

**COALITIONS IN ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
PARTY POLITICAL STRATEGIES IN HUNG COUNCILS**

MICHAEL TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Michael Temple

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This work takes a multi-method approach to the study of hung English councils. Insights and suppositions from a variety of approaches are utilised, including formal coalition theory and case studies of local authorities. A major aim of the thesis is to analyse questionnaire and case study data which will further improve our understanding of coalitional activity. Although the primary purpose is to inform the student of hung councils, formal coalition theories are also tested.

This study provides the first clear evidence that elected political elites lose power to the body of councillors in most hung councils. However, the power of the bureaucratic elite, unlike their political counterparts, appears to remain relatively constant. Contrary to previous proposals, decision making is not characterised by uncertainty and confusion; a learning process takes place in hung councils, and the views of participants become more favourable over time.

The influence of the centre party is a recurring theme of the study. Whether pay-offs are office or policy, the Liberal Democrats are the primary beneficiary in hung English councils. Their commitment to a more open form of decision making and willingness to bargain with other parties may be contributing reasons for their success, but it is their ideological position in the middle of the two main parties which is offered as the primary reason for the influence they wield.

None of the formal theories of coalition formation and duration perform well in predictive terms. Overall, the most accurate prediction of administrative formation would posit a minority administration formed by the largest party group, although majority coalitions are becoming more prevalent. Contrary to expectations, minority administrations are also more durable than coalitions. The large number of minority administrations demonstrates that not all politicians are 'office-driven', and that policy pay-offs are crucial. Policy closeness appears to be a greater influence on duration than either ideological connectedness or coalition size.

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INTRODUCTION

A Multi-Method Approach to the Study of Local Coalitions

During the past decade the British political system, with little tradition of the phenomenon at either national or local level, has had to accommodate an increasing number of local authorities where no political party has an overall majority. Their number has grown during the 1980s and early 1990s, until between a fifth and a quarter of all local authorities are now hung.¹ Hung councils necessitate the formation and maintenance of coalitions, however constituted, between political parties. Despite this, studies of hung councils have failed to utilise the huge body of research into coalitional behaviour, generally concentrating on the changes hungness brings to the 'normal' practices of British local government. The specific circumstances of the local authority or authorities under examination receive a great deal of analysis, while accounts of coalition politics from other political systems are rarely considered. Such an approach, far from contributing to greater understanding by concentrating on the very particular circumstances of English local government, militates against it. The study of political coalitions has received a great deal of attention over the last 30 years, and to ignore the research that has been carried out into the formation of, for example, laboratory game, legislative, executive, and judicial coalitions, is to minimise the chances of understanding what is happening when a council is hung.

Formal studies of coalition formation and duration are the norm in the field of research into coalition behaviour. There are two strands of such research, one of which (the game theoretical approach) has tended to concentrate on laboratory games, using 'real-world' coalitions as essentially testing grounds for assessing game-theoretic insights, while the other (the European politics approach) has concentrated on attempting to build an inductive theory of European coalition government from empirical observations. These two strands should be complementary, yet what has been described as "an intellectual tragedy" has been taking place. It is argued that the two approaches are "by now so far apart in their

¹ Completely reliable data on council compositions is difficult to obtain, as there is no statutory requirement for British local councils to provide detailed election results. The results supplied often fail to identify political parties, and by-elections occur more frequently than at national level. In addition, changes of political allegiance by councillors are not uncommon. The assistance of the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre at Polytechnic South West was invaluable in identifying hung councils. The most recent study of hung councils has suggested that the growth in hung councils is over for the moment, "and an increase in the number of majority control authorities is taking place" (Leach & Stewart, 1992, p.2) .

styles of analysis that they have almost nothing to contribute to one another" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.10).²

The gulf between these two closely-related approaches reflects the problem in the wider field of coalition studies, with scholars from the 'mainstream' of political science often failing to utilise correlative developments in other approaches.³ To some extent, such problems are understandable, as formal studies present some difficulties for the mainstream political scientist. The mathematical nature of laboratory studies can act as a barrier to comprehension, and what are often seen as unrealistic and over-simplistic assumptions of political behaviour, made by theorists in both main traditions, exasperate those who see observation and system specific knowledge as essential to any real understanding of political processes. Formal theories have slowly modified their early postulate of the politician as driven solely by a lust for office, yet the insights made by theorists have often been minimised by students of politics. In particular, their search for a general explanation of coalition behaviour, applicable to all coalition scenarios, has been rejected. Much of the criticism misconstrues the nature and objectives of the formal approach, as the chapters which follow will point out.

The tendency to ignore theoretical developments in coalition studies is very apparent in most academic studies of hung councils, which have largely failed to take note of previous research into coalition formation and duration. They have generally either concentrated on charting the differences between 'normal' and hung councils or, more recently, adopted a 'multi-dimensional' approach, where a knowledge of system specific variables, such as historical, social, and institutional factors, is seen as crucial to understanding the coalitional process.⁴ Recent studies in both the 'mainstream' local government tradition and the 'multi-dimensional' approach have provided some valuable information for this research, and many of the findings of such studies will be tested in this work.⁵

² Developments in these approaches, and Laver & Schofield's criticisms, will be examined in depth in the opening chapter of this thesis.

³ For example, there is a world of difference between the two schools of formal theory and the approach to coalitions of such distinguished scholars as David Butler (1978). Butler takes a totally descriptive approach, with no reference at all to the work done by coalition theorists.

⁴ Chapter One (section 1.5.3.) explains the multi-dimensional approach in detail. Chapter Three (section 3.3.1) explores its application to English local government coalitions.

⁵ Most notably, Leach & Stewart (1988) and Leach & Game (1989), with their detailed accounts of the arrangements in hung councils, and Mellors (1989) in his multi-dimensional analysis of hung county councils. Also, the recent publication of Leach & Stewart (1992) reflects the growing academic interest in British coalition politics.

However, while both these approaches have often given useful intimations of the central forces operating in English hung councils, they have been unhelpful as comparative guides. The studies are extremely system-specific, and attribute coalitional processes to a complex intermingling of many forces. It is quite correct to argue that the particular cocktail of social, economic, institutional, historical, motivational, and political variables present in a political system is crucially important to the coalitional strategies undertaken by political actors. However, formal theorists attempting to build general explanations of coalition behaviour cannot possibly build such all-embracing assumptions into their model. Consequently, such purely descriptive studies receive little or no attention from coalition theorists.

Another common approach in the literature are anecdotal accounts of 'life in the balance' in British councils. Such accounts, predominantly by chief executives or party leaders, often provide a valuable insight into a hung council, but usually fail to deliver any but the most subjective judgements of behaviour. They are solely concerned with the events familiar to the observer, although conclusions are sometimes drawn for possible national hung parliaments.⁶ While anecdotal accounts do present some observations which can be tested in a wider universe of local authorities, most such studies are not particularly useful to coalition theorists.

So, formal theorists ignore the findings of research not based on a well-defined analytical framework, while such work in turn takes little notice of the postulates of formal theory. Such strategies fail to increase our knowledge of the most fundamental of all political activities, the making and maintenance of coalitions. To say the least, this is unfortunate, as all of the approaches discussed above provide insights into coalition politics. Accordingly, all will be utilised in this study of hung councils.

This research intends to take its hypotheses from a variety of sources; it is an attempt at a "multi-method approach" to the study of local coalitions. Wherever the insights of coalitional behaviour have come from, whether game theory, the European politics approach, empirical political theory, previous academic studies of both hung national legislatures and hung local governments (from whatever type of approach), or the observations of participants, they will be tested for their relevance to the English local government system. The primary focus of this

⁶ For example, see Wendt (1986).

research is upon the factors impinging on the behaviour of actors in hung English councils, and observations connected with the English local government system will receive priority.⁷ However, it is not intended to follow the restrictive pathway of most approaches to the study of local government coalitions. Insights into the effects of hungness on the structures and actors of English local authorities will be taken (and tested) from any source. The main purpose of this research is heuristic; proving or disproving the various theories of coalition formation and duration is not its central purpose. Neither is it intended to demonstrate the superiority of one particular methodology or approach. All the ways of studying coalitions have some merit, and all of them tell us something about coalitional behaviour. The specific form this investigation takes will now be outlined.

The Preparatory Chapters

A multi-method approach means a considerable preliminary examination of the developments in coalition studies. Therefore, Chapter One will attempt to introduce the reader to a comprehensive array of theories of coalition formation and duration. The early developments in coalition theories will be outlined, and some of the assumptions made by theorists about the actions and motivations of political actors (for example, the notion that political parties can be characterised as rational individuals, as much formal theory does) will be critically assessed. Developments in a number of different approaches will be outlined, and some challenges to the general direction coalition studies have taken will be introduced.

There is little point in connecting these general theoretical developments to hung English local authorities until we have also examined the local government system. It is therefore essential to describe the relationship between the actors involved in English local government, and in particular, to address the question of where decision making power lies in non-hung local councils, in order to chart any changes from the 'normal' distribution of power when a council becomes hung. It is also necessary to demonstrate the suitability of local government as an arena for studying the process of coalition formation, a process which becomes essential (whether the word 'coalition' is used or not) when a council is hung. The structure of government may well be an influence on the type of administration forming.

⁷ The empirical chapters will largely utilise the findings of previous studies into British hung councils as the basis for the testing of a number of hypotheses. In order to avoid constant repetition, the findings of the majority of these works will be introduced in the relevant chapters; for example, previous findings of administrative durability in hung British councils will be introduced in Chapter Six, when the factors impinging on coalition duration are assessed.

Therefore, a knowledge of both the internal structure, and of the constraints that might be placed upon local actors, is essential to an understanding of the tactics actors might pursue.

Chapter Three will assess the insights both these introductory chapters bring to this specific study of local coalitions. The analytical assumptions of coalition theorists concerning the goals and cohesion of political parties will be assessed for their suitability in a study of sub-national coalitions. Problems of definition, in particular the appropriate criteria to adopt for deciding what constitutes both the formation and termination of an 'administration' at local level, will be dealt with in some detail. The main bulk of this thesis is an investigation of the data generated by questionnaires sent to 515 party leaders and chief executive officers in both hung and non-hung English local authorities, and Chapter Three will give full details of that exercise.⁸ The questionnaires were designed both to generate information to examine the validity of a number of the assumptions raised by previous studies of hung councils, and to test formal coalition theories. The data will be assessed in five chapters, devoted to specific topics of concern.

The Empirical Examination

While recognising that political parties, as Pridham points out, "are usually more than just institution-bound actors" (1987, p.380), structural and institutional constraints inevitably affect political strategies, and an examination of such constraints must therefore precede a study of the tactics political parties pursue. Factors such as the local electoral cycle, which are out of the control of political elites, may be affecting the processes of coalition formation and maintenance. These potential influences on coalition activity in English local authorities, because they may well limit the choices political groups can make, need to be examined prior to an examination of party political tactics. Therefore, the empirical examination of the factors influencing local actors in hung councils will begin with Chapter Four, *The Local Context*, which explores the effects specific institutional factors may have on coalitional activity.

However, while institutional constraints are undoubtedly important, arguably the most significant variable affecting coalition formation will be the strategies adopted by the main political parties. Whatever the institutional limitations placed on coalitional behaviour, their willingness or otherwise to 'make a deal' will be crucial. Accordingly, Chapter Five, *Party Strategies and Coalition Formation*, will

⁸ The appendix reproduce the four questionnaires, sent to various actors.

assess the political influences on coalition formation. The impact of the national-local party dimension, and the attitudes of the former opposition parties to the former rulers will receive consideration, but the general thrust of Chapter Five is an examination of the four major political parties at local level and the tactics they will endeavour to follow, and the specific political alliances they will tend to make.

Different political alliances may have different chances of survival, and Chapter Six, *The Stability of Administrations in Hung Councils*, details the influences affecting the length of time a particular administrative arrangement will last. The first two empirical chapters have covered, first, institutional and, second, party political factors influencing coalition formation. This chapter looks at both these areas to assess the influence on duration of, for example, the 'institutional' variable of different electoral cycles and the 'political' variable of different inter-party accommodations.

These first three empirical chapters have been primarily concerned with factors connected with administrative formation and durability. However, the arrival of hungness will have a fundamental impact on the operation of local councils, and will inevitably affect both the decision making structures and the actors themselves. Therefore, the next two chapters will scrutinise these factors. Chapter Seven examines the effects of hungness on the structures and operations of local councils. In such conditions, the introduction of new administrative conventions appears inevitable, and such considerations as committee appointments and the access of politicians to chief officers are explored.

Chapter Eight concentrates on the perceptions of local actors to the relationships between actors. If structures must change to accommodate the new processes of decision making, then the behaviour of actors must also change (and vice versa). The process of decision making is explored, and the levels of influence on policy between hung and non-hung councils is assessed. Finally, the changes hungness brings to the power relationships between actors and to the relative importance of the formal decision making bodies of the council are examined.

As well as these studies of the processes of political activity in hung English councils, Chapter Nine will conclude our examination of the data collected in the questionnaires by analysing the validity of some of the general theoretical proposals that have been made concerning the formation and duration of coalitions in a variety of settings. Minimum winning and ideologically connected theories of

coalition formation and duration will be tested, a task which will necessitate the construction of a left-right policy scale for local parties. Also, the effects of policy closeness on coalition formation and duration will be analysed, and some conclusions will be drawn concerning the goals of local politicians.

Overall, the empirical examination will scrutinise a large number of areas which have been identified as important by both coalition studies and by observers of hung English councils. This study is aware that political relationships are dynamic and that, inevitably, many of these areas overlap. However, if there is to be any clarity brought to the analysis, fairly rigorous demarcation is essential.

The final chapter takes a different approach to the study of hung local authorities by assessing the activities of one hung council, Devon County Council, in some depth. It is not the intention of this chapter to produce a detailed 'history' of the 4 years Devon was hung between 1985 to 1989, but to garner the interpretations of the main actors on their response to the necessity of coalition government. Accordingly, all the party leaders and the chief executive were interviewed at length about their attitudes to the problems raised by hungness; their views of the tactics they pursued will dominate this case study.

To reiterate, the main purpose of this research is heuristic; it is an attempt to add to our knowledge of the politics of coalition in English hung councils. However, it has another important function, and that is to contribute to the process of 'bridge-building' between different approaches, a course begun by Laver & Schofield. It is often the case that game theoretical approaches are too abstruse for those in the European tradition, while the atheoretical approach of many studies of European politics alienates the formal theorist, but they are often talking about the same thing and "simply using different languages to do so" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.11). If the miscellaneous approaches to the study of coalitions are allowed to go different ways, uninformed about the insights of alternative methods of analysis, all of them will suffer from the loss and our knowledge of coalitions will be the poorer. Accordingly, this research will adopt a variety of approaches to the study of local coalitions. There is no existing paradigm for a multi-method approach to coalitions, and this study is not an attempt to argue the supremacy of the approach taken here. However, it is hoped that all students of coalition politics (whatever their methodological preferences) might find the results of this thesis not only interesting, but also of some relevance to their particular concerns.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF COALITION THEORY

Introduction

Section One: The First Steps Towards a Theory of Political Coalitions

- 1.1.1. The Fundamental Activity of Politics: Definitions of 'Coalition'**
- 1.1.2. Coalition Theory: A Failure To Study The Real World?**
- 1.1.3. The Roots of Coalition Theory: Problems of Rational Assumptions**
- 1.1.4. Can Groups Be Characterised As Rational Individuals?**
- 1.1.5. Alternative Interpretations of Motives**

Section Two: The Classic Developments in Theories of Coalition Formation

- 1.2.1. Minimum Winning Coalitions: The Conservation of Benefits**
- 1.2.2. Bargaining Theory**
- 1.2.3. The Introduction of an Ideological Dimension**
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Section Three: Coalition Durability

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- 1.3.2. Early Approaches to Coalition Duration**
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- 1.3.5. Other Influences on Duration**

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- 1.4.1. Some Solutions to the Bargaining Process**
- 1.4.2. The Difficulty of Constructing 'Reality'**
- 1.4.3. Recent Approaches in the Game Theoretic Tradition**
- 1.4.4. The Problems of Predictive Models**

Section Five: Towards An Integrated Theory

- 1.5.1. An Explanation for Minority Governments**
- 1.5.2. The Integration of Office and Policy Motivations**
- 1.5.3. A Multi-Dimensional Approach**
- 1.5.4. A Challenge to Traditional Coalition Theories**

Conclusions

Introduction

The major purpose of this chapter is to detail some of the developments¹ that theory has contributed to the understanding of the forces shaping the construction and maintenance of political coalitions. It is not the intention of this chapter to construct a theory of local coalitions.² The study of local coalitions, whether here or abroad, is still in its infancy, and a great deal more research is needed before a coherent theory can be offered.

Formal coalition theory has its roots in the mathematical simulation of human behaviour found in the theory of games. In order to simplify analysis, game theory makes a number of assumptions about motives and behaviour, which section one will assess. Following this, section two examines the early development of coalition theories, which tended to concentrate on formation. A number of later studies examined possible influences on coalition duration, and section three details the findings of this endeavour. Section four examines the increasing sophistication of game theoretical models, scrutinising some of the more important research from this tradition. Finally, section five looks at recent attempts to address the need for policy concerns to assume a central role in coalition studies, and outlines the 'multi-dimensional approach' which some recent studies have adopted.

Together, this body of research constitutes a considerable achievement, although the task of constructing a coherent and realistic theory of coalition behaviour still remains beyond the bounds of current knowledge and methodology. However, as the following review should demonstrate, the first steps have been taken.

Section One: The Creation of a Science of Politics

This opening section will briefly examine the background to the early developments in coalition studies, and assess some problems of definition and utilisation. Coalition theory's roots in mathematical game theory are briefly examined, and some of the problems arising from that theoretical background are assessed. Whether the assumption of 'rationality' is appropriate for political behaviour is considered, and, in particular, the problems of using a concept of individual rationality to understand group behaviour are examined. Hopefully, the ground is prepared for the start of an

¹ "Some of the developments" because "coalition studies in particular are beset by far too many half-baked theories that are justifiably of little interest to anyone but their authors" (Laver, 1989, p.18).

² For, as Mellors notes "any attempt to explore coalitional behaviour in local politics is likely, in the early stages, to raise more questions than answers" (Mellors, 1989, p.306).

examination of coalition theory's progress towards a greater understanding of political interaction.

1.1.1. The Fundamental Activity of Politics: Definitions of 'Coalition'

The formation of coalitions is a fundamental activity of political life, ranging from the deals made by elites to the evolution of mass political parties, yet until the 1960s there had been little research into this basic ingredient of politics. Such observations on 'coalition' behaviour that existed, were confined to party coalitions at national government level (a perspective still adopted by most students of coalitions) and the attitude of political scientists was overwhelmingly negative³. Blondel (1968, p.180) sums up the general feelings of political scientists; that *coalition* government appears to be incompatible with *stable* government. Such analysts, who from their normative perspective argued the value of stability in politics and government, appeared to miss the fundamental nature of coalition-building to political activity. If coalition governments were inherently unstable, as they argued, then all political activity could be seen as unstable because all 'decision-making' groupings were the result of coalition building.⁴ Given the preoccupation of post-war behavioural research on the causes and benefits of political stability, it is unsurprising that such an obvious step of logic was ignored or minimised. The early coalition theorists were well aware of the implications of their research for the traditional balance of power theories.⁵

Before examining the origins of coalition theory, a definition of 'coalition' is needed which meets the requirements of this study. One definition is provided by Gamson (1961), who defines a coalition as "the joint use of resources to determine the outcome of a mixed-motive situation involving more than two units", with a mixed-motive situation defined as one in which an element of conflict and coordination exists (Gamson, 1961, p.374). An element of conflict exists because there is no outcome which maximises payoff to everybody, and an element of coordination exists because for at least two of the players there is the possibility that by coordinating their

³ Lowell (1896) believed that strong and efficient government in a parliamentary system was impossible if more than one party ruled, and 20th century arguments against coalition government continued in the same vein of prejudice uninformed by empirical observation. Laski (1938) argued that coalition government was liable to be weak and lacking in principles and Duverger (1951) maintained that coalition or minority governments were symptomised by frequent cabinet collapses (see Dodd, 1976, pp.6-9).

⁴ Cleveland (1991) demonstrates an understanding of this, noting the world coalition Iraq's invasion of Kuwait "brought into being" and the instability such "coalition building" generates in a "world that has mutated beyond a Cold War" (Cleveland, 1991, p.24).

⁵ For example, Riker argued that politics was inherently unstable, and that disequilibrium was probably a permanent political feature (Riker, 1962, pp.186-187).

resources they can improve their chances of receiving a payoff. Gamson's definition is succinct, but provides us with little idea of the stages which may be present in the complex process of coalition formation. Kelley (1968) gives a more detailed definition, which offers a clearer idea of the possible stages of development in coalition formation:

"By a coalition we mean a group of individuals or groups of individuals who: 1. agree to pursue a common and articulated goal; 2. pool their relevant resources in pursuit of this goal; 3. engage in conscious communication concerning the goal and the means of obtaining it; 4. agree on the distribution of the payoff (benefits) received when obtaining the goal." (Kelley, 1968, pp.62-63)

Such a definition demonstrates that there are a number of political situations in which coalitions can be studied. Kelley's definition covers everything from a deal between two people, to the formation of a political party, to a world socio-economic order. However, the emphasis in the study of coalition behaviour has been on the formation, composition, longevity, and distribution of benefits among cabinet coalitions in Western democracies.⁶ The parties forming such a coalition will necessarily have to agree on the distribution of payoffs when obtaining office. Given that coalition bargaining at local level in Britain will also be mainly between political parties,⁷ and even if such cooperation would appear to be more single-issue based and sporadic than at national level (see Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987), Kelley's definition appears an adequate starting point in the discussion of coalitions.

1.1.2. Coalition Theory: A Failure To Study The 'Real World'?

Research into the formation and maintenance of political coalitions is still in its infancy. However, since Riker's (1962) proposition of the "minimal winning coalition" there have been considerable developments and modifications to Riker's hypothesis that winning coalitions will include only those members necessary to obtain a majority and no more. Research into the processes of coalition formation have normally adopted one of two criteria. Theories inspired by Riker's hypothesis of a size criterion, which assume that actors attempt to limit membership in order to

⁶ Grofman (1982) offered a model which he believed to be "potentially applicable to coalition processes in such diverse areas as cabinet formation, Supreme Court opinion coalitions, legislative policy making, and trade route formation among networks of spatially separated potential trading partners" (Grofman, 1982, p.77). Also, Rohde (1972a, 1972b) examined Supreme Court decision making using coalition theory; in general, however, the emphasis has been on cabinet coalitions.

⁷ The presence of significant numbers of 'Independent' groups (traditionally with lesser cohesion than other groups) could complicate the picture at local level, a problem addressed in Chapter Three (section 3.1.3.).

conserve benefits in the form of cabinet seats, can, with "some loss of historical accuracy", be seen as the "first generation" of formal models of coalition formation (Grofman, 1987, p.1). The "second generation" of formal models concentrates on policy motivations, and presumes that actors strive to minimise the ideological distance or policy range of the coalition. ⁸

These developments constitute a considerable body of theory. Despite this, many political scientists are dissatisfied with what is seen as a lack of empirical knowledge underlying the theories. Browne & Dreijmanis (1982) make the point that:

"the major tradition in coalition studies has been the development of highly abstract and mathematical theories of coalition ... processes, proceeding often without the benefit of explicit reference to or connection with observational data pertaining to real experiences. Cast at such a general level, many of the attempts which have been made to confirm propositions associated with coalition theories have not proven to be particularly fruitful. It is our belief that such failures of application result from theoretical insufficiency caused by the general failure of analysts to systematically connect the major concepts of formal coalition theories with counterpart phenomena present in real coalition environments." (p.ix)

The criticism is appropriate, although the emphasis on abstract and mathematical models is perhaps understandable, given that theories of coalition behaviour are, in general, founded upon models of n-person games.⁹The foundations of a theory of political coalitions will now be examined.

1.1.3. The Roots of Coalition Theory: The Problems of 'Rationality'

Game Theory began as an attempt by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1945) to answer a fundamental and problematical question: "what is a rational outcome or 'order of society' in a social state in which men disagree?" ¹⁰ Von Neumann and

⁸ Laver & Schofield distinguish between the *European tradition*, which concentrates on "empirical theory and research at a cross-national level", and the *Game Theoretic tradition* which is largely concerned with laboratory games and more "motivated by a desire to elaborate upon a particular body of theory" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.8-10). However, it must be noted that research in the European tradition has largely been structured by the suppositions of the game theory approach which "has dominated the study of parliamentary government formation" (Strom, 1990, p.33).

⁹ See for example, Von Neumann & Morgenstern(1945), Luce (1956) and Luce & Raiffa (1957). Davis (1983) gives a lucid and 'non-technical' introduction to the major developments in the game theory tradition.

¹⁰ See Leiserson (1970b) for an examination of the developments of game theory apropos of coalition behaviour.

Morgenstern answered this problem of "strategic rationality" ¹¹ with their theory of games, a mathematical simulation of human behaviour which attempts to analyse the choices available to rational individuals or groups in conflictual and/or competitive situations. The probable action of all actors or "players" in the "game" is analysed; in such situations, game theory can help define the strategy (or strategies) rational individuals should "play" in order to maximise gains or minimise losses. The game theoretical approach maintains that political activity is calculated choice making by group actors from a set of alternatives in order to achieve the most desired outcome for the members of the group.¹²

There are a number of problems in attempting to operationalise such a model. In game theory situations, and much more so in actual political situations, outcomes are frequently indeterminate: there are usually a number of possible solutions, and attempting to determine solutions and payoffs will then depend on social or psychological factors which may be beyond the capacity of mathematical analysis.¹³ That is, the "correct" solution cannot always be decided by applying rational behaviour principles. In addition, as Simon (1957) has posited, in the 'real world' rationality may well be 'bounded' by the constraints of, for example, time and money, and 'rational man' will recognise this. Thus, as Laver (1981) has pointed out in a discussion on the problems faced by rational choice theory's characterisation of man as a 'maximiser of cardinal utilities', although the rational individual must "choose the course of action which realises his or her goals most effectively" (Laver, 1981, p.23), they may well make a decision "in the knowledge that something better probably exists, having decided that it is not worth spending resources to decide what that something is" (Laver, 1981, p.26). Such limitations are less likely to occur in n-person laboratory games.¹⁴

¹¹ See von Neumann & Morgenstern (1945, Chapter Ten). There are two basic rational models, parametric and strategic. In parametric rationality, a player's environment is constant "in the sense that it does not adapt to his own actions", while "strategic rationality applies if the behaviour of each player depends on that of every other" (Strom, 1990, p.33). As Strom notes, strategic rationality is clearly more applicable to the process of government formation, "where the decision of one party leader whether or not to participate in government crucially depends on those of other such leaders" (1990, p.33).

¹² The ease with which actors and resources could be identified, and the existence of "clear-cut" payoffs and decision rules "suggested that coalition behaviour was particularly susceptible to the application of rational choice theories" (Luebbert, 1983, p.236).

¹³ In a criticism of the foundations of 'rational choice theory', Rudebusch notes a range of problems in considering persons as "rational maximisers of their individual preferences" (Rudebusch, 1979, p.2), including how to specify ends and research postulates of 'perfect information' by actors.

¹⁴ A further difficulty is that even under controlled laboratory conditions, players do not always act to maximise their expected winnings (e.g., see Davis, 1983, p.59). The

1.1.4. Can Groups Be Characterised As Rational Individuals?

A further complication is that the actors in coalition scenarios are usually groups of individuals, that is, political parties.¹⁵ However, these groups are modelled as a rational individual, by expressing a united preference for certain outcomes. Given that such a simplification greatly eases analysis, this is not generally seen as a major drawback. However, informal factions exist in most political parties, and some parties (for example, the Christian Democrats in Italy) have formally organised factions. If internal party differences do affect the coalition bargaining process, and despite the lack of research into this potential problem it appears intuitively probable that they do, then it is possible that, in such cases, the application of models incorporating principles of individual rationality may be inappropriate if internal party differences continue into the process of negotiating with other political parties. In addition, it could be argued that the starting point of most studies is incorrect. By ignoring or minimising the probability of internal bargaining processes which precede negotiations between parties, analysts may be missing insights into the process of coalition formation.¹⁶

The majority of theoretical approaches ignore the possible influences of internal party factions, perhaps understandably, for it must be admitted that information on the effects of internal party differences to government formation or coalition agreements is sparse.¹⁷ Norpoth has argued that political leaders in West Germany enjoy "great leeway" in their coalition behaviour, in that most voters attached to the two major parties (the SPD and the CDU/CSU) "favour heavily" the coalition preferences of party leaders (Norpoth, 1980, p.424). This might indicate that

significant number of oversized coalitions which have been identified in European parliamentary democracies (Taylor & Laver, 1973, see below) may indicate that the non-maximisation of winnings is not confined to players in the laboratory.

¹⁵ Rationality is a particularly problematical concept to apply to group behaviour. As Rangell notes, "the irrational, which is such a large factor in group decisions, needs to be taken fully into account" (Rangell, 1980, p.76).

¹⁶ Daalder argues that, while it might be acceptable to consider a party as a unitary actor when the decision to enter a coalition is made, this "does not pre-empt a need for continuous decision making on concrete decisions to follow" (Daalder, 1983, p.21) which internal party differences will almost certainly affect. Budge agrees that internal party differences can affect a government's policy output (Budge, 1984, p.101), and it is possible that such differences, in addition to affecting the process of coalition formation, may also affect the process of coalition maintenance.

¹⁷ Budge & Keman include the consequences of internal party factions in their "general theory of party government" (1990, pp.42-43), noting that the consequences are "most evident in the area of internal government change".(p.42). The problems of internal party factions in coalition building have yet to be addressed adequately (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.28-30).

members of the parliamentary party will be under some public pressure, in addition to the pressure from their leaders, to support the elite preferences. Given that studies into German political culture remark on the high degree of deference shown to the political elite (for example, Barnes & Kaase, 1979), it may be that in West Germany political parties could be treated as rational individuals for the purpose of studying coalition formation. In addition, leaders of some political parties (for example, most "Conservative" parties) can enjoy a large degree of autonomy in policy-making, and considerable deference will be shown towards their decisions. Models employing principles of individual rationality may, therefore, be adequate for the study of coalition behaviour in some political systems, and for negotiations between some political parties.¹⁸

However, despite Norpoth's supposition, and despite Browne's assertion that, in the main, parliamentary parties fulfil the requirement that they "exhibit stable and definite policy preferences and a uniform commitment to these positions by their individual parliamentary members" and that parties are therefore, "reasonable approximations for the concept of actor" (Browne, 1982, p.346), doubts may still be expressed about the viability of treating all political parties as individual actors.¹⁹ Luebbert argues that "the failure of existing theory to address the profoundly important and interesting role of intraparty variables in the shaping of government formation outcomes is striking" (Luebbert, 1983, p.243),²⁰ and it could be argued that more research into the intraparty stage of the coalition process is needed before the doubts about applying principles of individual rationality to political parties are fully assuaged. However, the disciplined and united front which modern political parties at both local and national level have increasingly attempted to present to their electorate, exemplified in the growing emphasis on election manifestoes, is an indication that assumptions of individual rationality may not be

¹⁸ Laver & Schofield categorise parties in four categories, (i) clearly "coherent" groups such as Communist parties, (ii) groups which are "disciplined enough to be treated as unitary actors" at any "fixed point in time" (which appears to apply to most parliamentary parties), (iii) groups who are "clearly not unitary actors" (such as the Christian Democrats in Italy, and (iv) "electoral coalitions of parties" such as the Liberal/SDP Alliance (Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.26-28). Obviously, such a range of categorisations must eventually be integrated by any serious coalition theory.

¹⁹ For example, David Ben-Gurion, the former prime minister of Israel, when asked how negotiations for a new coalition were proceeding, replied; "I have talked with all the other parties, and they have agreed. Now I must discuss it with my own party, and this will be difficult" (in Luebbert, 1983, p.243).

²⁰ An exception to Luebbert's criticism is Laver & Shepsle's attempt, in an examination of the credibility of policy proposals, to open the "black box" of "the politics of intraparty decision making over government formation" (Laver & Shepsle, 1990a, p.506). See Section Four of this chapter.

inappropriate. Most parties "do maintain a high degree of parliamentary cohesion, especially when they are in government ... thus treating them as single actors represented by their spokesman does not unduly distort reality" (Budge & Herman, 1978, p.460)²¹. In general, the advantages of treating parties as rational individual actors outweigh the potential disadvantages, although the disagreements among coalition theorists will undoubtedly continue.²²

1.1.5. Alternative Interpretations of Motives

The assumption of rationality underlying formal coalition models, despite its simplification of political behaviour, was not seen as a serious problem by Rapaport (1973).²³ The assumption of rationality, argued Rapaport, was not a problem as predictions based on that assumption could be taken as a "base line" for descriptive theory. The extent to which actual political behaviour systematically deviated from rationality, however so defined, would enable additional or alternative assumptions to be made which could "serve to develop a 'realistic' descriptive theory of political behaviour" (Rapaport, 1973, pp.xv-xvi).

In contrast to Rapaport, de Swaan argues that the refutation of most of the original theories indicates that "the rational decision model that has served as a point of departure is shown to be an inadequate approach to the study of coalition formation" (de Swaan,1973,p.7). De Swaan proposed an approach (examined in detail below) which was a fundamental departure from the rational choice approach of Riker. Its theoretical foundation was based on an *incrementalist* mode of decision-making.

Other analysts are less certain than de Swaan that the rational decision model has outlived its usefulness. Luebbert suggests a "typological rational approach to theory", arguing that the failure of previous rationalist efforts "has not been in the irrational behaviour of politicians, but in our inability to comprehend the choices that politicians confront" (Luebbert, 1983, p.247). Luebbert maintains that his typological approach recognises the multiple, frequently conflicting, goals of

²¹ In support of Budge & Herman, it has been observed that "from a European perspective we are ... primarily concerned with coalition formation ... in parliamentary systems in which party discipline is rigid" (Bjurulf & Berg, 1984, p.176).

²² Although, as Laver & Schofield point out, when particular parties "are best represented as coalitions of distinct factions ... accounts of the coalitional process *must* take intraparty politics into account" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.22, my emphasis).

²³ Neither, although they were acknowledged, were the ambiguities arising between "individually rational" and "collectively rational" decisions (Rapaport, 1973, p.xv), most famously represented in the 'prisoner's dilemma' game. Such ambiguities may have repercussions for coalitional behaviour if intraparty factions fail to recognise their individual preferences may result in the worse result for the party as a whole.

potential coalition actors. Policy preferences, and the need to retain party support and unity, are important considerations. In addition, emotional considerations, for example, loyalty to past allies, personal friendship between party elites who may hold widely differing ideological positions, or refusal to enter a winning coalition because of personal animosity between individuals of different political parties, may be as important in coalition formation as the desire of politicians to win. Such factors may be even more important in local government politics, as it is reasonable to assume a greater degree of contact between politicians in the smaller and more parochial world of local government.²⁴

To recap, we have seen that the roots of coalition theory lie within the mathematical tradition of game theory. In simple n-person laboratory games, winning or losing can be clearly defined, and rational behaviour is easily assessed. However, deciding what is 'winning' and what is 'losing' is more difficult in the 'messy' real world of coalition politics. Not only that, it has been suggested that a definition of rationality which treats political parties as 'unitary actors' may fail to capture the nuances of party group behaviour. As Luebbert (1983) suggests, political parties may have multiple and often conflicting goals, and such parties may neither behave as unitary actors nor have a shared definition of what constitutes 'winning'. The problems of applying a narrow definition of 'rationality' are apparent, but a 'broad' definition weakens the rational model's explanatory power (Laver, 1981).

A number of theoretical points have been addressed, and it is clear that disagreement will continue in those areas. However, despite the acknowledged problems of definition and method of research, in the last 30 years there have been many developments in our understanding of the factors influencing coalition processes. Section Two will now examine some of the early developments in the study of coalition politics.

Section Two: The Classic Developments in Theories of Coalition Formation

The early development of coalition theory was guided by the idea of limiting coalition size, in order that the benefits of coalition membership could be conserved. This

²⁴ Laver notes the dangers of confusing *intrinsic* and *instrumental* goals, and argues that if rational choice theories are not to be "doomed to triviality" the assumption must be made that "socially defined goals have no *intrinsic* value for the individual and are designed solely for *instrumental* reasons ... if any action can be rational (because there will always be some goal which it furthers) our core assumptions are insufficiently constrained to generate more than truisms" (Laver, 1981, pp.28-29, emphasis in original; see also Laver, 1978, pp.253-256).

emphasis on size and maximisation of benefits indicates that the primary goal of "actors" (in this case political parties) was seen by early theorists as political office. The number of cabinet seats was obviously limited; therefore, it appeared to make sense that coalition actors would attempt to keep coalitions to the smallest size necessary to obtain a legislative majority, thus enabling each coalition member to obtain the maximum possible number of cabinet seats.

1.2.1. Minimum Winning Coalitions: The Conservation of Benefits

Von Neumann & Morgenstern had proposed that only 'minimal winning coalitions' would form, with a minimal winning coalition being one which would be made losing by the loss of any member. Gamson (1961) was the first person to forecast the formation of coalitions of *minimum* winning size in terms of seats gained, regardless of the coalition partners' places on the "policy continuum".²⁵ 'Minimum winning coalitions' comprise a coalition which is the smallest number of seats above the number needed to win, a far more specific proposition than 'minimal winning' (which generates a large number of possible solutions to the game). Minimum winning coalitions are a 'subset' of minimal winning coalitions, and can be considered as 'bare majority coalitions' which comprise the smallest total weight of members in the legislature. Riker (1962) formalised the hypothesis in his size principle, which was formulated as:

"In n-person, zero-sum games, where side payments are permitted, where players are rational, and where they have perfect information, only minimum winning coalitions occur.....In social situations similar to n-person, zero-sum games with side payments, participants create coalitions just as large as they believe winning and no larger"(Riker, 1962, pp.22-23).²⁶

Riker modified his model to allow for the probability of imperfect information in social situations. Given such conditions of "imperfect information", he argued that subjectively estimated minimum winning coalitions may form, but this rejection of

²⁵ Gamson's hypothesis, while predicated upon von Neumann & Morgenstern's seminal *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* (1945), was also strongly influenced by Caplow, who had proposed that coalition formation depended "upon the initial distribution of power" (Caplow, 1956, p.490). Caplow's proposal indicated that, given the right assumptions, a predictive theory of coalition formation could be formulated.

²⁶ Riker's definition of a 'rational player' was based on the premise that, "given social situations ... in which exist two alternative courses of action with differing outcomes in money or power or success, some participants will choose the alternative leading to the larger payoff. Such behaviour is rational behaviour, and it will be accepted as definitive while the behaviour of participants who do not so choose will not necessarily be accepted"(Riker, 1962, p.23).

an optimal payoff in favour of a subjectively estimated payoff "may be regarded as a rational act of maximisation in an uncertain world" (Riker, 1962, p.48).

Riker acknowledges the existence of a problem with this modification, but his treatment of this problem demonstrates that using purely the notion of "winning" to specify rational political behaviour ignores other facets of human behaviour. Riker sees the problem solely in terms of how to distinguish between larger than minimum winning coalitions formed by the rational motive of winning in an uncertain world and those formed by "irrational" motives such as loyalty (Riker, 1962, p.49). The problem is surely that, whilst winning and conserving benefits are important considerations to most political parties, they are not the only factors political leaders must take into account when constructing possible winning coalitions. Loyalty to "old friends" can be a rational political act, especially if future chances of success are taken into account.²⁷ In addition, Luebbert feels that "rationalist theory greatly overstates the role of information uncertainty" in coalition formation (Luebbert, 1983, p.242). In other words, politicians are more aware of the options open to them, and the limits on their choices, than rational choice theorists give them credit for, an indication, argues Luebbert, of the theorists' failure to study and link their theoretical findings to political behaviour in the real world.

However, there is some support for Riker, particularly in his assertion of a correlation between the amount of information available and the size of a winning coalition²⁸. It does seem intuitively probable that experience of dealing with opposition parties will generate the knowledge of which party or parties to trust, therefore leading to a minimisation of the legislative majority. Coalition partners previously included as a "safety net" to minimise the risks of losing a legislative majority, can, with this extra experience and knowledge, be excluded from the coalition with a decrease in the risk of losing minimal winning coalitions disintegrating. However, it may be, as Kelley argues, that unconsidered variables are affecting the coalition process. For example, it may simply be that the number of

²⁷ Again, the problem is, if anything can be a 'rational' act, then the notion of rationality loses all its explanatory power.

²⁸ Merkl (1968) has shown that the average size of German Lander coalitions has: "progressively declined ... as the amount of information available has increased, the average size of the winning coalitions has approached the point hypothesized by Riker" (Merkl, 1968, p.68). Kelley, however, points out the dangers involved in accepting such a point. The variables for which information is known may not be relevant to coalition behaviour, and "the correlation could very well be spurious...other important variables for which data is not available may account for the observed correlations"(Kelley, 1968, pp.68-69).

seats held by traditional coalition partners has declined, or policy differences between previous coalition partners may have increased to the point where their participation in a coalition partnership is not feasible.²⁹

1.2.2. Bargaining Theory

The emphasis on minimising coalition size to conserve benefits in terms of office payoffs was continued by Leiserson's (1968) notion of "bargaining theory". Leiserson argued that, given two or more possible winning coalitions, the coalition with fewest parties would form because of the relative ease of bargaining. The process of maintaining the coalition was also examined by Leiserson, who noted that in Japan the members of the "Prime Minister's support coalition" were not the only members of the cabinet; posts were given to others in order to encourage support for the future (Leiserson, 1968, p.779). Leiserson argued that payoffs to actors not in the winning coalition could be construed as "required" for long term coalition maintenance (Leiserson, 1968, p.782), but the relevance of Japan's experiences to the formation and maintenance of cabinet coalitions in the "European tradition" is debatable. Japanese party politics is dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which comprises of a number of non-socialist factions. The struggle for political leadership is waged between these factions, with the Prime Minister "chosen by a coalition of LDP factions which controls a majority of votes at the party convention" (Leiserson, 1968, p.770).³⁰

Payoffs to those not in the support coalition can thus be seen more as, for example, the initial allocation of cabinet posts to "wets" by Margaret Thatcher in an effort to satisfy party factions, minimise internal discord, and present a consensual image to the electorate, rather than the distribution of ministerial payoffs to opponents from other political parties in order to attract future support. In addition, Leiserson's argument that coalitions would form with the fewest parties (which seems intuitively likely) is partly contradicted by the former Danish prime minister Viggo Kampmann. Kampmann maintains that "a three-party government is easier to manage than one consisting of two parties since, if the large party and one of the small parties agree, the other must perforce go along" (in Groennings et al, 1970,

²⁹ Merkl's (1968) examination made no allowance for policy considerations, and it may well be that the decrease in size of German Lander coalitions, attributed by Merkl to increased information, can be explained either by 'electoral arithmetic' or by irreconcilable policy differences between former coalition partners.

³⁰ The Recruit bribery scandal of 1988, and numerous allegations of financial corruption and sexual improprieties against leading party members (including past and present Prime Ministers), has threatened the LDP's hegemony in Japanese national politics.

f.n. 463), with the only alternative to compliance being a loss of its power and the dissolution of the coalition. Kampmann's observation could be seen as an example of a theoretical assumption being weakened by political know-how.

1.2.3. The Introduction of an Ideological Dimension

The concentration by Leiserson on the variable of coalition size is surprising, given that in his doctoral dissertation ³¹ he had proposed that political parties sought agreement with parties ideologically close to them, and predicted that coalitions would form with minimal ideological diversity. Leiserson's ideological theory of political coalitions was developed from four-person laboratory games, and was uninformed by reference to "real-life" coalition situations. Axelrod's (1970) derivative of Leiserson's theory was supported by reference to government coalitions in post-war Italy, and was a significant advance in the development of theories of coalition formation.

Axelrod proposed that the less "conflict of interest" there was in a potential coalition, the more likely that coalition would form, other things being equal, and the greater likelihood that the coalition would last³². Axelrod posited that "minimal connected winning coalitions" would be more likely to form than any other type, defining a minimal connected winning coalition as:

"a coalition that is connected; is a winning coalition; and is minimal in the sense that it can lose no member party without ceasing to be connected and winning" (Axelrod, 1970, p.167).

Axelrod examined Italian government coalitions between 1953-1968, grading the parties along an ordinal policy dimension. The relative size of the intervals between the parties on the ordinal policy dimension was assumed to have no significance. Axelrod found that of 17 coalitions formed during the period, 10 could be classified as minimal connected winning coalitions. Moreover, those coalitions lasted for 14 months on average, compared to an average duration of 8 months for those coalitions which were not minimal and connected. In addition to his proposition of the minimal connected winning coalition, Axelrod thus proposed a relationship between the size of

³¹ Michael Leiserson, *Coalitions in Politics*, University of Yale, 1966.

³² Although his propositions took no account of a party's placing on an ideological continuum, Riker (1962, p.38) was aware that certain "imputations" might be inadmissible for ideological reasons; that is, some far right or far left parties might be excluded from the coalition formation process and that therefore winning coalitions including these parties would be effectively prohibited.

a coalition and its durability: once formed, minimal connected winning coalitions "are likely to last longer than other coalitions" (Axelrod, 1970, p.184).

There has been a significant measure of support for both Axelrod's theory of coalition formation,³³ and for his proposition of a relationship between a coalition's size and ideology and its durability.³⁴ Against this, Browne, Gleiber & Mashoba (1986) point out while Axelrod's theory was "quite selective" in generating its prediction set it "need not be terribly accurate in predicting actual formations": they argue that Axelrod's testing procedure was a "blunt instrument" and that the claims made for the value of minimal connected winning theory were "ambiguous and expansive" (Browne, Gleiber & Mashoba, 1986, p.14).

1.2.4. The Importance of Policy Preferences

A weakness of Axelrod's model is the reliance on an ordinal policy space, ignoring the possibility that a vast ideological gulf may exist between parties adjacent on an ordinal scale. De Swaan (1970) argued that a party attempted to minimise the ideological distance between potential coalition partners, by striving to bring about that coalition which would adopt policies as close as possible to their own "preferred policies" (de Swaan, 1970, p.429). De Swaan formalised this proposition in 1973. He pointed out that the previous theories had all yielded a prediction of theories that were minimal in some sense, either "with respect to their membership weight, number of members, or their range on the policy scale", and posited a different perspective on coalition formation (de Swaan, 1973, p.9). De Swaan developed the idea of "policy distance". This suggested that an actor:

"strives to bring about a winning coalition in which he is included and which he expects to adopt a policy that is as close as possible, on a scale of policies, to his own most preferred policy" (de Swaan, 1973, p.88).

Coalitions were formed among "neighbours" in the policy sense. A coalition between parties which excluded a party or parties located between the coalition partners

³³ For example, in an examination of coalitions in post-war Italy and Weimar Germany, Felker (1981) argued that it was "definitely superior in predictability" to other theories considered (Felker, 1981, p.366) and Mahler & Trilling (1975) found that Axelrod's theory performed well in the case of Israeli parliamentary coalitions (Mahler & Trilling, 1975, pp.220-234).

³⁴ Warwick (1979), in an examination of European parliamentary democracies, found that "minimal winning status is a very powerful influence on durability" and that coalitions straddling political cleavages "are less likely to endure" (Warwick, 1979, p.490), a finding verified by Felker (Felker, 1981, p.365). These findings are examined in more depth in Section Three (below), which assesses research into coalition durability.

would be inadmissible, as in Axelrod's model.³⁵ Coalitions formed which were "closed coalitions" (de Swaan, 1973, p.70), and parties attempted to be "pivotal" in the coalition (in the sense of holding the voting balance in a legislature) thus increasing the chances of their preferred policies becoming adopted (de Swaan, 1973, p.119).

In addition to introducing the idea of policy preferences, as opposed to Axelrod's more simplistic notion of connectedness along an ordinal left-right continuum, de Swaan's theory represents (as Section One of this chapter has already noted) a fundamental departure from rational approaches.³⁶ His adoption of incrementalism has been extremely influential in coalition theory,³⁷ and de Swaan describes the process by which he believes coalitions are formed with admirable simplicity:

"An actor will not survey all possible outcomes and calculate his own and every other actor's preference for these states; the actor is much more likely to decide that, whatever the 'best' coalition may be, his aspiration level will be satisfied if he is included in a winning coalition. As a consequence, he will behave in a 'satisfying' rather than a maximising manner. His decision strategy will be incrementalist: since he is not in a majority on his own, he will remedy this by searching for partners in a majority coalition. The actor is likely to enter the process in a 'margin dependent' manner by looking for the partner with whom policy differences are minimal and require only marginal adjustment: his neighbour on the scale. If the two do not control a majority together, they will repeat the procedure with their respective neighbours, 'step-by-step' until a majority has been achieved: such a majority would consist of a closed, minimal range coalition" (de Swaan, 1973, p.287).

De Swaan has argued that the "closed coalition proposition" can account for 19 out of 22 Dutch government coalitions, although the statistical significance is low, as the number of predictions generated from this proposition is considerable (de Swaan, 1982, p.231). When the closed coalition proposition is allied to a minimising criterion, i.e., "that coalitions will not contain a party that increases the range of the coalition along the policy scale, unless that party is necessary in order to control a majority", the success rate of de Swaan's proposition decreases to 12 out of 22, although the statistical significance greatly improves (De Swaan, 1982, p.231).

³⁵ Marradi (1982) offers support for both de Swaan and Axelrod, arguing that "the connectedness of partners along a general policy continuum is the criterion controlling the formation of Italian government coalitions" (Marradi, 1982, p.69).

³⁶ See Luebbert (1983) for an assessment of this break with the rationalist tradition.

³⁷ For example, see Grofman (1982) and Laver (1990).

As Norpoth (1982) points out, the requirement that coalition partners should be "neighbours on a policy continuum", is not "overly demanding", despite the difficulties of integrating economic policy, foreign policy, and religious/cultural policy, etc., into a uni-dimensional policy scale.³⁸ The "neighbour requirement" rules out unnatural coalitions of far right and far left parties and still allows a wide variety of coalitions to form.³⁹ The requirement that coalitions are formed so as to minimise the policy distances between the actors involved is a far more demanding condition, and raises the problem of how to judge policy distance (see Norpoth, 1982, pp.13-17). However rigorous the analysis is, assessing policy distance will inevitably involve a number of subjective judgements, and will, equally inevitably, provoke disagreement among even the most expert observers of a political system.⁴⁰

Despite the undeniable problems of operationalising concepts such as policy distances, these early developments in coalition theory put forward by Riker, Leiserson, Axelrod, and de Swaan, appeared promising. The insights they apparently offered into political behaviour generated considerable interest, and suggested the imminent possibility of a coherent and convincing general theory of coalition formation. Such hopes were weakened by a simple piece of empirical political science, the impact of which will now be examined.

1.2.5. The Difficulties Of A 'Winning' Criterion

As the work of Axelrod (1970) and de Swaan (1970, 1973) above has indicated, empirical coalition studies have concentrated on coalition formation in European parliamentary democracies. In such multi-party legislatures where (more often than not) no party has an overall majority and where a majority is usually needed to pass legislation, coalition formation is a regular and relatively public occurrence.

³⁸ This might be particularly difficult in West Germany where the three regular coalition actors (SPD, FDP, CDU/CSU) will have different neighbours depending on which of the three most important policy continua (Economic, Cultural, and Foreign Policy) is used. The problem can only have been exacerbated by political union with East Germany.

³⁹ The application of the "neighbour requirement" may well be more problematic when examining coalitions in British local government, as some writers maintain that informal coalition arrangements between Labour and Conservative, designed to keep the Alliance out of power, are not uncommon (for example, see Mellors, 1983).

⁴⁰ Norpoth has suggested that considerations of policy are, in fact, secondary in West Germany, as the "selection of coalition partners has always preceded the thorough examination of policies" and that differences arising during bargaining have never wrecked the planned coalition (Norpoth, 1982, p.20), but the absence of a Socialist Party may well make West Germany a special case; there appears to be little real disagreement on fundamental economic questions. Again, political union with East Germany may change this state of affairs.

Payoffs in the form of cabinet seats are readily observable.⁴¹ Whilst policy concessions are more difficult to observe, it is possible to chart deviations from a party's manifesto and from their publicly stated policy objectives, in order to gauge the nature and extent of any possible policy concessions. In addition, changes in the policy of one coalition member are often pointed out by its partner(s), in order that the electorate will be aware of their influence. Of course, such action is capable of engendering negative, as well as positive, responses in the electorate if a party should become too closely identified with the policies of an unpopular government.⁴² Whatever, it appears that, whether payoffs are in terms of office or policy, executive or legislative coalitions between political parties may be the most easily observable examples of coalitional behaviour,⁴³ and, as such, have provided the main source of data in the development of formal coalition theory. They also provided the source of data for a destruction of the predictive capacity of the early theories described above.

Taylor & Laver (1973), in an empirical examination of 132 different European post-war coalition governments, discovered that only 57 were minimum winning, and that none of the theories could be called successful in predicting which coalitions would form, although those theories concentrating on a minimum connected coalition with the least ideological divergency were the most successful.⁴⁴ Taylor & Laver argued that the size of the coalition was not an important consideration and that in several of the countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Ireland) "few or none of the theories perform very well" (Taylor & Laver, 1973, p.226).

⁴¹ While the emphasis by analysts on formal cabinet coalitions in Western democracies is understandable, it does offer a problem for studies of local coalitions. There is no formal executive or 'cabinet' in English local government which means that payoffs may be more likely to be in the form of 'policy' than of 'office', a point examined in later chapters.

⁴² For example, it is arguable that part of the reason for the decline in the Liberal vote in the British general election of 1979 could be attributed to their support for Labour during the Lib-Lab pact. On the other hand, the Free Democrats in West Germany have regularly changed coalition partners, on one occasion in mid-term, apparently without unduly incurring the wrath of the electorate or becoming too closely identified with either of their regular partners in government.

⁴³ The distinction between executive and legislative coalitions is an important one, as we shall see, and one which "has not always been appreciated by coalition theorists. The most obvious consequence of this has been the reverence that has been accorded to legislative majorities in some accounts of the behaviour of coalition executives" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.68).

⁴⁴ The relatively good performance of such theories in European parliamentary democracies is corroborated by the research of de Swaan (1982). The success of the minimum connected strategy is, however, mainly explained by its good performance in a small number of countries, especially Italy, which had been the empirical testing ground of Axelrod. In most countries, the minimum connected criterion performs no better than any other strategy (Schofield & Laver, 1985, p.145).

Perhaps most significantly, the assumption that a party would prefer any winning coalition of which it was a member and be "indifferent to all coalitions which are non-winning or from which it's excluded (or both)" (Taylor & Laver, 1973, p.207) was challenged by their discovery that 45 of the 132 governments examined were minority governments, and none of the theories could explain this. Although de Swaan's idea of policy preferences was potentially capable of offering a possible explanation for the durability of some minority governments, the emphasis by the theories on "winning", with winning being narrowly construed as forming a legislative majority, was obviously challenged by the discovery of so many minority governments.

A number of specific criticisms were made of the theories. For example, they were criticised as being non-dynamic.⁴⁵ Taylor & Laver highlighted the static nature of the theories and their failure to consider historical considerations:

"each time a government leaves office it is as if the slate has been wiped clean...equilibrium governments are once again predicted to form, regardless of which governments had been in office previously" (Taylor & Laver, 1973, p.234).

The treatment of political parties as unitary actors, with no acknowledgement either of the factions within parties or of the ideological overlapping that can occur between parties, was also criticised (Taylor & Laver, 1973, p.234).⁴⁶

Taylor & Laver put forward a possible explanation for minority governments. As all minority governments needed support or "critical abstention" from other parties, "this raises the question of whether the 'real' or 'effective' government coalition should be thought of as including the support parties as well as those which receive portfolios" (Taylor & Laver, 1973, p.232), but the authors confined the notion to "issues" (which could be considered short term and shifting, and therefore an unsuitable explanation for durable minority governments) rather than the possibility of a long term policy similarity between parties as the basis for long-

⁴⁵ As Budge & Fairlie note, no attempt was made in coalition theories to "account for the evolution of particular preferences or political tastes" (Budge & Fairlie, 1977, pp.49-55).

⁴⁶ Despite this criticism, Taylor & Laver themselves made no attempt to represent parties spatially on the left-right ideological continuum, being "forced to rely on the judgement of experts...[and having]...to settle for merely ordinal measurement" (Taylor & Laver, 1973, pp.215-216).

term support.⁴⁷ However, Taylor & Laver's work was to be extraordinarily influential; coalition theory's obsession with a circumscribed notion of what "winning" constituted was shown to be inadequate.⁴⁸

1.2.6. The Balkanisation of Coalition Studies

While it is relatively simple to chart the development of coalition theory until 1973, with each advance clearly building on the insights (and perceived shortcomings) of previous theories, the picture becomes less clear after this date, and a straightforward, chronological, picture of developments becomes more difficult to present. The predictive failure of coalition theories indicated that many other variables needed to be examined. The discovery of a large number of minority governments pointed out the importance of parties pursuing policies, whether inside or outside of the formal government coalition. Until then, models had addressed other stages of the coalition process only indirectly; there was to be more emphasis, for example, on the processes of coalition maintenance. The objective simplicity of Riker's first model was to be replaced by a greater subjectivity, as models of coalition formation sought to resemble the real world more closely. A simple piece of empirical research had exposed the predictive claims of the coalition theories, and there was to be no return to the overt simplicity of the early models. Mathematical models would become more complex, the predictive ability of all models would come to rely more and more on subjective judgement, and coalition theory would alienate many political scientists in the process.⁴⁹

Given this divergence of study, there are considerable problems in presenting a coherent chronological overview of developments. Therefore, as the introduction to this chapter indicated, the following two sections will each examine certain aspects of coalition studies since Taylor & Laver's (1973) challenge to the predictive accuracy of early theories. The following section (Section Three) will detail attempts to understand more about the process of coalition duration, while Section Four will briefly examine developments in the game theory tradition. Following this, Section

⁴⁷ A point later developed by Budge & Herman's (1978) criterion of 'government viability' (discussed below).

⁴⁸ Browne (1973) and de Swaan (1973) also tested the early office seeking theories of coalition formation; their findings generally support those of Taylor & Laver (1973).

⁴⁹ Straffin & Grofman (1984) note the lack of enthusiasm felt by many political scientists to the development of mathematical models of political behaviour; an academic colleague of theirs "has been heard to complain with some bitterness that he can no longer read the American Political Science Review because it is full of mathematical symbols" (Straffin & Grofman, 1984, p.259). The authors seem to regard his remarks as those of a grumpy Luddite, but his reaction illustrates the feelings of many political scientists, who are otherwise interested in the study of coalitions, towards formal coalition theory.

Five will complete this analysis of the development of coalition theory, examining significant research in general approaches to the present day.⁵⁰

The findings of Taylor & Laver (1973) and de Swaan (1973) on the poor fit of formal theories and the presence of so many minority governments indicated that policy considerations must be taken into account in any theory of coalition formation. There was also a shift from the primary concern with coalition formation to a more detailed examination of coalition durability and "hence to a greater appreciation of both the context and the complexities of coalitional behaviour" (Pridham, 1987, p.376).

However, despite the greater interest in other aspects of coalitions, the great majority of coalition studies still concentrate on the process of coalition formation. Even within studies of coalition formation, little attention has generally been paid to payoffs, which may also be an influence on coalition duration.⁵¹ Research has concentrated on the effect on coalition formation of initial weights (in the form of legislative seats) modified by location on (usually) a uni-dimensional policy scale. Much less effort has been devoted to the problems of coalition maintenance, the causes of termination receiving very little attention. The following section examines the research that has been carried out into the area of government maintenance.

Section Three: Coalition Durability

Investigations of the factors which may be influencing coalition duration are not abundant; influenced by the focus of game-theoretic models on outcomes, coalition theorists have largely concentrated on the process of coalition formation. Although Laver & Schofield maintain "a lot of research has been done on the duration of coalition cabinets" (1990, p.144), the question of coalitional durability has received nothing like the attention coalition formation has attracted.

1.3.1. Problems of Definition and Approach

This lack of attention is understandable, as coalition breakdown and termination may be the most difficult aspects of governmental behaviour to analyse, "in part because

⁵⁰ While the 'segregation' of often complementary research is not an ideal approach, and fails to acknowledge the 'cross-fertilisation' which has been a feature of coalition studies, it may be an accurate reflection of the current division between game theory and empirical studies.

⁵¹ Even a work conscious of the discrepancy between the attention paid to formation and duration, Laver & Schofield's impressive *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (1990), has only 18 pages devoted to the question of cabinet stability. However, they do examine coalition payoffs in detail (1990, pp.164-194).

of the lack of previous research and in part because of the difficulties in pinning down and putting into focus such diffuse phenomena" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.187). For example, considerable problems arise just from an attempt to define what is meant by the 'end of a government'. It has been noted that most authors permutate "a selection of the following criteria in their definition of the end of a government": a change in the party membership of a government, a government resignation, a change of leader, and an election (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.145).

Thus, there is no standard definition of when a government ends, and different writers adopt different criteria; indeed, the particular conventions of the system being examined may demand a certain criterion be included or excluded.⁵² It follows that the results of research may well depend on the criteria adopted, making comparisons of different studies potentially problematic.

There are other, and perhaps more serious, problems for the student of coalition longevity. Even when the question of government breakdown *is* examined:

"coalition literature approaches the question ... in a curiously indirect way, dominated by its characteristic concern with how governments formed in the first place. This is because lack of success in specifying the form coalitions take (e.g. the existence of as many surplus majority and minority coalitions as minimal winning ones) can be excused by the lesser stability and shorter duration of governments not conforming to the prescribed criteria ... this leads to breakdown and termination being ignored as phenomena requiring explanation in their own right" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.159).

Dodd (1976), despite his study's status as the first exhaustive examination of cabinet durability⁵³, provides the classic example of such an approach, with its premise that durability is primarily related to closeness to minimum winning status (1976, pp.51-53).⁵⁴

⁵² As Strom notes in a discussion of the problems of measuring duration, "operational definitions must be justified by the research problem at hand" (Strom, 1988, p.927).

⁵³ Earlier, Laver's (1974) "ideological diversity" hypothesis (first defined in Taylor & Laver, 1973, p.217), which refined Axelrod's notion of an ideological left-right continuum by introducing a numerical value to indicate distance between the parties, as well as supporting Axelrod's findings that "the less diverse a coalition is, the more it is preferred", also found that the less diverse a coalition was "the longer will be its duration" (Laver, 1974, p.260).

⁵⁴ Dodd was also later to argue that coalition durability needs to be seen as an "independent variable in its own right" (1984, p.156).

1.3.2. Early Approaches to Coalition Duration

Dodd's was the first substantive research concerned primarily with the factors affecting coalition duration; he attempted to identify the conditions conducive to durable coalition government.⁵⁵ Dodd argues that the quest for power can be perceived as "an attempt by each party to maximise its participation in the cabinet" and that the central motivation of parties is a desire for the best cabinet positions, with each party seeking to obtain the maximum advantage.⁵⁶ He found that the durability of cabinets was positively related to coalitional status; "the durability of cabinets largely depends upon the degree to which they approximate coalitions of minimum winning size" (Dodd, 1976, pp.139-140). Minority and oversized cabinets were seen as unstable or less stable and as "cabinets depart from minimum winning status, cabinet durability decreases" (Dodd, 1976, p.159).

There has been some empirical support for Dodd's premise. Grimsson (1982) in an examination of Icelandic government coalitions reported "strong evidence in support of Dodd's hypothesis concerning the durability of cabinets" (Grimsson, 1982, p.181). Norpoth, citing the full terms of those West German coalition governments with the slimmest margins, i.e., Adenauer (1949) and Schmidt (1976), feels "one might argue that the more the parliamentary support of a coalition exceeds the minimum winning requirement...the shorter the duration of the coalition will be" (Norpoth, 1982, p.29).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ One would have expected that, following the findings of Taylor & Laver (1973) of a significant number of minority governments, policy motives might have formed a significant part of any hypothesis of coalitional duration. However, Dodd's assertion that "parties act to maximise their power within the government; thus they attempt to attain and maintain cabinet status"(Dodd, 1976, p.16) indicates that policy-preference approaches were still considered to be of secondary importance to the motivation of ministerial office.

⁵⁶ Budge & Herman (1978) supported Dodd's assertion that parties sought the 'best' ministries, but construed the best ministries as those "most influential in the areas of their concern (e.g. agrarian parties will want the agriculture ministry)" (Budge & Herman, 1978, p.476).

⁵⁷ Schofield (1985) also found that minimum winning coalitions lasted longer than other types. Against this however, Nyholm argues that in Finland "the larger the coalition, the longer its lifetime", and that coalitional heterogeneity need not be a barrier to coalitional durability (Nyholm, 1982, pp.105-108); Budge & Kernan (1990, pp.174-175) also found that in some systems ideologically mixed governments last longer than homogeneous governments. Marradi (1982) reported that Dodd's hypothesis was "only partly confirmed" in Italy, proposing that Dodd's proposition may be more applicable to minority, rather than to oversized, government coalitions (Marradi, 1982, pp.68-69).

While Warwick (1979) also finds minimal winning status "a very powerful independent influence on durability" (1979, p.490), he offers a different perspective on cabinet durability to Dodd. Warwick argues there is a "critical gap" between bourgeois and socialist/social democrat parties which has significance for both government formation and durability.⁵⁸ Where coalition duration is concerned, Warwick argues that the "significant aspects of European party systems...are the major political cleavages" and that the less spanning of cleavages there was the "more desirable" potential coalitions would be to actors (Warwick, 1979, p.490). He found that "coalitions spanning this ideological divide will prove to be less durable than other coalitions" (Warwick, 1979, p.479).⁵⁹ There is support for *and* against Warwick's hypothesis⁶⁰ However, perhaps more importantly, Warwick (1979) argues that his findings concerning the significance of the major political cleavages to durability "also means that game theoretical approaches can no longer be allowed to dominate theoretical or empirical work on coalition behaviour" (Warwick, 1979, p.490).

Von Beyme (1983) agrees with Warwick's view on game theory approaches, and argues "research on coalitions on the basis of game theory has not come to terms with the peculiarities of European party systems" (von Beyme, 1983, p.342). However, other approaches have also received criticism, and there has been considerable argument (examined in section 1.3.4.) between academics on the merits of different conceptualisations.

1.3.3. An Absence of Dynamics

Whatever the approach taken, predictions of coalition durability have tended to be "deterministic" or "regressive"; in other words, the information used to predict duration "is known when the government forms" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.158). For early theorists, coalition *formation* theories often 'doubled' as explanations of durability.⁶¹ Given this, it is unsurprising that the factors they saw as influencing

⁵⁸ Warwick's categorisation of 'bourgeois' and 'socialist' is an extension of the "pro/anti system parties" divide postulated by Taylor & Herman (1971, pp.28-37).

⁵⁹ In addition, he found that "even ideologically diverse coalitions ... will last longer if they cannot afford to lose a member party without losing their majority" (Warwick, 1979, p.490), although as Laver & Schofield point out, Warwick found no clear relationship between ideological "compactness" and stability (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.155).

⁶⁰ Browne reports the contention that "coalitions whose partners span cleavage dimensions are less durable than those whose partners do not is supported by data from Finland, Iceland and Italy"; however, in Belgium and the Netherlands coalitions spanning such cleavages had "slightly increased cabinet durations".(Browne, 1982, p.487).

⁶¹ For example, Axelrod (1970) and Laver (1974). However, as Strom points out, while government formation studies are "typically deterministic", this is not the case with

both formation (and as a 'by-product' duration) dominate the first studies of coalition durability, which were conducted in the game theory tradition.⁶² Institutionalists' offered explanations based on such variables as the number of parties in the system or "party system fragmentation",⁶³ although game theory propositions have also often been incorporated in such "regression models" (see Strom, 1988, p.923).

Of course, there is a strong possibility that factors seen as influencing coalition formation (for example, minimum winning status, ideological diversity, the major political cleavages) will also affect the durability of administrations. However, experienced political observers will not need to be told that the factors leading to the break-up of a coalition government will affect the coalitions that subsequently form. Parties who have just terminated an arrangement due to, for example, policy differences are unlikely to form another coalition immediately.⁶⁴ Therefore, coalition termination must not just be seen as a consequence of, for example, a failure to achieve minimum winning status, but also as a potential cause of a particular government forming (see Budge & Keman, 1990, pp.159-162). It may even be that a particular termination, leading to a new administration, will also affect the durability of that administration in turn.

This has considerable consequences for theories of coalition formation. Most formal theories, with their emphasis on wiping the board clean and starting again each time a coalition government falls, will consider a previous coalition to be just as likely to form again as any other. However, when a coalition breaks up acrimoniously it must at the very least be considered less likely to form than other solutions.⁶⁵ Any

similar studies of cabinet durability, where "there is no deductive theoretical argument that cabinet duration is precisely determined by the structure of the coalition formation game ... rather, the argument tends to be cast in probabilistic terms" (Strom, 1988, p.924).

⁶² In the first hint of a current controversy that is addressed later in this section, Browne et al dispute that early studies were in the game theory tradition, although they concede such studies utilised variables (such as minimal winning status) "identified by game and coalition theory" (Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1988, p.934). However, there can be little dispute that Dodd (1976) must be seen in this tradition.

⁶³ For example, Sanders & Herman (1977) and Lijphart, 1984). Chapters Four and Six examines such explanations for their relevance regarding local coalition formation and duration respectively.

⁶⁴ An assumption made by Budge & Keman (1990). See Table 2.4, Implication 6 (ii), p.52, although not supported by their research (see 1990, p.187).

⁶⁵ Although Strom (1985, p.753) finds that minority governments do well in subsequent elections.

successful theory of coalition formation, then, must also integrate the effects of government termination on subsequent coalition activity.⁶⁶

However, just as theories of coalition formation have followed different paths, what the American Political Science Review calls "a spirited debate"⁶⁷ has "arisen over the best approach to the analysis of the durability of governing coalitions in parliamentary democracies" (Vol. 82, No. 3, September 1988, abstract, p.923). Some aspects of that debate will now be examined.

1.3.4. The "Spirited Debate"

Criticism of the failure of game theory approaches was also a feature of a series of studies by Browne *et al* into factors influencing coalition duration (1984, 1986, 1988 and others).⁶⁸ Browne, Frenreis & Gleiber (1984) propose a "stochastic approach", and argue that "the stability of cabinets is appropriately modelled as a problem of individual decision making under uncertainty"; cabinet dissolutions occur because of unpredictable "critical events" (1984, p.191). In support, Laver & Schofield find that "even a very 'durable' government [can] have quite a short 'duration' if a particularly important event happens to bring down the government early in its potential life" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.162)⁶⁹

As well as criticising game theory approaches, Browne *et al* were also critical of Warwick's research methods, pointing out that he "eliminated several cabinets from his data set whose termination was unconnected with the idea of instability" (Browne, Frenreis & Gleiber, 1984, p.177). However, their critique was as nothing compared to the criticism their work received in turn. While Strom agrees that Browne *et al* make some "valid and reasonable criticisms" against "coalition-

⁶⁶ Budge & Keman expected to find that governments ending because of elections or Prime Ministerial resignations would be more likely to "encourage continued collaboration" than those ending because of "quarrelling" between partners. However, while Budge & Keman (1990, p.187), did find a relationship, it was that "parties in governments terminating with elections are consistently *less* likely to cooperate again" than those where government dissolution was the cause of termination (my emphasis).

⁶⁷ As we shall see, an example of litotes.

⁶⁸ For Browne *et al*, game theoretic approaches to duration "incorporate unrealistic premises" (1984, p.173), are "deterministic" (1986, p.630) and have failed empirically (1986, p.631).

⁶⁹ Laver & Schofield argue that the type of "bargaining system" (a combination of party weight and policy position) "conditions the stability of coalition cabinets" (1990, p.158) They claim that a synthesis of this model and the "events" approach of Browne *et al* "can accommodate both the impact of random shocks and the influence of regime and cabinet attributes and therefore subsumes much of the work that has been done on the subject of cabinet stability" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.161; King, Alt, Burns & Laver, *American Journal of Political Science*, forthcoming). See also Chapter Six, Section Two.

theoretic explanations of cabinet duration"(Strom, 1988, p.925)⁷⁰ his main point is that:

"although innovative and methodologically fairly sophisticated, these analyses are misconceived, poorly executed, and ultimately unlikely to advance our understanding of government coalitions" (Strom, 1988, p.923).

Not least of Strom's criticisms was their failure to imbue the notion of a "terminal event" with "substantive content".⁷¹ He also noted the poor "predictive power" of their concept, and he concluded that "the new stochastic models of government durability are disappointing and inadequate" and "clearly, a superior alternative [to models in the game-theoretic tradition] has not been presented" (Strom, 1988, pp.928-929).⁷²

Not surprisingly, Browne *et al* respond vigorously to such criticism. They describe Strom's attack as "mischievous" and "substantially distorted" and they totally reject the claim made by Strom, that their work "has sought to discredit and banish game theory from the arena of coalition research" (Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1988, pp.931-934). They make a number of pertinent responses, including pointing out that an important contribution of the 'critical events' approach is that it identifies "a major source of uncertainty in the rational decision making calculations of coalition actors". This has repercussions for bargaining , because the extent of such uncertainty might alter an actor's decision "both with respect to their choice of partners and preferences for particular benefits". The central idea of "uncertainty" also "encourages us to view coalition processes dynamically" (Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1988, p.937). Most importantly, the events approach "calls for a redirection of scholarly attention from the question of how long cabinets may be expected to endure towards the questions of when and why cabinets will fall" (p.937).⁷³

⁷⁰ Notably, coalition theory's often "simplistic assumptions" and its treatment of formations as "mutually independent events" (Strom, 1988, p.924).

⁷¹ A criticism they accepted; "aware of this deficiency, we have begun investigating the problem"(Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1988, fn.8, p.938).

⁷² For Strom, "specifically, the stochastic modelers have (1) misrepresented the game-theoretic tradition and its empirical success, (2) paid insufficient attention to key terms and assumptions in their own models, (3) overinterpreted empirical support for these models, (4) misplaced the focus of the analysis through substantive unfamiliarity or faulty metaphor, and (5) provided a poor alternative to the game-theoretic approach in the development of a cumulative and rigorous science of politics" (Strom, 1988, p.923).

⁷³ Strom (1988, p.926-927) also alleges that Browne *et al* fail even to specify the basic unit of analysis, the definition of a government termination. Their response points out that they did offer a definition of termination, in a work (Browne, Gleiber, & Mashoba, 1988)

The dispute between Browne et al and Strom might appear a minor matter, an example (particularly severe perhaps) of 'academic infighting', but in addition to both sides making pertinent points about the weaknesses of the other's approach, it further demonstrates the way in which coalition studies have fragmented, to the extent that a wall is being built between the different approaches. Strom's criticisms seem not to have been made in a spirit of academic debate, but more in the spirit of a vixen protecting her cubs from a predator; the cubs in this case are the offspring of various formal studies, while the predator (which is also seen as attacking 'institutionalist' models) is perceived to be the 'stochastic model'. The argument between Strom and Browne et al is an expression of a wider "tragedy", the growing apart of complementary traditions of academic research.⁷⁴

1.3.5. Other Influences on Duration

We will return to this problem in the final section of this chapter. However, to conclude this examination, there are a number of other factors that have been alleged to affect coalition duration. As well as arguing that minimum winning coalitions are more stable than other coalitions,⁷⁵ Dodd maintains that minority governments are also associated with instability (Dodd, 1976, pp.133-139). While Strom argues that minority governments are not symptoms of political instability, (Strom, 1990, p.63), he does find that minority governments are less durable than majority coalitions (Strom, 1990, p.238).⁷⁶

Perhaps surprisingly, "none of the studies that has been conducted to date provides any sustained evidence of a systematic relationship between the ideological diversity of a coalition and its life expectancy" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.155); Axelrod's claim that minimal and ideologically connected coalitions are also longer lasting is supported by some studies, and challenged by others.⁷⁷ The effects of policy

uncited by Strom, and that their decision rule in the articles he did cite was clear (Browne, Frendreis, & Gleiber, 1988, pp.932-933).

⁷⁴ See Laver & Schofield (1990, pp.10-11).

⁷⁵ A finding supported by Schofield (1985) who used the same criteria of termination as Dodd.

⁷⁶ See also Strom (1985) where he finds that "minority governments are associated with higher rates of governmental turnover", although, given that the minority governments fare better in subsequent elections (as previously mentioned; see fn 65), he argues that the formation of a minority government is "highly rational" (Strom, 1985, p.753). This implies that politicians are aware of the improved electoral performance of former minority governments, a not unreasonable assumption given that most politicians are keen students of past electoral performance.

⁷⁷ See Schofield (1985, p.588).

considerations on coalitional duration are still largely unconsidered, and Budge & Keman (1990) is one of the very few works to examine the effects of policy criteria on government termination. While Laver & Schofield argue that "the duration of cabinets seems to be unrelated to policy matters" (1990, p.155), Budge & Keman received some indication that "governments formed without policy agreements will be shorter-lived, less effective, and less stable" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.188).

Despite the criticisms that have been made about deterministic approaches, it does appear that closeness to minimum winning status is a powerful indicator of coalitional durability, and that minority governments, while not necessarily a symptom of instability, are less durable than majority coalitions. The evidence for the effect on duration of other criteria often associated with coalition formation (for example, minimal connected winning status) is more ambiguous. Other research has suggested that random and unpredictable events may precipitate government collapse, although even within this model of government duration it appears that some types of government in some types of system are more durable than others.

As this section has indicated, game theoretic approaches are often seen as positing an unrealistic picture of real life coalitions. Many of these criticisms fail to acknowledge the enormous contribution game theory approaches have made to coalition studies, ignore the necessary theoretical assumptions (however flawed) that empiricism cannot provide, and often misunderstand the nature of approaches in this tradition.⁷⁸ That is not to deny the veracity of some of the criticisms; indeed, as the following section will show, some formal modellers acknowledge them. Theorists have continued to produce highly formal mathematical models based on laboratory games, some of which have prompted more empirical research, and the following section will examine some of the recent contributions to coalition studies made by the game theoretic tradition.

Section Four: Developments in Game Theory

To the uninformed, the controversy between stochastic modelling and game theory (discussed above) might appear to indicate that coalition studies is an arena where a vibrant interchange of ideas is taking place between the supporters of different approaches. On the contrary, it would be more accurate to suggest that the reverse is the case. The relationship between political scientists in the game theory tradition and mainstream political scientists has become tenuous, and the major reason is almost certainly because of the increasingly mathematical nature of game theoretical

⁷⁸ Strom's (1988) defence of the game theoretical tradition addresses these issues in full.

studies.⁷⁹ Such incomprehensibility may have serious repercussions for empirical coalition studies. Pridham (1987) argues that the abstract quality of formal coalition theories has discouraged empirical work among country specialists and that "academic interest in coalition theory subsided from the early 1970s" (Pridham, 1987, p.375).⁸⁰

1.4.1. Some Solutions to the Bargaining Process

Despite Pridham's assertions of the deficiencies of formal coalition studies, there have been a number of developments within coalition theory during the 1970s and 1980s. Within the game-theoretical tradition, various solutions have been offered to characterise the bargaining process within coalition formation; these have included the 'bargaining-set' proposed by Peleg (1973) from earlier work by Aumann & Maschler (1964), the development of the 'core' notion within bargaining-set games to the 'kernel' or 'core' solution offered by, amongst others, Schofield (1976) and Owen (1986), and the 'competitive solution' of McKelvey, Ordeshook and Winer (1978). The idea of the 'core' is that the payoff, or 'imputation', to actors in the coalition game must be rational; the members of each possible coalition must receive an imputation at least as great as their value. It would be irrational for actors to take less from a coalition than they could get by acting alone or by breaking up the coalition. All the "coalitionally rational imputations" constitute the core, and a game without a core is unstable, because whatever the payoff "some coalition has the power and motivation to break up the imputation and go off on its own" (Davis, 1981, p.184); the theory would therefore predict a coalition outcome in the core.⁸¹

The 'competitive solution' rests on an assumption first made by de Swaan (1973) of the importance of 'pivotal' actors. The 'competitive solution' hypothesizes that:

"potential coalitions must bid for their members in a competitive environment via the proposals they offer. Given that several coalitions are attempting to form simultaneously, each coalition must, if possible, bid efficiently by appropriately rewarding its 'critical' members. Thus, if any one player or set of players is pivotal between two coalitions and if each coalition is to have a chance of forming, the pivotal players should be

⁷⁹ For example, the nineteen contributions to 'Game Theory & Political Science' (1978) are incomprehensible to the non-mathematician.

⁸⁰ Pridham believes coalition studies failed to keep pace with developments in areas such as the study of party systems and individual political parties and that only very recently has "this isolation of coalition studies and their deficiencies of approach ... drawn more attention" (Pridham, 1987, p.375).

⁸¹ Strom (1990, p.171) risks confusion by using the term "core" (which in game theoretic terms is "the set of undominated solutions") to refer to the position in policy terms of the Christian Democrats in Italy.

indifferent between the offers of both coalitions lest their preferences insure that one of the two cannot form. This can result in certain coalitions being unable to compete, and thus, we must identify not only the competitive offers of coalitions, but also, the coalitions that can make them" (McKelvey, Ordeshook & Winer, 1978, p.605).

The authors report considerable success for their hypothesis in laboratory games (McKelvey, Ordeshook & Winer, 1978, pp.611-612), but such games are not a political arena. These, and other game theory solutions, face a considerable problem; do they offer an adequate representation of political behaviour? For example, to look at the proposals of McKelvey et al, do coalition actors always reap the payoff their weight would suggest, as the notion of a 'core' solution proposes? Will the pivotal actor be indifferent to competing offers? Are coalitions attempting to form simultaneously? Such questions remain largely unconsidered in formal theory.

1.4.2. Problems of Constructing 'Reality'

The theories have only rarely been utilised by empiricists or informed by empirical research, concentrating on formal and elegant solutions to the coalition 'game'; early game theory solutions had prompted Taylor (1972, pp.372-373) to argue that formal solution theory was irrelevant to the study of legislative coalition processes. Political scientists in the game theory tradition, while arguing that game theory had made significant developments in some areas, were themselves often critical of its shortcomings:

"In one critical area, game theory has failed to have a substantial impact on political science. At the conceptual level, game theory has by now led many political scientists to think in terms of strategies, coalitions, and payoffs. Game theory has also contributed heavily to the development of positive political theory. But game theory has only rarely led to rigorous empirical analysis of real world political behaviour. In fact, political scientists, including ourselves, have often turned away from the messiness of real world analysis to the cozy comfort of laboratory experiments" (McKelvey & Rosenthal, 1978, pp.405-406).

McKelvey & Rosenthal proposed that to develop a real world model would take "three critical steps": (1) "the preference or utility functions of the actors must be modelled"; (2) "the real world situation must be modelled as a formal game"; (3) the analyst must be able "to conduct an appropriate statistical evaluation of the correspondence between observed outcomes and predicted outcomes" (McKelvey & Rosenthal, 1978, p.406). The difficulties of constructing such a model need hardly be stated, but when coalition theory has yet to produce remotely satisfying criteria of politicians 'utility functions', for example, their attitudes towards office and policy payoffs, the authors' optimism that their paper "applies the above framework

for model building and evaluation to a reasonably complex situation⁸² seems inappropriate (McKelvey & Rosenthal, 1978, p.406).

1.4.3. Recent Approaches in the Game Theoretic Tradition

Recently, some interesting models in the game theoretic tradition have attempted to present a more realistic view of political interaction. Some have incorporated earlier approaches in game theory.

A New Spatial Theory

For example, Austen-Smith & Banks' (1988) propose a 'multistage game theoretic model' of party competition in a proportional representation (p.r.) system, which incorporates previously independent "spatial theories" of elections and legislatures.⁸³ The authors argue the merging of the two approaches is necessary because:

"rational voters...will take into account the subsequent legislative game in making their decisions at the electoral stage of the process.⁸⁴ In turn, rational candidates will take account of such deliberations in selecting their electoral strategy and subsequent legislative behaviour conditional on electoral success. So to understand more fully both electoral and legislative behaviour-in the sense of being able to explain and predict policy positions, policy outcomes, and coalition structures-it is necessary to develop a theory of both political arenas simultaneously" (Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988, p.405)

Again, the difficulty of developing a theory incorporating electoral and legislative arenas is apparent,⁸⁵ but such an approach demonstrates that game theorists are not unaware of the complexities of 'real' political life. Also, their conclusion that the model demonstrates that "the popular conception" of p.r. systems as more likely than simple plurality systems to lead to legislatures which "reflect the variety of interests in the electorate seems mistaken" (Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988,

⁸² The framework is applied to electoral coalitions in the French apparantement system.

⁸³ For a review of spatial theories, see Shepsle, (1986). Another approach is that of Schofield (1982), who offers an incorporation of 'the bargaining set' and policy based theories (such as de Swaan, 1973).

⁸⁴ As noted, this model is developed to represent competition in a political system with proportional representation. However, they also assume there are only three parties (Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988, p.408), which in a p.r. system might be taken as further evidence of the unrealistic assumptions of game theorists.

⁸⁵ In a very influential paper proposing an integration of office and policy considerations, Laver & Budge (1987) had, prior to Austen-Smith & Banks, noted a significant relationship between electoral considerations and coalition formation; they argued electors may well "see themselves as voting for potential coalitions" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.25). Their observations are discussed in more depth in Section Five of this chapter.

p.417)⁸⁶ has potential repercussions beyond the study of coalitions. Not only that, but such work does not reflect an approach that has nothing to offer mainstream political scientists, although the pages of mathematical notations somewhat limit its accessibility.

Intraparty Politics

A concern with accessibility was clearly important to Laver & Shepsle (1990a), who despite an approach very much in the game theoretic tradition, eschewed the use of the "axiom-theorem-proof" methods normal in game theory and presented "simple paper and pencil examples" in their attempt to produce a model of government formation which allows consideration of the role of intraparty politics to coalition formation. (Laver & Shepsle, 1990a, p.506). Their approach concentrates on *government* formations rather than *coalition* building, noting that "most coalition theories have not distinguished between coalitions formed to divide a pie or pass a motion and those formed to establish a government" (Laver & Shepsle, 1990a, p.489). This helps to explain why most theory has failed to address such critical matters as intraparty politics. In Laver & Shepsle's model, the cabinet proposals of parties becomes the crucial unit by which the credibility of coalition proposals is judged. As they express it, the allocation of a portfolio to a party constitutes a "credible commitment to implement the ideal policy of that party in the relevant policy jurisdiction" (Laver & Shepsle, 1990, p.490a), and a party can "back up its promises by indicating the senior politician whose policy preferences provide the incentives to implement these promises in office" (1990a, p.506). Laver & Shepsle maintain their approach means that it is no longer necessary to make an assumption of parties as unitary actors.⁸⁷

Proto-Coalition Formation

Laver & Shepsle's model, despite its game theoretic approach, was easily understandable to a non-mathematician. While it is not strictly 'game theory', one of the more accessible formal models that has been presented is Grofman's (1982) dynamic model of proto-coalition formation, which also bears a more direct relationship with the 'real world' of political coalition formation than the more

⁸⁶ They note that such a conception rests on an assumption of "non-strategic behaviour" by voters *and* parties, which "on both theoretical and empirical grounds is unwarranted". (Austen-Smith & Banks, 1988, p.417).

⁸⁷ While the degree of autonomy their model proposed for cabinet ministers must be disputed, as they assume ministers are "policy dictators" (1990a, fn. p.490) in their departments, Laver & Shepsle's approach is certainly capable of allowing the examination of party factions in coalition bargaining if we assume that party factions are necessarily represented by senior politicians who will be rewarded with cabinet office.

abstract solutions offered. The process by which Grofman categorises coalition formation can be seen as a development of de Swaan's (1973) hypothesis on the processes of coalition formation and as a generalisation of Axelrod's (1970) 'connected coalitions' from a uni-dimensional policy space to an N-dimensional policy space (Grofman, 1982, p.77). An actor forms a 'proto-coalition' with their most preferred partner, i.e., "the actor nearest to him in n-space" (Grofman, 1982, p.78). This new coalition then repeats the process until a 'winning' coalition is formed. Grofman reports considerable predictive success with this model.

1.4.4. Problems for Predictive Models

Once again then, a predictive theory in the game theory tradition appears to suggest a plausible hypothesis of coalition formation and claims a considerable predictive success. However, there is a serious problem for predictive models, whether they are in the game theory or 'European politics' traditions. Laver (1989) points out perhaps the most significant problem of theorists constructing and testing their predictive models using the available empirical data, particularly when it comes to a critical evaluation of their properties:

"This is that the main data set to which they address themselves - the universe of national governments in post-war Europe - is by now one of the most thoroughly picked over in the entire social sciences. As a consequence, the relationship between theory and data has become extremely incestuous. It is no longer possible, for example, to construct a general theory from *a priori* assumptions and then run off to 'test' it against the data, since the general properties of this data set are by now very well known ... a situation that in particular makes it very difficult for us to evaluate new inductive theories that have succeeded in snuggling still closer to a perfect fit with the universe of post-war European coalition governments." (Laver, 1989, pp.16-17).

This implies that models such as those offered by Grofman (who has made numerous changes to his model to improve the fit with a data set he is already familiar with) need to be treated with considerable scepticism.⁸⁸

However, the incestuous relationship between data and theory is not the only problem for explanations in the game theory tradition. As previously noted, a major problem with the mathematically complex models in a strict game theory tradition is

⁸⁸The original model was criticised by Luebbert (1983) for allowing only majority coalitions to form and was further criticised for making a unique prediction, which failed to take account of the possibility of coalition arrangements changing without a change in voting strength (Rapoport & Weg, 1986, pp.577-598). Grofman modified his model in 1987 "to allow for predicting the circumstances under which a minority coalition might be expected to form" (Grofman, 1987, p.1), and reported that his revised model performed well in an examination of coalition outcomes in four countries, Denmark, Norway, Germany and Italy.

their incomprehensibility to non-mathematicians. This has undoubtedly limited their influence on political scientists, even those working within the field of empirical coalition studies. Perhaps even more importantly, the scenario of politics presented in most mathematical models, despite their general rejection of certain unrealistic aspects of early coalition theory such as uni-dimensional policy spaces, seems far too simplistic to most observers of political behaviour. While it might be relatively easy to apply rational notions of 'winning' as the sole concern of politicians to the world of, for example, Machiavelli (and even then unsatisfactorily),⁸⁹ late 20th century Western coalition politics exists in a world where the influences upon politicians are infinitely more subtle. The final section of this chapter will examine some recent efforts which may meet the requirement that coalition studies address the realities of politics.

Section Five: Towards an Integrated Theory

A number of areas will be assessed in this section. Within a more general approach, a number of studies which relate the theory more directly to the real world have been offered,⁹⁰ and specifically within the area of coalitions of political parties perhaps the most important developments have been to establish new criteria of coalition 'membership' and 'viability', and attempts to achieve a measure of integration between the office-seeking and policy preference approaches (for example, Budge & Herman, 1978, and Budge & Laver, 1987). Despite their fundamental importance in coalition studies, studies of the distribution of coalition payoffs (and particularly policy payoffs) have been limited, although recent work is redressing the balance.⁹¹ In addition, the multi-dimensional framework pioneered by Pridham, which argues that more empirical studies of coalition behaviour are necessary, will be assessed. This section begins with an examination of the proposal of a new definition of government viability, one which offered a plausible explanation for the existence of so many minority governments in European parliamentary systems.

⁸⁹ Politics was much closer to a zero-sum game in 15/16th century Florence. 20th century politicians have far less freedom of movement than Machiavelli's Prince, who did not need to consider, for example, such constraints as future electoral prospects or the policy preferences of a mass party. This is not to deny that his Prince also had other considerations than 'winning', but when 'losing' means death or banishment, winning 'office' becomes very much the primary goal.

⁹⁰ It must be pointed out that this was expressed in terms such as "improving the predictive fit".

⁹¹ For example, the authors in Browne & Dreijmanis (editors, 1982) did comment on payoffs; see also Laver & Schofield (1990, Chapter Seven).

1.5.1. An Explanation for Minority Governments

The discovery of a large number of minority governments by Taylor & Laver (1973) indicated severe problems for the dominant explanations of coalition formation.⁹² They all made an assumption that 'winning' meant controlling a majority of seats. One difficulty of a majority criterion is evident - it cannot account for minority governments. Such administrations were merely seen as short-lived and unstable (Dodd, 1976), which while agreeing with both the feelings of many observers of political behaviour and earlier theorists (for example, Axelrod, 1970), gave no indication of why minority administrations formed at all.

Budge & Herman (1978) offered a possible explanation for minority governments. They suggested that parties would pursue policies, and would support governments who advanced those policies, whether or not they were in government, thus "abandoning the assumption [within coalition theory] that size or even ideology are of unvarying importance or salience" (Budge & Herman, 1978, p.459). They introduced a new criterion of government viability,⁹³ the ability to win "a majority on legislative votes of confidence" (Budge & Herman, 1978, p.461). In this case, if two parties disagreed with each other more than with the government, the success of minority administrations could be explained. It might also be better in some ways for the 'support party(ies)' not to enter into a formal coalition agreement by taking ministerial office, in that if governments do lose elections rather than oppositions winning them, too close an identification with the governing party might be counter-productive electorally.⁹⁴ Luebbert (1986) has also suggested that the maintenance of party unity for the 'support party' might best be achieved from outside of a governing coalition (Luebbert, 1986, p.244) which would certainly be an important consideration to any political leader contemplating entering into a formal governing coalition.

1.5.2. The Integration of Office and Policy Motivations

So, early approaches to coalition formation concentrated on explanations which saw winning a legislative majority as the primary goal, and the rewards of office as the primary payoff of 'winning'. Policy payoffs were generally used "to constrain the

⁹² Riker (1962), Leiserson (1968), Axelrod (1970), de Swaan (1973).

⁹³ It must be noted that a *viable* government is not necessarily an *effective* one, for "viability is no guarantee that a government can fulfil its constitutional functions [and] parliamentary governments ... must be both viable and effective" (Strom, 1990, p.5).

⁹⁴ In order that his 'dynamic model of proto-coalition formation' might encompass minority administrations, Grofman (1987) utilised Budge & Herman's criterion to include support parties as part of any 'winning' coalition; he called such arrangements 'standing coalitions' (Grofman, 1987, p.4).

coalitions which office-seeking parties can form, thus improving the fit between minimal winning formulations and actual coalition behaviour" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.1). At least since Budge & Herman (1978), approaches have stressed the importance of policy considerations to a number of governmental factors, pointing out the weakness of assumptions that politicians are only interested in office pay-offs. As Warwick (1979) points out:

"politicians appear to be under the twin, and by no means compatible, motivations of pursuing their beliefs and pursuing power, and causal approaches that ignore either one of these motivations are likely to prove deficient" (Warwick, 1979, p.490)

Despite the now general recognition within coalition theory of the importance of policy considerations to coalition processes there has been little consideration within the literature to policy motivations as a primary motive. As Budge & Laver (1987) argue:

"policy-payoffs ... have generally been used in existing theory to constrain the coalitions which office-seeking parties can form, thus improving the fit between minimal winning formulations and actual coalition behaviour" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.1).

However, for Budge & Laver, the relationship between office and policy is far more complex and interesting. They characterise the relationship between 'office-seeking' and 'policy-pursuit' as variable; their key assumption is "that office-seeking can be both an end in itself and a means to achieve office ... similarly, policy-pursuit can be both an end in itself and a means to achieve office" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.2). They also offered a new criterion of government viability, replacing the majority criterion with a viability criterion; Budge & Herman's (1978) criterion of viability was modified to:

"a proto-coalition V will form a government if there is no alternative coalition A supported by parties controlling more legislative votes than those supporting V and which all supporters of A prefer to form rather than V" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.10).

The main tenet of Budge & Laver's argument is that both office payoffs and policy payoffs must be included in any comprehensive theory. Such a theory will be lacking in empirical support concerning policy payoffs, because despite the general consensus within coalition studies of the importance of policy considerations, very little substantive research into policy payoffs has occurred.

The importance of office considerations is indisputable. As Laver & Schofield (1990) argue, the close relationship "between a party's legislative weight and the number of portfolios it receives from its coalition partners" demonstrates quite conclusively that "office *is* important" (1990, p.193, emphasis in original). However, the empirical results of research into policy payoffs is "hitherto disappointing",⁹⁵ and therefore:

"the development of a much more comprehensive research programme designed to assess the relationship between the policies of a coalition and the preferences of its members remains one of the most important pieces of unfinished business in the political science of government coalitions" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.194).

Budge & Laver (1987) also propose that the electorate's evaluation of a party's policy position will be conditioned by that party's past and anticipated future performances, which they argue are "intimately related to coalitional behaviour" (Laver & Budge, 1987, pp.22-23). Significantly, if an electorate evaluates policy positions, then it would appear that they may also anticipate likely coalitions; electors may well "see themselves as voting for potential coalitions" and parties "may explicitly state in campaigns which coalitions they will, or will not, join". If so, then "a large part of the coalition formation process may be over before the election is held" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.25), implying that a successful coalition theory must be prepared to admit a significant amount of pre-election bargaining.⁹⁶

Budge & Laver (1987) hoped that stressing the relationship between policy and office as variable, rather than assuming the "automatic predominance" of office-seeking hypotheses, would allow them to face up to a number of problems previously ignored in formal coalition theory,⁹⁷ especially that of relating the processes of

⁹⁵ But see Budge & Keman (1990, Chapter Five) who find that parties do "move policies in the direction of their own preferences" (1990, p.158).

⁹⁶ For example, prior to the 1980 West German election, the opinion polls had indicated that the choice of Franz-Josef Strauss, the leader of the CSU, as the CDU/CSU nomination for Chancellor, was moving some CDU/CSU voters to indicate that they would switch to the FDP. Such pre-election manoeuvring made it impossible (or electorally dangerous in the future) for the FDP to support the CDU/CSU after the election, although when Helmut Kohl was "offered" as Chancellor by the CDU/CSU in 1982 they abandoned their SPD coalition partner (Bogdanor, 1983, pp.44-45); despite a loss in votes in 1984, they were not unduly punished for their duplicity.

⁹⁷ It must be noted that "a theory which incorporated all the possible combinations of office-seeking and policy-pursuit would be, at least in the present state of our knowledge, essentially untestable". The authors note that while simplification is therefore necessary, "one must be careful to cover the commonly occurring situations" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.30). Otherwise, the same criticism levelled against early theories of over simplistic scenarios would be repeated.

coalition formation to other aspects of governmental behaviour (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.1). Other researchers, although equally disenchanted with the direction coalition studies had taken, approached the same problem in a different way. One of the most influential approaches of recent years has been the multi-dimensional approach of Pridham (1986). The multi-dimensional approach has generated a considerable number of empirical studies, although it must be admitted that the emphasis appears to have been more on preparing the ground than in significant insights into coalitional behaviour. More questions have been asked than answers provided, as some practitioners admit (Mellors & Pijenburg, 1989, p.306).⁹⁸

1.5.3. A Multi-Dimensional Approach

In addition to the differing motivations actors will have towards office and policy payoffs suggested by Budge & Laver (1987), Pridham argues that a number of contextual factors must be taken into account in coalition studies "based on linkages between coalition politics and party systems as a whole"; parties should be seen as operating within both "given party systems" and wider environments (Pridham, 1986, p.24). A number of dimensions affecting coalition behaviour therefore have to be taken into account, and Pridham proposes that any framework for coalition studies has to include the following dimensions:

- (1) Historical, emphasising the importance of time, particularly in past experiences of relations with other political parties;
- (2) Institutional, recognising that different political systems afford different opportunities for coalitional arrangements;
- (3) Motivational, recognising that attitudes to office and policy goals will vary, and also that the numerical strengths of parties may affect their willingness to enter into coalitions;
- (4) Horizontal/Vertical, examining the effects of local and regional coalitions on national party behaviour;
- (5) Internal Party, "focusing on the dynamics of internal party processes", which might well lead to questioning of the 'elementary assumption' within formal coalition theory of parties as unitary actors;
- (6) Socio-Political, which includes the effects a number of variables such as electoral politics, interest groups, cleavage conflict and political culture might have on coalitional behaviour;

⁹⁸ Although, as Mellors & Pijenburg's collection of multi-dimensional studies concludes, "it is only to be expected that the initial going will be tough" (1989, p.307).

(7) Environmental/External, examining the role that actors outside the direct control of coalition actors (such as the media) might have on coalition politics (see Pridham, 1987, pp.376-380).⁹⁹

Pridham recognised that his list of dimensions was not exhaustive, but did feel that it would provide a basis for an alternative theory. Pridham's concerns were not new; other research had examined the problems raised by a number of the dimensions Pridham identified.¹⁰⁰ Notably, Franklin & Mackie (1983) found that "historical events do influence formation outcomes, in that parties who have joined together in the past are likely to do so again" (Franklin & Mackie, 1983, p.296). The authors argued that the incorporation of a "longitudinal perspective" into existing theory more than doubled their ability "to explain formation outcomes" (Franklin & Mackie, 1983, pp. 295-298). They maintained that, more importantly, in adopting an historical perspective the true importance of size and ideology could be appreciated for the first time:

"Historical events limit the ability of these considerations [size and ideology] to influence particular formation outcomes, but these historical events are themselves in large part consequences of the same considerations. So where size and ideology fail to affect the present, it is often because their effect has already been felt on the past" (Franklin & Mackie, 1983, p.298).

1.5.4. A Challenge to Traditional Coalition Theories

While acknowledging his debt to these and other studies Pridham argues that the multi-dimensional approach "goes beyond them in integrating such work and also exploring areas so far untrodden by them" (Pridham, 1987, p.379); it also challenges many of the assumptions of coalition theory. Pridham criticises the artificial and abstract nature of formal coalition theory, arguing that:

"Political parties cannot essentially be considered as unitary actors in the coalition game.

- A variety of informal determinants of coalitional behaviour should be taken into account.
- It is imperative to consider the coalitional relationship as a continuing process, encompassing both formation and maintenance.
- Coalitional behaviour has to be assessed within a wider political framework than the institutional context.

⁹⁹ It might be thought that we are moving from the sublime to the ridiculous in that, while game theory leaves a lot out, Pridham includes the kitchen sink.

¹⁰⁰ For example, Groennings, Kelley & Leiserson (1970) had emphasised the importance of a comparative approach, while Dodd (1976) had considered the impact of cleavages to coalition durability. Hinckley had also pointed out that "real world games occur in time, with past constraints and future expectations" (Hinckley, 1976, p.6).

- Political parties are obviously the key or central actors in the coalitional game, though not to the exclusion of other possible actors.
- Qualitative changes in West European party systems since the 1960s reinforce the need for a different approach to coalitional behaviour along these lines.
- Coalitional politics is an inherently complex and often 'messy' affair, where expectations of rational behaviour may well be unrealistic."(Pridham, 1986, pp.24-29)¹⁰¹.

As Pijnenburg (1986) has pointed out, this does not imply that traditional coalition theories are completely discarded, but that their predictive purpose does not provide "an accurate analysis of the mechanisms of coalition politics" (Pijnenburg, 1986, p.4). The multi-dimensional approach aims to provide, via empirical research, the knowledge of 'real-life' coalitional politics that the dominant formal models have scarcely been concerned with. Criticisms of the unrealistic nature of much formal theory are not new, although such criticisms, rather than proposing an alternative approach to game theoretical models, generally sought to integrate the two strands of formal theory and empirical research more closely in the hope that a more accurate predictive model could be produced.¹⁰²

In contrast, Pridham's criticisms confront the very basis of traditional coalition theory, its assumption of groups of actors (in this case political parties) as rational individuals. The multi-dimensional approach makes no pretensions to predicting outcomes: rather, it seeks to explain what actually happens when political parties engage in coalitional activities. Laver's (1989) comments on the incestuous relationship between theory and data point up (leaving aside its core assumptions) formal coalition theory's most serious handicap, the deficiency of the data available on which to test hypotheses. Any development in formal theory which expects to be taken seriously by mainstream political science must be informed by the empirical knowledge gained from the increasing number of studies which have spread their net outside of the confines of European national legislatures (for example, Pridham, 1986, Mellors & Pijnenburg, 1989). However, critics of formal theory must also acknowledge the developments that have been made.

¹⁰¹ Hainsworth & Loughlin (1989) note that negotiations following French regional elections "justified Pridham's view of coalition politics as a messy, complex, uneven, and variable process" (1989, p.159).

¹⁰² See Budge & Herman (1978), Hinckley (1981), Browne & Dreijmanis (1982). As an example of such criticisms, Browne (1982) perceived the major problem of coalition literature as a failure of theoretical developments to incorporate empirical insights and of empiricists failing "to carefully connect their propositions with existing theory" (Browne, 1982, p.356).

Some distinguished voices argue the necessity for the gap between the game theoretical approach and the European empirical approach to be bridged. For Laver & Schofield, an:

"intellectual tragedy has been developing...the European politics and game-theoretic approaches are by now so far apart in their styles of analysis that they have almost nothing to contribute to one another....This growing apart...is a tragedy that has recently become especially apparent as game theorists increasingly acknowledge the theoretical importance of particular institutional details of the coalition formation process, together with all sorts of other empirical matters that have long been the concern of the European politics people. It more and more seems to be the case that both groups of scholars are talking about almost precisely the same thing but that they are simply using different languages to do so" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.10-11).

Conclusions

To a large extent, coalition studies are now attempting to deal more fully with the criticisms that have been made concerning their often unrealistic assumptions of political behaviour. Narrow definitions of 'rationality' are now usually avoided, and theorists are more aware that the goals of politicians are more complex than a simple desire to hold office. 'Winning' is a complex concept, and different actors will have different concepts of what winning means. A theory which fails to acknowledge this is unlikely to impress. Despite this, holding office is necessary for the achievement of many political aims, and the evidence suggests that models assuming a priority for holding office are not an inaccurate reflection of most politicians strategies. The evidence of the importance of policy is far less clear. The assumption of parties as unitary actors has also been challenged, and most observers now argue that any comprehensive theory will have to include the idea of intraparty factions.

Despite the importance of payoff distribution and the reasons for government termination to future coalition formations, these areas have received little attention in the majority of studies. Obviously, they are more difficult to investigate than the process of coalition formation. Recent studies (including, to a small extent, this thesis) are somewhat redressing the balance, but this weakness still needs to be addressed by future studies.

The attempt by Laver & Schofield to bridge the gap between different traditions of coalition research is also essential, and the 'multi-method approach' of this thesis attempts to continue their endeavour. Unfortunately, despite some protestations to the contrary, the multi-dimensional approach of Pridham and others does not appear to believe that formal theory has much to offer empirical studies of coalitions. Many

of their criticisms of formal theory are relevant, but their essentially atheoretical approach cannot be allowed to dominate coalition studies. The problem with such system-specific approaches is that their findings are often of little interest outside of the system being examined. Also, despite the adoption of a common 'framework', the difficulties of comparison may further 'balkanise' coalition studies. As the introduction to this thesis has stated, this study is an attempt to continue Laver & Schofield's process of 'bridge-building', and the insights of the coalition studies outlined in this introductory chapter will be used alongside of the findings of previous research into hung councils in an attempt to further our understanding of 'life in the balance'.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LOCAL POLITICAL SYSTEM: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STRUCTURES AND ACTORS

Introduction

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- 2.1.1. The English Local Government System**
- 2.1.2. The Duties of Local Authorities**
- 2.1.3. The Advance of Politics**
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Conclusions

Introduction

Chapter Two has two major functions. Firstly, it introduces the English local government system, and charts the situation that exists in the majority of local councils, where one party has overall control. Secondly, it will also assess the independence of local politicians from central political, and local bureaucratic, control; the suitability of local politicians as decision making actors in coalition scenarios is evaluated. This prepares the way for Chapter Three, which begins the process of 'marrying' coalition studies and local government studies.

We begin with an examination of the structure of English local government since the last major reorganisation in 1974. This is followed by a look at the internal structure of a local authority, including a resume of the functions of the various parts (for example, the committees) of the council. Section two attempts to locate the centre of decision making in local councils; the role of council bodies is assessed, and the thesis that a 'joint elite' of leading councillors and officers rules is put forward. The political and officer elite are examined in turn. With this viewpoint of the distribution of power in mind, section three outlines a number of models of the officer-councillor relationship. The nature of officer-councillor relationships is examined from both a theoretical and empirical perspective, in an attempt to decide which of the models (if any) offers the most realistic picture of decision making in English local government. The impact of such a finding on a study of coalition formation is determined. Finally, section four looks at the nature of central-local relationships, at government and party level, in order to assess the extent of possible constraints on the bargaining ability of local parties in a coalition situation.

Section One: The Institutional Context of Local Government

Mellors (1989) points out that the "institutional setting" of a local political system will be a major influence upon the type of coalition behaviour occurring, and argues that there are a number of reasons why this is so. Mellors maintains that:

"the status of local government will determine the value of the prizes (both office and policy) available to the potential coalition actor; the constitutional arrangements - both internal (e.g. whether or not there is a distinct political executive) and external (e.g. the system and timing of elections) - besides also contributing to the value of payoffs at local level will help determine the arena for local coalitions and contribute to the rules of the coalition game at local level." (Mellors, 1989, p.69).

Therefore, an examination of the 'institutional setting' is a prerequisite of a study of local coalitions. This appraisal commences with a review of the local government system in which English local coalition actors have to operate.

2.1.1. The English Local Government System

Local government in England had its last full-scale reorganisation in 1974, following the enactment of the Local Government Act (1972). The recommendation of the Redcliffe-Maud Report on Local Government in England (1969) was that a single tier of local government would be both more efficient and more democratic, with "no doubt where responsibility lies [and] no confusion over which authority does what" (Redcliffe-Maud, 1969, Volume One, p.68). Despite this, the Conservative government introduced a two-tier structure in England which reflected the views of the Wheatley Report (1969, pp.164-165) on Scottish local government.¹ The two-tier structure in England was "strictly adhered to even when there seemed little justification for it in particular circumstances" (Hampton, 1987, p.37). For example, the Isle of Wight, with a population of less than 100,000 has a total of three local authorities (one county and two district councils).²

Many of the arguments on the merits of the different systems conceal a struggle for ideological supremacy which has implications for the structures adopted. As Hampton notes:

"the debates between advocates of single-tier and two-tier local government are ... conducted within an atmosphere in which the relative merits of the two systems for the values of efficiency and democracy are infused with the expectations of party or local advantage. The result is often a series of complex compromises that obtains the theoretical advantages of neither system and forms the basis for further argument." (Hampton, 1987, p.55).

There were numerous criticisms of the reformed local government system, including accusations of change for political reasons (see Byrne, 1986, pp.44-46).³

¹The three island authorities in Scotland are unitary authorities. Also, in some places there is an addition of a third tier of parish councils with limited powers.

² A recurring complaint was that the nine largest former county boroughs, all with populations over 200,000, found "the restricted powers available to them as a result of local government reorganisation . . . completely inadequate to deal with the challenges and problems presented in complex urban situations" (Alexander, 1982a, p.64).

³ Accusations of change for political reasons can hardly go deeper than Chandler's argument that "the Redcliffe-Maud Commission was established by Richard Crossman and Harold Wilson partly as a device to avoid making decisions on boundary reforms that would have had for the Labour Party unpalatable consequences for the safety of some of their prized constituencies" (Chandler, 1988, p.181). More recently, it was suggested that the

Accusations of making change for party advantage were also levelled when the Conservative government of the 1980s further complicated the structure of local government in England (see Horton, 1990, p.178), with a single-tier structure being created in the metropolitan areas and in London. The Local Government Act (1985) abolished the six metropolitan counties and the Greater London Council (all Labour controlled), creating publicly unaccountable 'joint boards' to administer those services which were not re-allocated to the London boroughs and metropolitan districts. The result is that local government in Britain today has a dual structure, with two tiers in England and Wales (counties and districts) and Scotland (regions and districts), and a single tier structure in the metropolitan and London boroughs. As well as weakening the base of 'local democracy' in some areas of England, this has further confused a public who generally have only a limited, and usually inaccurate, knowledge of what a local authority does.

2.1.2. The Duties of Local Authorities

Just what a local authority does do is tightly controlled by specific statutes from central government, and local authorities in Britain cannot act outside of the powers expressly given to them by Acts of Parliament.⁴ The services provided by local government can be divided into five main categories, grouped according to shared characteristics. These are, (1) protective services such as police and fire, (2) environmental services such as highways, transport and planning, (3) personal welfare services like social work, education and housing, (4) the provision of amenities such as parks and museums, and (5) trading services for which councils make charges to the public, such as public transport, local markets and crematoria (Hampton, 1987, p. 61). The precise division of responsibilities between the two tiers of government (where there *are* two tiers) is not really of concern to this particular study. It is sufficient to note that county councils rather than district councils are the "major spending authority" (having responsibility for the two main areas of local government spending, education and personal social services) and that even before their abolition the metropolitan counties were responsible for far fewer services than the metropolitan districts (Layfield, 1976, pp.195-196).⁵

Conservative government's suggestion that strategic planning responsibilities be taken from county councils was partly because the rise of the Alliance had meant they were no longer "the bedrock of party support" (Paul Barker, "Goodbye to Lancashire, and welcome back, Yorkshire", *The Independent*, 26/4/89)

⁴ The Local Government Act (1972) allows local authorities to levy a rate of no more than 2p annually for specific local purposes, but apart from this, local authorities cannot act outside of functions given them by statute. (Travers, 1986, p.37).

⁵ It may be pertinent to note that the Layfield Committee (1976), discussing the possible introduction of a local income tax, did not distinguish between counties and districts or

Central government has a number of mechanisms available to ensure local government does not exceed its powers, and since 1979 it has not hesitated to use the full weight of the law, with the result that some writers feel there has been a "juridification of central-local relationships" (Loughlin, 1986, p.193). Local authorities are not only strictly controlled with regard to their powers; the great majority of their duties are obligatory, and councils have little discretion with regard to the duties they have.

In addition to the control exercised by central government over the scope of local authority powers, central intervention has also limited the financial autonomy of local government. Most commentators agree that the level of central control has increased since 1979, when a Conservative government ideologically opposed to state intervention in the economic and social welfare spheres was elected with a pledge to 'roll back the frontiers of the state'; local authorities were seen as responsible for a great deal of unnecessary spending (see Horton, 1990). During the 1980s, a number of Acts have been passed (for example, legislation on 'rate-capping' and the introduction of the community charge or 'poll tax', followed by 'charge-capping') which have lessened the ability of local authorities to set their own levels of income.

2.1.3. The Advance of Politics

It might be thought, then, that a system where local administrations appear to be so constrained will fail to generate much interest among the political parties; why bother to expend energy fighting for control of institutions with very little autonomy? However, despite all the attacks on local government autonomy from central government, local government is still a significant part of the overall political system in Britain and control of local councils, whether county, district or metropolitan, is still a considerable political prize.⁶ As Mellors notes:

metropolitan counties and metropolitan districts in its discussions on local government finance. Instead, it distinguished between authorities on the basis of "major spending authorities" (county councils and metropolitan districts) and the rest. (Layfield, 1976, p.196).

⁶ However, it has also been argued that the "community charge removes the ability of local authorities to redistribute income and drastically limits their ability to adjust services according to community needs" The authors' gloomy prognosis for supporters of local democracy is that this means "in future local government will exist for the narrow purpose of delivering services" (Butcher, Law, Leach & Mullard, 1990, p.75). If this does become the case, its value as a political prize will be severely lessened. However, while aware of the future difficulties for local government, other writers are less pessimistic (see Stewart & Stoker, 1989, pp.252-254).

"the units of government are large, the range of duties extensive and their budgets, although subject to considerable central interference, a major component of the nation's economy. In these terms at least, the institutional setting of local government provides an attractive arena for lively party political activity the political parties do regard local council seats as prizes well worth contesting and winning. Despite all the constraints that are imposed on local government, control of a council gives a political party a valuable political foothold in the locality and an important opportunity to shape the community that it serves." (Mellors, 1989, pp.73-74)

There is "scope for real discretion" at local level, and "local councillors take many of the important policy decisions that affect most people's everyday lives" (Laver, 1989, p.21). The growth in the number of seats contested by the major political parties, and the subsequent decline of the 'independent' councillor at all but parish council level, is some indication of the importance attached to control of a local council. As the Widdicombe Report on the Conduct of Local Authority Business noted, local authorities have in recent years become increasingly 'politicised' (Widdicombe, 1986, p.30)⁷.

There are a number of reasons for the increase in the 'politicisation' of local authorities. Local government reorganisation in 1974 introduced fewer and larger authorities, with greater size increasing the costs of fighting an election and, to some extent, negating the advantage of the well known 'local personality' fighting on a non-partisan ticket. Political parties who wished to be considered as serious national parties had to try and maximise support at every opportunity. Competition for council seats increased as party labels became more important, and fewer candidates were returned unopposed. This has meant that local authorities with a low degree of political organisation are now rare, and generally confined to the peripheries, for example, Cornwall, where Independent councillors are still a considerable factor. In the last election before the 1974 re-organisation, 47% of local authorities in England and Wales were controlled by Independent or Non-Party councillors; by 1985 the figure had fallen to 16% (Widdicombe, 1986, Para. 2.40, p.30). In 1975, 4,802 councillors did not belong to any of the three major parties, but by 1985 the figure had fallen to 1,389 (Mellors, 1986, p.6).

⁷ However, political parties have been around a long time in local government. Parties have been active in local government "since at least the elections that followed the Municipal Reform Act 1835" (Gyford & James, 1983, p.1), and fierce clashes between Radicals, Whigs and Conservatives over issues of social reform continued throughout the 19th century. The establishment of the Labour Party, with its initial emphasis on collective decision-making, ensured that such clashes were to continue, at least in the large urban conglomerations, throughout the 20th century, as anti-Labour/Socialist coalitions of Conservatives, Liberals and Independents were formed in local authorities where Labour was a significant force (Cook, 1975).

In addition, during the 1960s the Liberals started to concentrate more of their energy in contesting local seats, attempting to build local power bases as a future springboard to success in national elections. This activity has had a dominant role in continuing "the very existence of the party in the country and, specifically, to contribute to its revived electoral fortunes" (Gyford & James, 1983, p.69); it has also meant that the other main parties have had to follow suit or risk their local power bases diminishing. In addition, Independents increasingly adopted a party label, which for the most part meant campaigning on a Conservative ticket (see Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume II, p.37). This increased party political activity suggests control of local councils is seen as a valuable political asset by the major parties.

If, as appears to be the case, political parties do see local authorities as a prize worth having, it appears logical that the amount of time they will control the prize for will affect the pleasure at winning. Four years of control will presumably be preferable to one year of control, so the electoral cycle of an authority may well be a considerable influence on the tactics political parties will adopt on assuming office.

2.1.4. The Electoral Cycle

The county councils and London borough councils hold elections for the whole council every 4 years, the metropolitan districts elect a third of their councillors every year with the fourth year free of elections, and the district councils may choose between these two contrasting methods.⁸ Such electoral differences, and the fact that local elections in Britain are also for a fixed period, are of more than passing interest to students of coalition politics. The fact that elections are for fixed periods means there is no possibility of a minority government waiting until the local opinion polls indicate it can obtain a majority and then calling a snap election, as Harold Wilson did when faced with the same situation in the hung Parliament of 1974. Whatever their views of hung politics, the actors in such councils have to live with the situation. The fixed election period also means that they "cannot be precipitated by the resignation of the local executive"; therefore, "party elites are less able to threaten dissidents" (Laver, 1989, p.22), suggesting that the power of party elites will be less at local level .

⁸ There are 333 English and Welsh district councils; 209 have elections every four years, and 124 of them elect their council by thirds (Rallings & Thrasher, 1989).

In addition, the length of time they have to live with hungness will almost certainly affect the strategies political parties adopt. There will surely be a greater incentive to make a deal in councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle, when there are 4 years to go before another election. On the other hand, the possibility of an election in one year restoring the *status quo* may be a powerful disincentive to coalition formation. Strom makes just this general point, suggesting that "the anticipation of upcoming elections ... may be sufficient to induce parties to abstain from power" (Strom, 1990, p.81). Politicians raised in a political culture which views coalitions with distrust will probably be even more reluctant to make deals with opponents which may be electorally damaging, when the possibility exists of a return to 'normality' in just 12 months. If this is the case, then coalitions will be more likely to form in councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle.⁹

Despite this caveat, the evidence suggests that control of a local council is a considerable prize, and the incentives for parties in a hung council to come to some arrangements in order that they can share the prize are apparent. As this brief outline has indicated, the overall structure of local government, the range of duties it possesses, and the nature of local elections and the electoral cycle, will probably have some affect on the tactics actors in hung councils pursue. Undoubtedly, the nature of a local authority's internal constitution will also affect political strategies. However, before examining the various components of a local authority, the main influence on the internal structure of 'the new local authorities' will be considered.

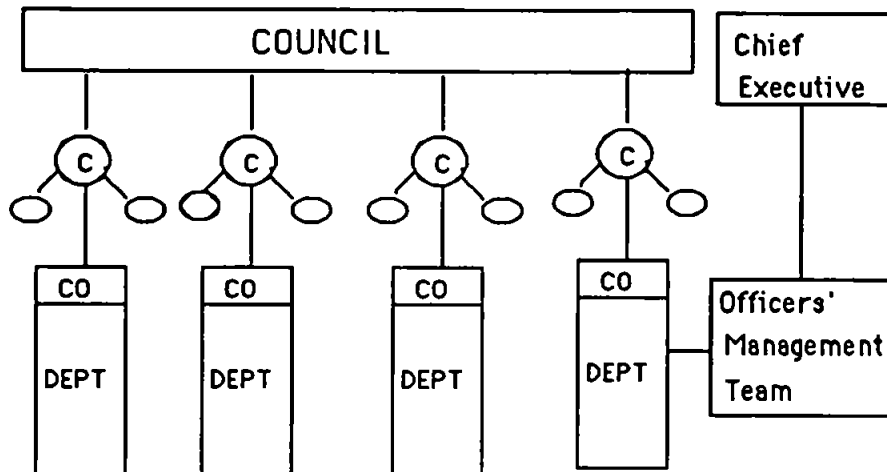
2.1.5. The Impact of the Bains Report

Following the 1974 reorganisation discussed above, the majority of new local authorities have based their management structure according to the recommendations of the Bains Report (1972) into the management and structure of the new local authorities (Davies, 1986, p.18). Bains believed that a "wider ranging corporate outlook" was necessary in local authorities (Bains, 1972, p.6), and recognised that if this was to have any chance of occurring "members and officers must recognise that neither can regard any area of the authority's work and administration as exclusively theirs" (Bains, 1972, p.8). To this end, Bains made a number of recommendations which were intended to improve the overall management of councils. The most important of these were the creation of a *chief executive* to head the administrative structure, assisted by a *management team* of chief officers, and at the centre of the committee structure, a *policy and resources committee* to perform a

⁹ Such possibilities are examined in Chapter Four, which explores the 'local context' to coalition building.

coordinating function on the political side of the council. Figure 3.1 offers a simplified guide to the main elements of the typical local authority in Britain, following the recommendations of the Bains Report (1972).

Figure 3.1: The Basic Structure of the Council (adapted from Byrne, 1986, p.146 & p.162)¹⁰



While Alexander (1982a, p.76) argues that the influence of Bains may be less deep than the wide-ranging adoption of his main proposals implies, most observers are in little doubt that the new corporate management has had a great influence on the administration of local government (see for example, Rosenberg, 1989, p.117-118; Byrne, 1986, p.157). The main recommendations of Bains which were adopted, and some aspects of their influence, will now be scrutinised.

The Demise of Departmentalism?

Prior to reorganisation in 1974, the traditional pattern of administration was that of separate and often antagonistic departmental kingdoms within the authority. Each department would report to its committee, and there was little coordination between the different departments and committees. The needs of the council as a whole were often secondary to the perceived needs of the particular department, and 'departmentalism' reigned (Elcock, 1986, pp.234-235). The only time committee decisions were examined in any sort of 'whole', was when the decisions of the

¹⁰ See Bains (1972, pp.98-121) for detailed descriptions and diagrams of the new structures.

different committees were presented to the full council for consideration and formal approval. As Elcock points out:

"only then could committee decisions be examined to see whether they conflicted with decisions of another committee; whether the overall use of resources by committees met the priorities which the council's members wished to follow and whether the decisions formed part of a coherent plan for the authority's future activity...this traditional decision-making process was found wanting on all three counts. Different committees were providing competing or even conflicting services, agreed priorities were not implemented or had not been clearly stated and there was no coherent view of the future" (Elcock, 1986, p.235).

The difficulties of coordinating activities when the system encouraged fragmentation meant that most efforts at coordination were confounded by departmental rivalries and pressure of time. It was in order to counteract this lack of coordination that the Bains Report recommended the establishment of a chief executive officer in each local authority, as the head of the officer structure. The chief executive was to have no department to run;¹¹ his or her main function was to coordinate the administration of the council and ensure a more coherent pattern to the plans of the authority. To this aim, Bains also recommended the setting up of a management team of the senior chief officers, chaired by the chief executive, its main function being to decide on proposals to be submitted to the council or the policy and resources committee.

It appears that the establishment of a chief executive and management teams of chief officers in most local authorities has meant more coherent overall management. Stewart argues that most councillors contend that it was not unusual, before the setting up of management teams, for different chief officers to disagree on their advice to committees, but that "since the advent of management teams such differences are kept within the team" (Stewart, 1983, p.96). Such a united front by officers towards councillors raises the question of whether such solidarity will contribute to officer ascendancy in a local authority, and Rosenberg notes the fear felt in some authorities of management teams becoming a "competing centre of decision making" (Rosenberg, 1989, pp.109-110). This fear of management teams forming an "alternative power base" has led to some authorities forbidding chief

¹¹ Despite this, research has found that some chief executives operate with an extensive department, usually incorporating sections "responsible for policy analysis and corporate planning, research and intelligence, management services, and perhaps the personnel function" (Greenwood, Walsh, Hinings & Ranson, 1980, p.61).

officer meetings while in others elected members insist on attending (Davies, 1986, p.18).¹²

The Policy and Resources Committee

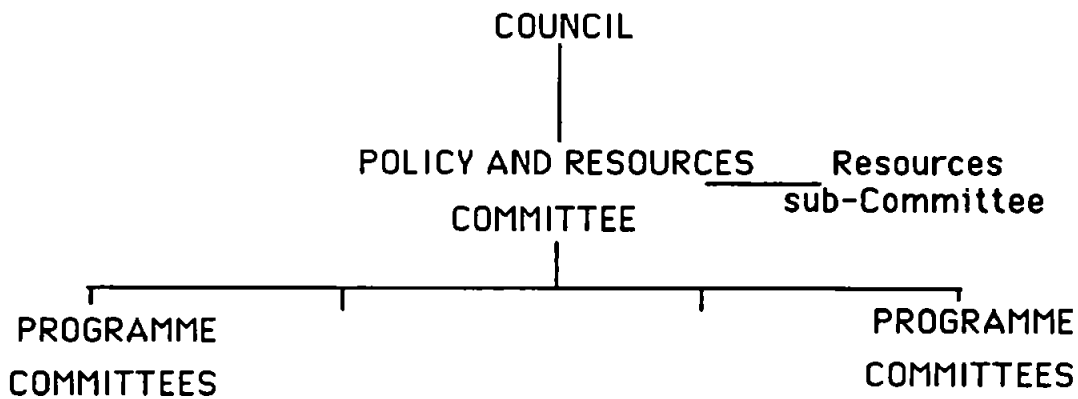
However, the rise of management teams has been matched by a rise in party organisation and discipline, and a greater emphasis in local parties on research teams and long term strategy. Party groups can thus make collective decisions¹³ which a united political front can effectively impose on officers, although Elcock reports one chief executive who "tried to persuade members that party group decisions were no more than requests to the chief officers group for a report and recommendations" (Elcock, 1986, p.263). Such an official attitude, at least in public, seems to be unusual. Most actors in local government are well aware that officers and councillors must work together, although both Redcliffe-Maud and Bains, inevitably given the importance of notions of 'accountability' to democratic theory, argued the need for elected members to be in control of the overall development and control of services.

In order to facilitate this, Bains also recommended the creation of a policy and resources committee at the very centre of the committee structure (see Figure 3.2). The policy and resources committee would oversee the programme committees and would be fed with the necessary resource information by a network of 'resource sub-committees', monitoring areas such as finance and performance review (Bains, 1972, p.99).

¹² Davies (as chief executive of Newcastle-upon-Tyne) argues that chief officers meetings are essential for efficient functioning, and that "if chief officers cannot meet together with the approval of the controlling party they will almost certainly have to find a way of meeting *informally*" (Davies, 1986, p.18, emphasis in original).

¹³ Section two of this chapter argues those 'collective party decisions' represent the policy preferences of a small political elite.

Figure 3.2: Outline Committee Structure (from Bains, 1972, p.99)



The evidence suggests that the policy and resources committee has become the "central control committee" (Rosenberg, 1989, p.132) in many local authorities, therefore fulfilling the function envisaged by Bains. Although not all local authorities will organise their policy and resources committee to act in this way, it has been observed that the most common role for the policy and resources committee is to comment on, and coordinate, the policy directives of other committees (Greenwood, Walsh, Hinings & Ranson, 1980, pp.58-62). Widdicombe reported that 462 of the 494 authorities responding had such an 'overall policy' committee (Widdicombe, 1986, Table A.31, p.277). and that it appears to occupy a central role in most local authorities (Widdicombe, 1986, p.111). Its importance is further illustrated by the knowledge that its chair will usually be occupied by the leader of the council, and that "the chief executive officer will be the principal officer servicing the policy and resources committee and through him or her the committee will have access to advice from all the officers of the local authority". In addition, the tendency will be that only senior councillors will be appointed to such an important committee.(Hampton, 1980, pp.79-80). The resemblance to the central government cabinet is apparent.

Unlike most European national governments, English local government has no central executive or 'cabinet'. With the central function of developing future policy (see Green, 1981, p.50-51), the policy and resources committee could be seen as the nearest equivalent of a cabinet at local level.¹⁴ While it must be remembered that

¹⁴ It will not always be successful in this function. Green argues that the policy and resources committee in Newcastle failed "to give adequate considerations to the issues

there are a number of constitutional differences between central and local government (see Wendt, 1986, pp.379-380), and even though membership of all committees now has to be proportional, control of the policy and resources committee still gives the leader of the majority group a "formal coordinating position" (Hampton, 1987, p.79) that was not available prior to reorganisation. However, "while it is tempting to use the policy committee as the functional equivalent of a cabinet at local level, this would understate the policy-making role of the major service committees, which can play a significant part in the allocation of resources" (Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987, p.504).

Despite the caveat, this does suggest such developments may have moved local councils even further away from the formal position of the full council as the repository of authority. It is clear that the innovations introduced following the recommendations of Bains have become important parts of the structure of most local authorities. Even in those authorities where such changes have been resisted, similar but informal modes of working may be adopted (Davies, 1986, p.18), suggesting that political power is located outside of the formal structure of committees and full council.

However, the formal position is still important. For example, public perceptions of Parliament as the centre of decision making in the English political system persist, and lip service is still paid to its sovereignty by the central executive. The idea of parliamentary sovereignty:

"provides the dominant language of political discourse. Most citizens feel that this is broadly speaking how the policy-process should operate, and this in turn provides a powerful incentive for political actors at least to go through the motions of following the precepts". (Greenaway, Smith & Street, 1992, p.50).

It is reasonable to suppose that such feelings also exist in the local context. If so, the need to conform to this formal conception of the focus of decision making in local councils will almost certainly affect the behaviour of local actors, at least in public. An examination of the formal picture is therefore essential.

which were brought before it, or to evolve a satisfactory way of considering questions of future policy" (Green, 1981, p.55). Also, Haywood reports the failure of the committee in Beverley, a council which was then dominated by Independent members; its usefulness was "limited ... with no cohesive party group in control" (Haywood, 1977, p.47), which, if so, is an indication the such a committee may be less influential in hung councils.

2.1.6. The Management of Local Authorities: The Formal Picture

The organisation of a local authority will vary from one authority to another, and Stanyer warns against "the myth of uniformity" (Stanyer, 1976, p.17) which has often been a feature of works on British local government.¹⁵ However, all local authorities will be organised in a similar way, and although it is necessary to remember that each local authority is an individual political unit in its own right, as Byrne points out:

"all follow a broadly similar pattern, and certain forms or procedures are universally adopted where they are required by law...all local authorities will conduct their activities through a council of all members, aided by a number of committees (comprising small groups of members), which work in close collaboration with senior officers, who are employed by the council and head the various departments of the council" (Byrne, 1986, p.146)

Formally, the full council of all members is the governing body of a local authority. Councils generally consist of between 40 to 100 elected members, most of whom are organised in political parties. Almost without exception, decisions are not made at the full council meeting; the practice has been to delegate considerable powers to the council committees. Journalists, however, tend to concentrate on the council meeting, with its ritualistic and often heated battles contrasting with (and making better copy than) the more restrained behaviour in committee meetings. As one Labour councillor observed, "if you want to make a splash in a newspaper you leap up at a Council meeting ... you don't do it at a committee" (Glasser, 1984, p.67). The business of the council meeting, therefore, is largely symbolic and the bulk of the council's agenda is dominated by reports from the various committees. The council is not usually an initiator of business; its main function is to ratify decisions already made elsewhere, usually in committee (Byrne, 1986, pp.146-147). However, it does not follow from this that committees are where power lies in a local authority.

The Functions and Operations of Council Committees

A council committee is normally concerned with either a specific service function (for example, education) or with a general function applicable to all the departments of the local authority (for example, the policy and resources committee). The frequency and timing of meetings "are matters which are left largely to the local authorities themselves to decide" (Byrne, 1986, p.148). The committee's agenda

¹⁵ See for example, Marshall (1960) and Warren & Richards (1965). Even today, most standard textbooks continue to ignore the widespread existence of hung councils (Byrne, 1986), although some pay a little attention to the different patterns of organisation hung councils exhibit (Stoker, 1991).

will usually consist of departmental officers' reports, which will detail the decisions required by the committee; officers will normally take part in any discussion. A committee normally consists of councillors appointed by the council. Co-opted members from outside the council can be added to a committee, but this is, with the exception of education committees where it is a common practice, a rare occurrence.¹⁶

When this research took place (Summer, 1988) majority parties were in control of allocating committee places. Widdicombe noted they often awarded themselves more committee members than their numbers on the council would indicate was fair,¹⁷ and single party committees, which effectively functioned as a *de facto* executive, were also not unknown (Mellors, 1989, p.74). Widdicombe argued that the composition of committees should reflect the composition of the council as a whole, and that the chief executive should be responsible for enforcing this rule (Widdicombe, 1986, Para. 5.54, p.81). The Local Government Act (1989) enacted this recommendation, and it is now a requirement that committee composition is proportional to the composition of the full council.¹⁸

The central point that must be made is that decision making power usually lies elsewhere. Party group briefings will inform committee members of the decisions required. Given the control of the majority party in the council chamber, committee decisions which go to full council have little chance of failing in most local authorities.¹⁹ The committee is often seen in standard textbooks as the primary source of decision making within a council, but as Stewart points out, although there can be issues on which there is real argument and discussion,²⁰ in the most part the

¹⁶ The co-opting of members is intended to add expertise to a committee, but it can also be used to distort the political composition of a committee. The Widdicombe Report (1986) detailed widespread disquiet among councillors of all parties at the practice of co-option, and argued that the legislation should be amended so that "decision taking committees and sub committees may consist only of councillors, and in particular only councillors may vote on such committees" (Widdicombe, 1986, Para. 5.107, p.94).

¹⁷ See Table 7.1, Chapter Seven.

¹⁸ The requirement of proportionality has repercussions for future studies of local coalitions, in that committee places can no longer be offered as 'rewards' for participation in a coalition. However, when this research took place, this possibility still existed, and Section One of Chapter Seven explores this. The fate of one-party committees after a council becomes hung is also considered in Chapter Seven.

¹⁹ Committee decisions will either be or a 'resolution' or a 'recommendation' to the full council. A resolution is not normally debated in council; most concern non-controversial decisions such as repairs or maintenance. Recommendations, on the other hand, require the endorsement of the full council (Stewart, 1983, p.89).

²⁰ Such argument is unlikely to affect the view of a majority party, and especially among councillors of the majority party is unlikely to be encouraged. According to Rosenberg, the

committee is merely ratifying " decisions made in other settings - in the department, in discussion between chairman and chief officer, or in the political group" (Stewart, 1983, p.89). So, if the council is merely a ratifying body for decisions taken in committees, and if committees are merely ratifying bodies for decisions taken elsewhere, many of the standard works on local government are perpetuating a myth.²¹

It would also be a mistake to assume that political power is necessarily concentrated on the political side of the council. Formally, officers carry out the policy decisions of councillors, but it is unrealistic to expect officers who are in day-to-day control of the administration of policy not to make an input into the policy process. Management in local government "has to be based on acceptance that a local authority embodies a political management system in which the political and management processes are intertwined (Stewart, 1990, p.26).²² The question of who is in control of policy, officers or councillors, has been the subject of much debate within local government studies and an examination of the relationship is, therefore, essential to our understanding of local policy making. Section Two's examination of the location of decision making power in single party majority control councils will largely concentrate on the dynamics of this relationship.

Section Two: Decision Making In English Local Authorities

Most studies of local government have commented on the close relationship between the leaders of the ruling party and chief officers, what Stoker calls the "joint elite" (Stoker, 1991 p.92).²³ While this relationship is rarely without tensions, and Widdicombe noted that the tensions had increased as councillors became "clearer about their political goals and priorities and more determined to ensure that these are implemented" (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume One, p.125), there is an

committee chairman will ensure that "difficult members" will be "tamed" (Rosenberg, 1989, p.210).

²¹ For example, according to Wilson "policy making takes place in the full council and in the committees and sub-committees" (Wilson, 1988, p.136). To be fair, the majority of mainstream studies of local government are well aware that most committees have become, like the operation of the full council, instruments of party control (for example, see Stoker, 1991, p.84).

²² As Stewart notes, "it is a dangerous mistake to believe that political processes and management processes are opposed to each other and can be separated" (Stewart, 1990, p.25).

²³ Rosenberg (1990, p.210) says that the "inner establishment of senior councillors and influential chief officers is of great importance in formal and informal decision making" (Rosenberg, 1989, p.210)

inevitable closeness between chief officers and controlling party leaders in a majority controlled council.

2.2.1. Where Are Decisions Really Made?

There is a general agreement among observers of British local government as to who the most powerful groups in the majority of local authorities are, and upon the significance of the various bodies within the council when a single party group controls the decision making process. While formally the officers of a council are the servants of all councillors, regardless of party or rank, the contact between officers and councillors tends to be confined to meetings of senior officers and senior party spokesmen, with the ordinary councillor effectively impotent in the development of policy. The 'joint elite' of chief officers and leading members of the governing party control the process of decision making and hence the general flow of policy within the council.²⁴

Almost without exception, as Section One has indicated, decisions are not made in the Council Chamber where all members sit. The council meeting puts the final, formal seal on decisions made elsewhere; normally, considerable powers are delegated to the council committees. The Council's main function in majority controlled councils is to ratify decisions already made in committee, and party whipping usually guarantees ratification (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume One, p.105). The Widdicombe Report gave support to this view of decision making, reporting that:

"it is now almost universal practice for councillors of the same political party on an authority to organise themselves in a political group which meets to predetermine the line to be taken on matters coming before the council" (Widdicombe, 1986, p.30).

Widdicombe also found that in most authorities the majority party took all committee chairs and vice chairs, and all sub-committee chairs (Widdicombe, 1986, p.30). This gives a majority party group a tight control on the activities of committees, and also enables group leaders to keep a close eye on rank and file members to ensure that party discipline is being maintained. While committee agendas are drawn up by officers, enabling officers to structure the business of the council, party discipline gives the majority party elite a potentially powerful hold on the major policy

²⁴ For example, Dearlove (1973), Green (1981), Barker, (1983) and Saunders (1979) all report that policy making is effectively controlled by the party leadership; these studies are discussed shortly.

direction of a council.²⁵ The ruling party also has its committee chairmen to ensure party discipline is maintained.

The Role of Committee Chairmen

In theory, committee chairmen are powerful actors, and "have long been regarded as key figures in the process of local government decision making" (Laver Rallings & Thrasher, 1987, p.504). It is certainly the case that some chairmen can exercise considerable influence; the chairman of the policy and resources committee occupies a central role, as does the chair of the finance committee.²⁶ Traditionally, the career path of local politicians has seen the eventual possession of one of the important committee chairs as a primary aim (Collins, 1978, pp.425-447). However, the changes in local government structure and the increasing politicisation of councils are seen by some observers as weakening the ability of committee chairmen as individual actors. Hampton maintains that "the growth in partisan organisation" combined with the new corporate structures has:

"enhanced the role of the leader but at the same time it has reduced the power of councillors occupying committee chairs. At one time these positions gave the power to affect policy in a particular area of local authority endeavour almost irrespective of the rest of council policy. In a politically organised council, however, the minutes of all committees will be discussed in the party groups" (Hampton, 1987, p.79).

Political decisions will therefore become more consistent, lessening the ability of individual chairmen to pursue their own policy preferences. However, because 'party groups' are discussing policy does not also mean that individual backbench councillors of the majority party are any more influential than opposition backbenchers.²⁷ The "enhanced role" of the leader noted by Hampton suggests a centralisation of decision making within local authorities.

This is not to deny that committee members will have a degree of influence in deciding council policy. Individual committee members have often specialised in the work of particular committees for most of their elected life. Newton found that it was quite normal for councillors to sit on the same committees for fifteen years (Newton,

²⁵ That said, there can be "occasions when the ruling group as a whole, not just its leading councillors, can be crucial in decision making " (Stoker & Wilson, 1986, pp.285-302).

²⁶ From his studies, Rosenberg make the common sense observation that some chairmen will be "weak" and others will be "powerful" (Rosenberg, 1989, pp.172-202).

²⁷ Although as Wilson notes, "the literature contains many examples of leaderships being force to change policy by determined backbench opposition *within* the ruling group" (Wilson, 1988, p.137, emphasis in original).

1976, p.152), and as Stewart points out, "specialisation by committee work is defined by experience as the norm for the councillor's role" (Stewart, 1983, p.139). A committee may merely be pushing through a programme already decided by the governing party elite, but the members of a committee will have made their views known to their colleagues in the party elite, and long term committee members will undoubtedly play a part in deciding their party's policy in those areas where they have acquired expertise.

Despite the widespread contention that elite control of policy has increased,²⁸ Widdicombe argues for the retention of the current decision making system because the level of 'backbench' involvement on committees "gives councillors as a whole ... a direct involvement in the process of government which they would not have if executive power was concentrated in fewer hands" (Widdicombe, 1986, p.71). In this, Widdicombe appears to have minimised the relevance of some of the evidence presented to the committee, in particular the contention that the "spread and intensification" of politicisation has long since diminished the significance of committee or council meetings "as arenas where policies or major decisions are actually made, *apart from in Independent-dominated or hung councils*" (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume One, p.105, my emphases). In addition, in response to the question "Is there, among the members, an inner circle of particularly influential senior members?", exactly three quarters of English chief executives answered 'yes', supporting the findings of most in-depth studies (Widdicombe, 1986, Table A.12). The effect of such elite control over policy in most local authorities has been, as has been argued above, to reduce the Council and its committees to bodies, where, in the main, decisions are ratified and "rubber-stamped" rather than made.

Of course, it is acknowledged that "senior councillors and officers must be careful not to offend the core political values and commitments of backbenchers" (Stoker, 1988, pp.92-93), but such acknowledgement does not weaken the case put forward by "defenders of the joint elite model", as Stoker argues.²⁹ The fact that party groups

²⁸ Stoker challenges the "prevailing wisdom" of total elite dominance, arguing that "it is important to consider the influence on policy processes that can be exercised by ruling group back-benchers in private party caucuses" (Stoker, 1988, p.90).

²⁹ Stoker seems to feel that assembling "sufficient examples of influences on the policy process stemming from outside the joint elite" (Stoker, 1988, p.104) weakens the thesis. However, no study of local decision making disputes that all groups in a council are capable of at least occasional influence; even backbench Members of Parliament will sometimes influence the government, and Davies (1979) notes that Wandsworth backbenchers were influential in some policy areas. Also, as Green (1981, p.74) points out, "traditional party values" will limit elite influence.

can have a key role in scrutinising policy initiatives implies at best a *reactive* role and Stoker admits that "pro-active" influence is rare (Stoker, 1991, p.96). It remains the case that in-depth studies of individual councils consistently encounter a policy making elite. The findings of some of those studies will now be detailed.

2.2.2. The Political Elite

While there is disagreement as to the precise nature of the relationship between the two groups comprising the elite, studies agree that the power of individual councillors or 'opposition' party groups is limited.³⁰ In order to map the relationship, an examination of the two sides of the elite is necessary, and we begin with an examination of the political elite in English local authorities.

The 1960s saw a growth of interest in local government, reflecting a general concern that local government was not providing a consistent level of service across the country. There was also more emphasis in the reports of official committees on the *actors* involved, providing scholars for the first time with relatively unbiased accounts of the motives, activities and abilities of elected local representatives in particular. The Maud Committee (1967) reported that few members saw themselves as policy-makers; "only three or four of all the members...even in some quite large authorities" (Maud, 1967, Vol.2, p.40), were involved in the formation of policy.³¹

Several pre-reorganisation studies supported the existence of small policy making elites. Newton's examination of local politics in Birmingham found a "small elite" dominating the policy process in both major parties (Newton, 1976, p.233). Dearlove's study of the Conservative controlled Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea found that the Leader of the Council was allowed a great deal of leeway in decision-making, even when the leader's views might be against the views of a senior committee chairman (Dearlove, 1973, pp.136-140). Neither Jones' (1969) study of Wolverhampton nor Bulpitt's (1967) analysis of parties in the North-West of England found evidence of party groups playing any significant role in policy formulation.

³⁰ See Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume One, Chapter Six, for an account of a number of aspects of the relationship.

³¹ How authoritative Maud can be considered is another matter. Stanyer was brutal about the committee's shortcomings, arguing that it "must be regarded as one of the most disastrous uses of an advisory committee that can be envisaged, if one asks and expects that an advisory committee will provide an authoritative analysis of the problems set by its terms of reference, and by rigorous reasoning propose defensible solutions which have a practical use" (Stanyer, 1970, pp.66-67).

The rise of party politics in local government since re-organisation in 1974 has not changed this situation. Rather, it appears that party elites retain a tight control on the general flow of policy. Barker's study of Bristol Labour party argues that the Labour group are "manipulated and controlled by the leadership" (Barker, 1983, p.17). In Newcastle, Green (1981) found the ruling Labour group was generally subservient to the party leadership. As one backbench councillor told him "the policy and resources committee tend to treat themselves as an executive committee of the group [displacing the group] in initiating and presenting policy ... the group loses out".³² Green concludes that the party group "did not play a significant part in initiating policy decisions, nor did they provide a setting in which individual councillors could put forward new proposals for serious consideration" (Green, 1981, pp.50-51). Glasser reports the chief executive of St Albans dismissing the influence of all but the senior politicians with the words: "the fact of life is that the individual councillor is not important in the management role *in any way at all*" (Glasser, 1984, p.138, my emphasis). While he notes a rather larger group of "influential" councillors than the above writers, Rallings (1976), in a study of influence in Paisley, finds that policy making is largely the preserve of the influential few, with "the majority of councillors [aspiring] no higher than the efficient discharge of constituency duties" (Rallings, 1976, p.364). In Croydon, Saunders reports that the group meetings of the ruling Conservatives were designed to "ensure that members formally fell into line behind their leaders" (Saunders, 1980, p.221). More dramatically, Collins (1984) compares party leaders to Prime Ministers, with the leader seen as a "custodian of policy" at local level. If major changes in policy are planned, this will usually entail a change of leader. Collins highlights the tendency for party leaders to become full-time politicians, employing a team of policy advisers or research assistants, and suggests that "to this extent some have become, in effect, local Prime Ministers" (Collins, 1984, p.45). Even in 'Liberal' groups, "leadership ... is provided by the inner circle of senior group members" (Stoker, 1991, p.97).³³

³² Although, as previously noted, Green was critical of the way it performed this function (1981, pp.54-55).

³³ As yet, there are no studies of local leadership in the SLD. Traditionally, the Liberals have rejected ideas of rigid party group discipline (Gyford & James, 1983, p.183), and its publications have been careful to emphasise the notion of "group decisions" (Clay, 1982, p.18). However, 'party group decisions' are largely irrelevant in power terms in opposition, and some *ruling* Liberal groups (for example, Liverpool in the 1970s and early 1980s) have had an identifiable group of leading councillors. At central level, the SLD, as its more formalised party convention indicates, may be moving towards the Conservative hierarchical structure which Labour has certainly adopted in recent years (as the increasingly stage-managed party conventions demonstrate). However, it must be noted

The ability of the leaders to decide the composition of the leadership group in the council and select chairpersons, puts them in a powerful position, and most ambitious local politicians will defer to leaders with such power of patronage. In many cities, for example, Liverpool, Hull, and Newcastle, there is a tradition of autocratic leadership within both the main parties. While Elcock (both a Labour politician and academic) argues that "in Leeds leading figures are carefully watched by their colleagues in the Labour Group and quickly cut down to size if they seek too much power" (Elcock, 1986, p.81) and while it must be noted that "leadership styles" in local government range "from the ultra-democratic to the downright authoritarian (Widdicombe, Research Volume One, p.90), most studies of internal politics agree on the considerable degree of autonomy allowed to leaders of both the main parties.³⁴ The effect of such elite control on policy in most local authorities has been, as has been argued above, to reduce the Council and its committees to bodies where, in the main, decisions are ratified and "rubber-stamped" rather than made.³⁵

2.2.3. The Bureaucratic Elite

On the officer side of the council, the chief executive is the head of the structure. Chief officers head the various council departments, and together with the chief executive as chairman comprise the management team, whose main function is to decide on proposals to be submitted to the council or the policy and resources committee.³⁶ The adoption of management teams has been almost universal in English local government (Alexander, 1981, p.34). As already detailed, the management team has contributed to a greater coherence in the views put forward to councillors by officers (Stewart, 1983, p.96).³⁷

that the local Liberal ideal of 'community politics' developed through the 1960s and 1970s (see Hain, 1976, and Pinkney, 1984), runs contrary to tight elite control.

³⁴ Pinkney (1984, p.75) also notes an identifiable group of leaders in Liberal groups, although Liberal groups were less likely to concentrate power than Labour groups (Pinkney, 1984, fn., p.83).

³⁵ It is accepted, as Stoker argues, that not all councils will operate in this way; however, the consensus view is that the majority of councils now operate with tight elite control of policy, a control that the Bains recommendations facilitated (Hampton, 1987, pp.78-80).

³⁶ Stephenson reports that Cheshire's management team "was specifically accountable for developing and managing corporate policies, including forward planning, overall performance and communications, both internal and external" (Stephenson, 1988, p.1430).

³⁷ The Audit Commission offer a note of dissent, arguing that, especially in large authorities, "the management team has been perceived to be an inadequate coordinating mechanism" (Audit Commission Management Papers No. 2, January 1989, p.3).

The management team therefore gives local government officers the opportunity to present a coherent strategy to councillors, which raises the question of whether such solidarity will contribute to officer ascendancy in a local authority. Officers, after all, are experts in their particular fields, and a united front of expertise might easily overpower politicians unlikely to possess the specialist knowledge which chief officers will have of, for example, town planning or the effects of interest rates on council budgeting. As Hampton points out, "councillors need to be very strong-minded, and in some circumstances foolhardy, if they are to go against strongly offered professional opinions"; if it is the norm that "councillors usually rely on their officers as the sole source of professional advice" (Hampton, 1987, p.82).the capacity for officer dominance is obvious.

On the other hand, the rise of management teams has been matched by a rise in party organisation and discipline, and a greater emphasis in local parties on research teams and long term strategy. Party groups can thus make collective decisions which their united front can effectively impose on officers, although Elcock reports one chief executive who "tried to persuade members that party group decisions were no more than requests to the chief officers group for a report and recommendations" (Elcock, 1986, p.263). Such an official attitude, at least in public, seems to be unusual, although one chief officer told Glasser (1984):

"it pays to give [councillors], something to do. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's not that important. It makes them feel they're doing their proper public duty, but the real thing is it keeps them out of our hair, and we can get on with our work" (Glasser, 1984, p.98).³⁸

Despite such responses, most actors in local government are well aware of the need for a cooperative working relationship between officers and councillors, although few would disagree with the widely held notion that elected members must be the final decision takers, accountable to the voters who elected them to office. Whatever the formal picture, it is unrealistic to expect officers who are in day to day control of the administration of policy not to have an input in decision making. The idea of officers being merely servants who implement the decisions of their elected masters is "logically untenable" (Collins, Hinings, & Walsh, 1978, p.34). It is also unlikely that local politicians, who are often deeply committed to their political views, exist merely to legitimate the policy preferences of local government professionals.

³⁸How that chief officer responded to the hungness that was shortly to happen in St Albans is unrecorded, but one would guess that his opinions would not have been favourable to the more consensual decision making process hungness must bring.

There is little doubt that both officers and councillors are involved in the development and administration of policy, but their relative power will vary from issue to issue and from one local authority to the next (see Alexander, 1981). The factors which might affect this power relationship will now be examined.

Section Three: The Councillor-Officer Relationship

There are a number of conceptions of the relationship between local government officers and councillors. The one thing that can be said with any confidence is that the formal picture of the relationship is far from the truth. For instance, no reference is made to the existence of party political groups either in the legislation governing local authorities or in the standing orders of most councils. Formally, councillors appoint and oversee a staff of professionals (local government officers), who are the servants of the council and responsible to *all* councillors as a body. Any councillor can request information and advice, and each member has the same right of access. Formally, officers advise, recommend, and research policies, with councillors making the final decisions. As the findings already discussed indicate, this is an unrealistic picture. Most studies have shown that the contact between local government officers and councillors tends to be confined to meetings of senior officers and the ruling elite, with the ordinary councillor effectively politically impotent in the development of policy.

2.3.1. Models of the Councillor-Officer Relationship

The main problem in attempting to evaluate the relationship is the lack of systematic studies, particularly into the role of the officer in the policy process.³⁹ As Greenwood & Hinings point out, when Newton queried the 'dictatorship of the official' he relied "almost exclusively upon interviews with members" (Greenwood & Hinings, 1977, p.3), who might be expected to emphasise their role in the policy making process. Admitting to excessive officer control would be to damage their prestige and also to admit a failure of duty. Dearlove justified the omission of the local government officer from his research on the grounds of his inability:

³⁹ Lee's (1963) classic study of Cheshire, *Social Leaders and Public Persons*, noted the importance of chief officers over a range of issues. Also, for councillors "promotion into the inner ring depended upon making an impression upon not only one's immediate colleagues but also upon the Chief Officers and Chairmen" (Lee, 1963, p.214). Rosenberg laments the decline of such "studies of ministerial politics" which he argues "declined and vanished, with few exceptions, after 1974" (Rosenberg, 1989, fn, p.217).

"to break through the cultural cliché that they were simply servants advising the all-powerful policy making councillors whose decisions they readily implemented" (Dearlove, 1973, p.229).

It does appear intuitively unlikely that the role of the professionals in local government is confined to carrying out administrative duties, and equally unlikely that councillors are under administrative control. The important question to ask appears to be: how are *both* involved in the development and administration of policy? Three models have been offered which are designed to address this question, the 'Technocratic Model', the 'Corporate Model', and the 'Representative Model' (Collins, Hinings, & Walsh, 1978).

The Technocratic Model sees the officer as dominant, arguing that the "growth in the scope of expert knowledge" (Collins, Hinings & Walsh, 1978, p.45) has meant most of the decisions that have to be taken are so technical that councillors have to rely on the professionals for guidance. Politicians are front men, irrelevant to the workings of a local authority, but necessary to legitimise the professionals decisions to the public. Only those with the requisite knowledge and technical ability are capable of making decisions, and politicians are unlikely to possess such knowledge.⁴⁰ It could be argued that the establishment of the management teams recommended by Bains (1972) in most local authorities, may have led some officers to believe that theirs is, or should be, the dominant role in the policy making process. It might certainly facilitate such dominance, as management teams enable officers to present a united front of expertise to councillors.⁴¹

The Representative Model, sees councillors as dominant, and while it is accepted that policy and administration cannot be fully separated, the officer is expected to be reticent about making policy.⁴² In the Representative Model, decisions are taken before entering the formal decision-making arenas of the council chamber and the council committee. The link between local government officers and party leaders is vital, and minor parties are seen as politically impotent. Therefore, in this model

⁴⁰ Glasser reports that in St Albans "the feeling that 'the officers keep us at arm's length' is common", and officers did not appear to respect the opinions of most councillors (Glasser, 1984, p.91).

⁴¹ At its most extreme, the Technocratic Model would argue that there are no political problems, but only scientific and rational solutions to the problems of the social world.

⁴² Two sub-divisions to this model are put forward by Collins, et al. The 'Individual Representative Model' argues that power lies with certain individual councillors, while the 'Collective Representative Model' sees power lying with the party group (Collins, Hinings & Walsh, 1978, pp.41-42).

there is a clear differentiation between politicians with and without power, a distinction that certainly fits with the picture previously presented in this chapter.

These models have been criticised for failing to sufficiently recognise that "developing and administering policy at the local level is a process which involves *both* officers and councillors, not simply one group or the other" (Wilson, 1988, p.137). This criticism cannot be levelled at the third model of the relationship, *The Corporate Model*. This model presents another way of looking at the relationship; as we have seen, the Bains Report advocated this type of corporate partnership between councillors and officers. In the Corporate Model, functions are inter-related, and the political and technical are blended into a political-management system. In this model, officers are acknowledged as having a role in the decision-making process, but politicians still constitute the final formal policy authority. The model recognises the existence of a small member-officer elite with a partnership based on consensual agreement.⁴³

2.3.2. Factors Influencing Councillor-Officer Relationships

The three models offered are "ideal types", and it is admitted that local authorities will probably possess attributes of all three models, "although they will be more like one type than another" (Collins, Hinings & Walsh, p.47). The degree to which the councillor-officer relationship will approach one of these ideal types is obviously dependent on a number of factors. Which party is in control of the council, the degree of political control, the degree of technicality of a problem, and the size of the authority, will all affect the relationship (Collins et al, pp.44-46).⁴⁴

Greenwood & Stewart (1973) suggest that Labour authorities will tend to favour a more corporate approach, while the Conservatives relationship with their officers will be more 'feudal'.⁴⁵ Relationships between officers and councillors in

⁴³ Stewart points out that the corporate approach can mean the establishment of an "ideology of managerial professionalism" (Stewart, 1983, p.217), indicating that councillors will be acting more like local government officers than as representatives of their electorate, which may lead to charges that public interest is being submerged by organisational interests and the need to ensure organisational stability.

⁴⁴ Long & Richer (1968, pp.152-153) note the extent of such factors will produce different structural effects on councils which will hence necessitate different management strategies and internal organisation.

⁴⁵ Dearlove notes that in Kensington, the Conservative leader of the council and the committee chairmen "were allowed very considerable powers by their colleagues" (Dearlove, 1973, p.124), supporting the argument that "the notion that the party leader is the custodian of policy ... operates in local as well as national Conservative politics" (Elcock & Wheaton, 1986, p.83).

SLD/Alliance controlled councils might be expected to be framed along the lines of the Corporate Model, given the proclaimed Alliance commitment at local level to more open and consultative government.⁴⁶

Collins *et al* argue that the "degree to which local authorities are politically organised" will be important, with those local authorities being more politically organised along party lines tending to be controlled by members (Collins, Hinings, & Walsh, 1978, p.44). Hill suggests that councils dominated by Independent members may well allow officers to play the dominant role in the policy making process, such local authorities being dominated by the machinations of "administrative politics", but that it is unlikely to be so in councils where disciplined party groups dominate the greater part of council business and where the emphasis is on "ideological politics" (Hill, 1972, p.227). Such authorities, whether controlled by a single majority party or a coalition of parties, are now the norm (Widdicombe, 1986, p.30).

The degree of technicality of a problem will also influence the relationship. In certain areas of local government responsibility, for example, planning and transport, the solutions to problems may appear to be more technical and less open to political debate than in an emotive area like social services, and it may be that officer control in those "technical" areas would be greater. However, as Collins *et al* point out, while it may be that the more complex a problem is the greater the likelihood of officer control, "the more complex problems are, the less likely they are to be thought amenable to *purely* technical solutions" (Collins, Hinings, & Walsh, 1978, p.46, emphasis in original). The authors suggest that, in such cases, it may be that the Corporate Model addresses this problem best.

Collins *et al* also suggest that the size of a local authority will influence the relationship between officers and councillors, with the greater the size, the greater the degree of technocratic control, for two reasons: First, larger authorities will have a greater volume of activity and, consequently, more designated decisions, and, second, there will be a growth of specialisation because of this greater volume of activity (Collins, Hinings, & Walsh, 1978, p.46). The authors conclude that local authorities will generally resemble one of these models, depending on the factors of political change, growth in the scope of expert knowledge, complexity of problems,

⁴⁶ Clay (1982, p.17) tells Liberal councillors that "an important key is getting the crucial chief officer relationships right at an early stage ... since chief officers can smooth relationships between groups behind the scenes, and are a vital source of information, it is worth persevering".

and size of the authority, influencing the relationship (Collins, Hinings, & Walsh, 1978, p.47).

2.3.3. Which Model?

The conclusions of Collins, Hinings & Walsh, that these models offer a guide to the councillor-officer relationship and that local authorities will resemble one or other of these models, is unhelpful to this study.⁴⁷ If officers are in control of a local authority, as the Technocratic Model argues, then any bargaining taking place between political parties in a hung council is largely irrelevant. Whatever the political arrangement agreed between the parties, if the officers are controlling the general flow of policy an examination of the "policy payoffs" will be pointless. However, the Technocratic Model does not fit with our, admittedly limited, knowledge of councillor-officer relationships. It may well be that, in some local authorities, officers will be the focus of decision making, but it is unlikely to be so in the majority of local authorities, which are now highly politicised.⁴⁸

In addition, while it might appear a reasonable contention that larger authorities will tend, of necessity, to adopt a more corporate approach, this does not preclude (as the model allows) councillors from making the important policy decisions, which provide an ideological framework within which decisions necessitating a high degree of technical knowledge can be made. As has been argued, local party elites control the majority of the major policy decisions in the council, and most decisions about policy are agreed before the committee stage. Committee members are well aware of the general direction of policy, and if they have to make a decision in committee are generally well aware of the ideological constraints which are 'imposed' upon them.

The Representative Model argues that decisions are taken before entering the formal policy-making arenas of the full Council and the committee, recognises the impotence of minor parties, and places the local political party at the centre of the decision-making process. The clear differentiation between politicians with or without power in this model fits with our knowledge from those studies of local authorities which have been carried out; party elites make policy, the rest usually do what they are told.

⁴⁷ A major problem in assessing the relationship is that the current local government model "is not one which lends itself to total clarity in roles and relationships" (Baddeley & James, 1987, p.35)

⁴⁸Recent research (Young & Davies, 1990) has confirmed the continuing trend of politicisation and party control found by Widdicombe (1986).

Elcock supports the claim of the Representative Model that decisions are often taken before entering the formal policy making arenas of local authorities; he argues "party groups and their executive committees make collective decisions which can be imposed on committees and officers" (Elcock, 1986, p.105), and even if those decisions are not imposed, regular meetings of party groups, at the very least, make certain that all members are aware of the senior councillors viewpoint on major policy matters. Widdicombe reports that in all the local authorities they surveyed, the party groups always met before council meetings, and some groups also met before committee meetings (Widdicombe, 1986, Para. 2.42, p.31).

Newton maintained that the party group in Birmingham was a vital factor in establishing political will over officers, since "it enabled councillors to say clearly what policies they collectively wished to follow" (Newton, 1976, pp.160-161).⁴⁹ While Newton admitted that it was difficult to assess their relative power with any degree of accuracy, the growth in party political organisation by all the major parties at local level appears to have placed the politicians in control of policy in most local authorities. The practice of appointing political advisers to local government officer posts, and of appointing political sympathisers to important posts within the administration, is also a considerable factor in establishing party control, and despite the disquiet expressed by Widdicombe about these practices (Widdicombe, 1986, pp.151-152), such appointments are likely to continue and maintain the political hold on many authorities, whatever legislation is introduced to curb the practice.

There also appears to have been a significant growth in the acceptance of party politics at local level, which may have been facilitated by the growing numbers of younger people entering local politics as a launchpad for individual national electoral success.⁵⁰ The Maud Committee found that approximately two-thirds of councillors believed that the work of the council could be carried out more efficiently without the existence of political parties (Maud, 1967, Vol.2, Table 7.11). Twenty years later Widdicombe reported that the existence of party groups, and the disciplined approach whereby councillors of the same party vote with each other on almost

⁴⁹ Although Newton also argued that the local pressure group system may have redressed the balance somewhat, as most pressure groups contacted officers rather than councillors, therefore giving officers valuable informational resources not possessed by councillors (Newton, 1976, p.162).

⁵⁰ Widdicombe (1986, Research Volume Two, Table 2.4, p.22) found that in all but the district councils there had been significant increases in the number of councillors under 45 in England, compared to the findings of the Robinson Committee (1977); half the councillors in London are under 45 years old.

every issue, was now "widely accepted" in the authorities they surveyed (Widdicombe, 1986, Para. 2.43, p.31). In addition, Sharpe & Newton (1984) found that "virtually all the county boroughs...were run on fairly well-developed party lines for all major, and some minor, policies" (Sharpe & Newton, 1984, p.215).

The conclusion that party groups are, in the main, firmly in control of policy, and that the Representative Model best represents the current situation in councillor-officer relationships, does not preclude the possibility of party elite control of policy, as many studies have indicated. Neither does it preclude considerable input by officers into the policy-making process,⁵¹ as this chapter has previously argued.

However, such an input by officers does not mean that this study has to worry unduly about the possible effects of such an input upon the bargaining that may take place between political parties in hung councils. The same situation exists in studies of coalition formation at national level, where the civil service of a country will have the same sorts of informational resources as their local equivalents, and thereby a similar influence on the policy-output of national governments. The national civil service has not been seen as a possible constraint on the bargaining process at national level by coalition theorists.⁵² While it may be argued that this is an omission in the studies, most politicians are well aware of the restraints they face in bargaining, and the knowledge that certain courses of action will be unable to be followed because of a strong probability of informed official resistance will necessarily be taken into account by the actors involved. The conclusion is that politicians are in control of policy, and while the input of officers is obviously important, politicians will take the final decision. Therefore, politicians can make policy deals with other parties in the knowledge that they can honour the decision making pledges they make.

⁵¹ As Baddeley & James argue, the principle of "political neutrality" is "no longer appropriate" behaviour for chief officers; as one chief officer told them "officers must be sensitive to the political will and aspirations of the democratically elected party" (Baddeley & James, 1987, pp.39-49). Such politically sensitive officers cannot help but be influential in the policy process.

⁵² Not only that, the problem of possible bureaucratic influences on coalition politics has *never been seriously addressed*, a criticism made by the multi-dimensional approach (see Pridham, 1986, pp.24-29). Mellors (1989, pp.96-97) mentions the possible impact of local officers on party relationships, but does not examine it. Laver & Schofield also note that *payoffs* to bureaucrats and appointments to administrative posts should be considered by coalition studies but are "to the best of our knowledge a largely unresearched area" (1990, pp.42-43) .

However, if the effect of officer input on the policy process can be dismissed for the purposes of this work, there are two constraints on local policy makers which must be considered more carefully. First, it is undeniable that central involvement in local policy making has increased since 1979 (see Horton, 1990, p.182). Second, it may also be that the perceived need for "unity" has meant that national party influence has increased to unprecedented levels; certainly, national influences on local coalition formation have been felt in some authorities (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.43). Such constraints may affect either the ability or willingness of local groups to co-operate with potential allies, and the following section will examine these separate yet related areas.

Section Four: Possible Constraints Upon Local Political Autonomy

Unlike most national governments, local "governments" are not sovereign. They exist, in Britain, at the whim of Parliament (or more realistically at the whim of the central government executive) and whole areas of local government can be legislated out of existence, as happened to the Greater London Council and the Metropolitan Counties. Central government can also take functions out of the hands of local authorities, and the increase in central control which first, rate-capping and now community charge-capping has brought about, has seriously damaged local autonomy.⁵³ In addition, there are certain institutional restraints on local autonomy as a consequence of central control. Local authorities are obliged by statute to perform certain functions, and prohibited from pursuing some courses of action, and in these areas bargaining would be impossible. However, central governments are also not completely autonomous actors, being restrained by international agreements and, in Britain, the greater sovereignty of the European Community, so such constraints on local coalition behaviour are not necessarily a barrier to coalition studies.

As well as the constraints on their behaviour from the central government, the individual political parties are also constrained by their national parties. Certain policies are decided nationally, and deviation from those policies would create problems for local parties. Labour-controlled Liverpool City Council provides a

⁵³ Norton notes that "interpretations of the United Kingdom's 'unwritten constitution' used to give local authorities a special place within the structure, but local government has no special protection in law and it has become clear under the Thatcher government that local authorities are unprotected by tradition or consensus. Any sense of independence that the cities and boroughs may have enjoyed as creations of the Crown has virtually disappeared" (Norton, 1990, pp.8-9). Long before this, however, Keith-Lucas ('What Price Local Democracy?', *New Statesman*, 12/8/76) was calling local self-government a "romantic dream".

notable example where both the central government and the national Labour Party acted as constraints on the activities of a local party. The full weight of both organisations were brought to bear on Liverpool's Labour councillors, under accusations of financial irresponsibility from the government and ideological extremism from Walworth Road. However, subsequent events might suggest that the power of the central government and of the national party are capable of being resisted at local level.⁵⁴

2.4.1. The Influence of Central Government

We begin this examination of central influences on local politics with a review of perhaps the most influential model of the relationship (certainly in recent years), Rhodes' resource-exchange model.⁵⁵ Rhodes' model suggests that, despite the trials for local government of the Thatcher years, when "the traditional tension between central and local government reached an unprecedented pitch of intensity" (Lee, 1987, p.44), local government may still possess considerable resources in the 'power game'.

The Resource-Exchange Model of Central-Local Relationships

The power of resistance to central government directives is a feature of Rhodes' (1981) model of the relationship between central and local authority. Traditionally, local governments have been seen by theorists as 'agents' of the centre or as 'partners' with the centre.⁵⁶ The growth in central government financial controls, the removal of services from the control of local authorities, the increasing readiness to use the courts to control 'rebel' councillors, and the abolishing of the GLC and the metropolitan counties, have all been used to argue that the concept of partnership is redundant, and that local authorities are fast becoming merely agents of the centre (for example, see Jones & Stewart, 1983). Few analysts would disagree with the conclusion that there has been an increasing centralisation of authority within the last decade; the overwhelming evidence is that there has been an

⁵⁴ A total of 47 Labour councillors were surcharged and disqualified from office for setting an illegal deficit budget, and all the councillors had to resign their seats. In addition, Labour's disciplinary procedures banished four councillors from the Labour Party, for alleged 'membership' of the far-left Militant Tendency (officially, Militant Tendency has no members, only supporters). However, two months later, the voters of Liverpool elected 51 different Labour councillors to the council, re-establishing Labour control, and on some estimates, 14 of those councillors were Militant "supporters" ("The Roots of a City's Decline", Colin Hughes, *The Independent*, 12/10/87).

⁵⁵ It must be noted that this is not an uncomplicated task; as Chandler observes, "it is impossible to describe precisely Rhodes' power-dependence model since it has been subject to continuous amendment by its author" (Chandler, 1988, p.6).

⁵⁶ See Thrasher (1981) for an account of the development of these two schools of thought.

increase in central controls, especially in the crucial area of local government finance.⁵⁷ However, as Sharpe and Newton point out;

"this conclusion does not in any way validate the local-government-as-agents school which seems to have exaggerated a quantitative change into a qualitative transformation" (Sharpe & Newton, 1984, p.37).

Rhodes proposes a different perspective on the relationship between central and local government, a resource-exchange model concentrating on a power dependency relationship. The relationship is an organisational struggle with both sides fighting for the control of constitutional, financial, political, hierarchical and informational resources (Rhodes, 1981, pp.30-31).⁵⁸ Despite the confrontational nature of the central-local relationship since at least 1979, Rhodes argues that because the relationship is necessarily one of exchange and dependence, that is, central government needs local authorities to provide services and local authorities need central finance to provide those and other specifically local services, the relationship cannot continue indefinitely in a confrontational manner. Rhodes' model recognises that either central or local government may be more dominant at any particular time, recognises variations in the degrees of discretion and power, and acknowledges that the relationship has the potential to vary from outright conflict, cooperation or domination by one side.⁵⁹ However, it is not, therefore, merely a variation on the "partnership" model. Rhodes' model, when applied to the analysis of central-local relation, means that;

"local authorities are neither the agents of the centre nor partners of the centre, but are rather loci of power which is mobilised in relation to the power exerted by the central authority" (Rhodes, 1981, p.24).

Revisions of the model (Rhodes, 1986) have placed far greater emphasis on the powers of central government to force local governments to carry out central

⁵⁷ Travers (1986, xii) cites central government's incompetence over many years to provide effective reform. The "ambiguities" found by the Layfield Report (1976) in the financial relations between the centre and localities are an indication of central government's long term inability to reform a complicated system.

⁵⁸ As Saunders puts it, the model is "an attempt by each side to defend and extend the degree of its autonomy and control in relation to each other (Saunders, 1984, p.25). It must also be pointed out that other writers, for example Boaden (1971) and Stanyer (1976) had previously pointed to the deficiencies of the traditional ways of looking at the relationship, pointing to the considerable discretion local government frequently exercised. See Goldsmith (1985) for an elegant essay on theories of urban politics.

⁵⁹ It has been noted that "channels of communication may ... be deliberately obscured when local authorities choose to follow a different interpretation of their powers from that held by the government" (Chandler, 1988, p.130).

directives. This is unsurprising, for "the Thatcher years have been characterised by much greater central direction and the influence of the community of local government has been greatly diminished" (Chandler, 1988, p.7).

However, the degree of central control need not affect a study of coalitional behaviour. Even if one were to agree with the argument that Britain today "stands within sight of a form of government which is more highly centralised than anything this side of East Germany" (Newton & Karran, 1985, p.129), it would be irrelevant to this study. Although local government is under pressure from the centre, it still has scope for autonomous action. As Laver points out (after citing a number of English cases), "the scope for real discretion over important substantive policy outputs can be...as great at local as at national level" (Laver, 1989, p.21). Be that as it may, whatever the degree of power of British local authorities in relation to central government, this study is concerned with them only as 'authoritative allocators of values'. Whether the decisions they make are major or minor in respect to the local environment, the concern of this work is with the process of deciding which parties in a hung council make those decisions, and not with the possible content of the decisions that the local authority is "allowed" to make.⁶⁰ It is the *dynamics* of decision making, rather than the *consequences*, which is of interest to this study.

Of course, the degree of interest in this study would be far less if local authorities were merely concerned with, for example, street lighting, rather than major budgetary decisions affecting the lives of the local population, but for the purposes of a study of local coalition behaviour the decisions being made are, effectively, of no concern. This is not to deny that the constraints placed on local government in the form of requiring local authorities to carry out certain tasks might affect the process of coalition formation. However, it is the *deals* that are made between political parties which are our primary concern, and provided central government does not forbid inter-party deals we can study local government coalitions. While it may be rather easier to form coalitions about street lighting than about crucial social welfare decisions, all local actors are operating under the same constraints with regard to central control.

⁶⁰ For example, despite their conclusion that "the community charge will be qualitatively different from local rates because it will deny the potential for local authorities to fund and develop policy differences; [it] will be denied the potential of income redistribution through the local rates" local government can still be seen to be "enjoying a bounded autonomy" (Butcher, Law, Leach & Mullard, 1990, p.186).

The same qualification does not apply to the central control which may be mobilised by the major political parties. Each of them will be operating under a different set of rules or a different set of national attitudes, and it may be that some local parties will be in a better position than others to take advantage of the opportunities offered by hungness. That proposition will now be examined.

2.4.2. The Influence of National Parties

There is little doubt that the fortunes of local parties are inextricably linked with those of their national party. While there may be disagreement over the extent of the influence, the importance of national politics to local voting behaviour is indisputable (Rallings & Thrasher, 1989). However, as Hampton points out, "although people vote in local elections with national issues in mind this does not mean ... that the national political parties necessarily have a strong influence on local politics" (Hampton, 1987, p.158). The extent of such influence, whether minor or not, is difficult to gauge. This section will look at some general points before assessing the central-local relationship of each of the three major party groups in turn.

To a large extent, local politicians operate in an environment created by their national colleagues. The important ideological battles are fought out nationally, and the major determinant on local election results appears to be the standing of the parties nationally, as the close correlation between local election results and national opinion poll ratings indicates (see Rallings & Thrasher, 1988, p.72). From time to time, national parties will actively intervene in the affairs of local parties if they believe their national image is being affected.⁶¹

This is not to say that local parties no longer possess considerable autonomy, but merely to note that the increasing importance of a consensual image being presented to a mass electorate has probably affected the extent of that local autonomy, and increased the 'politicisation' of local authorities, with local parties more likely to divide along national lines (see Mellors, 1989, p.95). The media compound this, often looking at local political events (especially local elections) totally from the

⁶¹As already mentioned, Walworth Road's intervention in the internal politics of Liverpool Labour Party offers a good example of this, the national party moving to expel Liverpool 'militants' from Labour Party membership despite the strong local support for those eventually expelled. It was not just Liverpool where Labour brought pressure to bear. In the run-up to the 1983 general election, Labour leader Michael Foot made it publicly clear, "that he expects the eight local Labour parties which have chosen Militant parliamentary candidates to drop them unless they renounce their Trotskyite allegiance" (*The Times*, 13/9/82)

viewpoint of their effect on national politics, a 'crime' academic psephologists are also often guilty of committing.⁶²

It must be noted that, while national parties can often wield considerable influence over the activities of *local party organisations*, they will find it difficult to interfere with the activities of the party groups on *local councils*. Gyford & James point out that, "constitutionally, none of the parties possess any mechanisms whereby local politicians may be forced to comply with the wishes of the party at the centre" (Gyford & James, 1983, p.195). Of course, for the most part, local parties will be anxious to support their national parties. As Hampton points out "there is no doubt some resistance among local politicians about embarrassing their national leadership, but national politicians need to earn any respect that is available" (Hampton, 1987, p.159). Many local leaders are often dominating figures themselves, and well capable of resisting national dictats.⁶³

While it would be surprising if the possibility of power, after years of opposition, did not affect the strategy of even the most deferential local party, it is "inevitable ... that national norms and values will affect what happens at local level" (Mellors, 1989, p. 81). However, it is likely that each of the national parties will react differently to their local organisations. Those differences will now be assessed, beginning with the party that has traditionally been viewed as the most centralised of the three major parties.

Labour and Central Control

The Labour party is "far more likely...to take an active interest in internal party controversies" than the Conservative party (Hampton, 1987, p.148), and given Labour's historical roots in collectivism this is unsurprising (Gyford & James, 1983, p.1). The extent to which Labour's opponents at national level use the activities of local Labour parties to attack the national party's "extremism" (see Laver, 1989, p.26) is another good reason why Labour will be especially concerned about the behaviour of local groups. The model standing orders for local parties were originally drafted by the national party in 1930. Clause Six of those orders comes

⁶² Such a 'nationalisation' of local politics is not confined to Great Britain. For example, Thomas has noted the same trend in Denmark (Thomas, 1989, p.125), and Pridham has commented on both the increasing 'nationalisation' of local politics (1984, p.223) and the way the media in Italy "have habitually commented on regional and local election results in national terms" (Pridham, 1989, p.208).

⁶³ It may even be that, given the lack of experience at national level, future parliamentary coalitions will be influenced by local coalition behaviour, as Pridham believes they are in Italy (Pridham, 1984, p.229)

close to forbidding local Labour groups from forming "local pacts" with other party groups (Mellors, 1989, p.93), and some groups have acquiesced to central party pressure (see Carter, 1986, p.13).⁶⁴ However, Gyford & James (1983, p.147) report instances of Labour groups defying the central party, and as Hampton notes, the majority of local Labour groups can in no sense be considered as "passive tools" of Walworth Road. Those struggles intensified during the 1970s, culminating with the creation of the Social Democratic Party, and continued through the 1980s, with a succession of ideological battles fought between (usually) the new 'moderate' centre and the remains of the 'hard left'.⁶⁵ This indicates that local Labour groups will not allow central preferences to dominate automatically.⁶⁶

The Conservatives: Pragmatism Rules

Like the Labour party, the Conservative party at Central Office has only a small number of staff in its local government department, which reflects its very limited "role in [local] policy formation" (Gyford & James, 1983, p.40). Some writers argue that the "weakness of the central organisation" is the "most salient point" of the relationship between Central Office and local party groups (Wilson & Pinto-Duchinsky, p.244). Local Conservative groups, therefore, have a good deal of autonomy, although the more ideological party of the Thatcher years often caused friction between the centre and local organisations, as demonstrated by the opposition of local Conservative groups to the introduction of both rate-capping and the community charge.⁶⁷ In addition, Mellors reports the national party "hardly welcomed" local party deals by Conservatives with other party groups (1986, p.23). Like Labour, the national party feels it has little to gain by proving the efficacy of coalitions, even at the local level. However, if there is one word that might best describe Conservative politics in England (with the notable exception of

⁶⁴ Mellors notes a "gradual change in Labour attitudes towards hung councils ... a more pragmatic approach has come to prevail" (Mellors, 1989, p.93).

⁶⁵ King notes the problems of the 'urban left' agenda for "redefining socialism" with both central government and the national Labour party: "undoubtedly, the unfavourable national arena influenced this development significantly as did the debates within the Labour party about their objectives" (King, 1989, p.202).

⁶⁶ Labour local groups are also hardly likely to respect a central party which appears to regard local government of such little importance that its spokesman for local government will admit to the conference of the Association of Metropolitan Councils that "he had tried to find out what the policy was [but] no one was able to tell him" Jeff Rooker went on to say that "putting it at its baldest, we haven't got a policy, that's the actual truth" ("Rooker admits to naked truth on local government", Sandra Barwick, *The Independent*, 24/9/87).

⁶⁷ Some of the tensions (and congruences) between Thatcherism and the local government system are examined by Mather (1989, pp.212-234).

the years from 1979-1990), it is 'pragmatism' (see Gilmour, 1977).⁶⁸ If this is the case, local Conservative groups will share power with almost any political group.

There are some similarities in the approach of the two biggest parties. At national level, both Labour and Conservative will no longer hesitate to intervene if a local party selects an 'unsuitable' Parliamentary candidate. This is especially apparent at by-elections, when the full force of national media attention is focussed on the main candidates. Labour has had a number of central-local clashes over prospective parliamentary candidates, and is now able to force a candidate on a local party. Local Conservatives have also alleged that "Central Office directly influences the choice of candidates", as, following a disastrous sequence of by-elections for the Conservatives in 1990-91, rumours abounded that a major reason for failure was that candidates were "foisted on the local association", a claim denied by the party vice-chairman (see Stephen Goodwin, *The Independent*, 2 July, 1991, p.8).

The Liberal Experience

As yet, there are no reports of local Liberal Democrats being 'leant on' by their national party to select a more suitable candidate. During the post-war years, the attitude of the Liberal party towards local parties has been clear. Perhaps because of their lack of political power, both nationally and (generally) at local level, local groups have exercised a good deal of autonomy. As has been noted, the role of local politics in recent years has been vital to the continued existence of the party as a national force (Gyford & James, 1983, pp.68-69). Mellors notes:

"being a decentralised party, the national leadership has little ability to enforce strategies upon local groups and the actual tactics adopted by Liberal council groups owe more to circumstances on the ground than to any nationally-determined plan. The role of the central party organisation ... is to give guidance when asked and to facilitate the sharing of experiences." (Mellors, 1989, p.94).

Liberal publications stress the autonomy of local groups on a range of issues, particularly in the institutional arrangements they can make (for example, see Clay, 1982, p.3). There is little reason to feel that the attitudes of the centre party

⁶⁸ Even the Thatcher years can be seen as pragmatic, if one believes that "Thatcherism represents an emphasis on the rhetoric rather than the reality of power" (Butcher, Law, Leach & Mullard, 1990, p.37), a position taken by Heselline (1987). Butcher et al are dismissive of the pragmatic argument, and maintain that "the true nature of the Conservative Party" is centred upon "the protection of property rights" (1990, p.37).

towards local elected groups has changed significantly since the merger with all but the Owenites of the SDP.⁶⁹

It seems that SLD groups at local level have a great deal of freedom from central party interference. Despite the inevitable differences of approach, it appears that the local associations of the other two major parties are also capable of resisting central directives. Labour, Conservative, and SLD groups can enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy in the strategies they pursue at local level. While the greater degree of 'freedom' enjoyed by the Liberals/ SLD/ Alliance might indicate they will be more active in local coalitions (a proposition examined in Chapter Five), the indications are that they can all be considered as sufficiently independent from their national associations to be treated as effective 'actors' in the coalition game.

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the basic structure of the English local government system and attempted to demonstrate its suitability as an arena in which to study coalition politics. It is evident that, despite the considerable cutbacks in the scope of local government powers in recent years, local councils still have considerable budgets and political power and control of a local authority is still seen as a welcome prize by the political parties. The number of uncontested seats has declined dramatically and organised party groups now control most local authorities in England.

Increasing politicisation, together with the changes introduced following the Bains recommendations, appears to have produced more coherent overall management. The changes introduced, especially the creation in most councils of a chief executive officer in charge of a management team of chief officers, have, combined with the effects of increased party discipline to produce (or consolidate) a policy making elite which is in control of the general direction of council policy. Despite the increased coherence on the officer side of the council, however, the consensus is that increasing politicisation, with party whipping and increased electoral competition, has ensured that the politicians remain in charge. While it is undisputed that officers can be influential figures, most councils appear to be under firm political control. Party groups are not generally seen as particularly powerful; senior councillors are seen to be in charge of their groups. The relationship between chief officers and leading councillors remains problematic, largely because of the lack of studies. The

⁶⁹ However, such local independence might be challenged if leader Paddy Ashdown's plans for "a new economic philosophy for the party" (largely unspecified) are successfully formulated (*The Guardian*, 29/7/91, p.20).

formal picture of officers as servants of the whole council, however, is clearly a fallacy.

Despite the increasing restrictions over local autonomy, central government is still unable to claim total control over local politics. While a number of studies have expressed concern that the poll tax will finally remove the 'politics' from local politics, that position has not yet arrived. Political parties in local authorities can still be viewed as independent actors in the sense that there is still an element of redistribution which can be negotiated. Similarly, local parties still appear to have quite a good deal of autonomy from their national parties. Therefore, despite the distaste often exhibited by the two major parties at national level towards coalition politics, the evidence suggests at least some local parties will make deals in hung councils.

Chapter One has detailed the development of coalition studies, and this chapter has suggested that local councils in England seem to offer an acceptable arena for the study of coalition politics. Chapter Three will now address some of the potential difficulties of marrying two such widely different areas of study as coalition studies and English local government, and prepare the way for the empirical examination that forms the main part of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE: LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COALITION THEORY

Introduction

Section One: Some Analytical Problems

3.1.1. What is the Goal of Local Politicians?

3.1.2. What is an 'Administration'?

3.1.3. Are Local Groups 'Unitary Actors'?

Section Two: The Study of Administrative Duration

3.2.1. Competing Definitions of 'Government Duration'

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3.3.1. The Multi-Dimensional Approach to the Examination of Hung Councils

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Section Four: The Collection of Data

3.4.1. Information Problems

3.4.2. Distribution of Questionnaires

3.4.3. Response Rates

Conclusions

Introduction

A number of assumptions and observations about the behaviour of actors in local government coalitions have been made by both political scientists and actors in hung councils. Much of this work has been concerned with local coalitional arrangements in Western Europe where, given the regular formation in many countries of both national and local coalitions, a significant amount of data have been collected. Britain, with its general tradition of single party majority rule at both local and national government level, has largely been ignored in coalition theory's search for data with which to test theoretical suppositions. However, a number of recent studies have concentrated on hung local authorities in Britain. While the detailed studies have mainly been concerned with a comparatively small number of authorities (for example, Blowers (1987) on Bedfordshire and Carter (1986) on three South Western counties), a few have examined a larger universe of hung councils (see Leach & Stewart, 1988, Leach & Game, 1989, and Mellors, 1989). From this body of work, a number of general propositions have been generated for hung councils.

As the opening chapters have indicated, the insights of coalition studies will be utilised whatever their source. However, the assumptions generated by studies of local coalitions will constitute the background for the testing of various hypotheses concerning the responses of actors in hung councils. In order to avoid constant repetition, the majority of those works will be introduced in the relevant chapters; for example, the observation by Carter (1986) that 'traditional rulers' will be excluded from administrations when a council becomes hung will be outlined and examined in the relevant section of Chapter Five, which examines party strategies, while the reasons for Mellors' (1983) argument that coalitions between parties will be more likely in councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle are detailed and tested in Chapter Four, which examines the effect of certain English local government institutional factors in coalition strategy. Chapter Three will concentrate on preparing the ground for that examination by assessing some of the potential problem areas the opening two chapters have indicated for the study of coalition behaviour in English councils.

Inevitably, Chapter Two has already addressed some of those problems. For example, there is no doubt that political parties see local authorities as prizes worth winning;

the rise in politicisation is just one indication of this.¹ The argument that central control, by both central government or the individual political parties, means that local parties and local administrations cannot be viewed as sufficiently independent to warrant studying as potential coalition actors has also been disposed of in Chapter Two. However, a number of potential difficulties remain for coalition research at the local level.

In section one, we assess some of the analytical problems raised by formal theory's assumptions, including an evaluation of the goals of local actors and whether the 'unitary actor' assumption is acceptable for local parties. Following this, section two will examine a number of problems related to the study of local administrative duration, including a defence of the criteria which will be used to determine the ending of an administration. Section three will then examine the multi-dimensional approach, as well as briefly outlining the nature of the five empirical chapters which follow this chapter. Finally, section four provides the details of response rates to this survey's questionnaires.

Section One: Some Analytical Problems

Chapter One has indicated that the study of political coalitions has centred on 'cabinet' coalitions, but there is no official cabinet in English local government. Therefore, we need to address the question of whether an assumption of 'office-seeking' politicians is correct for local coalitional actors. We also need to define the criteria by which we will decide whether a particular 'administration' is in place. Following this, we assess some of the problems raised by the theoretical assumption of political parties as unitary actors; the assumption is problematic for national parties, but it may be even more difficult to operationalise in the study of the undoubtedly less ideological world of English local authorities. However, we begin with the fundamental question of just what local actors are seeking from the coalitions they make when a council is hung.

3.1.1. What is the Goal of Local Politicians?

The concentration, historically, of coalition theory on the central desire of politicians as winning cabinet office is understandable. In most European national legislatures, the distribution of cabinet portfolios as rewards for participation in a 'winning' coalition are clear to see (Browne & Dreijmanis, 1982). However, while

¹ Although the "tidal force" of politicisation could have received a "possibly terminal setback" if the Widdicombe proposals had been enacted more fully (see Leach, 1989, p.121).

the emphasis by analysts on formal cabinet coalitions in Western democracies is understandable, it does offer a problem for studies of local coalitions.

As Chapter Two has detailed, there is no requirement for an 'executive body' or 'cabinet' in British local authorities, which appears to weaken the explanatory power of office-seeking' theories. The formal decision making body is the full council of all councillors, and while many local authorities do have 'unofficial cabinets' (Stewart, 1986, p.137) the existence of such bodies is dependent upon "disciplined voting majorities in full councils and council committees capable of delivering policies in accordance with the wishes of the majority party"; when a council becomes hung, the "constitutional situation reverts to its more formal nature" (Mellors, 1989, p.74). Therefore, whatever the true (if informal) picture when one party has a majority of seats, when a council becomes hung there is no official central decision making body which can comprise a prize for a successful coalition to divide among its members. Our first question must be: without a cabinet and the distribution of ministerial portfolios, what is the goal of local politicians in a hung council?

It might be thought that the offer of committee chairmanships could fulfil the requirements of 'office-seeking' explanations of coalition behaviour. After all, committee chairmen are commonly seen as powerful people in local government circles, and the possession of an important chair has been characterised as the aim of most politicians.² Despite Hampton's argument (see 2.2.1) of the demise in importance of committee chairmen following the "growth in partisan organisation" (Hampton, 1987, p.79) most observers of local government confirm that committee chairmanships are still much sought after by local politicians, and that committee chairs and vice-chairs represent the political elite of a council (see Stoker, 1991, p.92).

Unfortunately for this hypothesis, research indicates that office payoffs in the form of committee chairs do not appear to be the goal of most local politicians in hung councils (Laver, Rallings, & Thrasher, 1987). This is understandable if Mellors is correct in his assertion that:

"committee chairmen in hung authorities have no executive power and are often able to do little more than control the proceedings of committee meetings. Without a voting majority on the committee, the value of their committee chairmanships is greatly reduced and, indeed, may be

² See Laver, Rallings & Thrasher (1987, p.504) and Collins (1978, pp.425-447).

considered so small as to be of no real political value" (Mellors, 1989, p.75).

If it is the case that committee chairs have little value in hung councils,³ and the findings of Laver, Rallings, & Thrasher (1987) offer strong evidence for the proposal, then one of the major assumptions of much formal theory, that politicians seek office as the reward for participation in a coalition, may not be applicable to British local coalitions. Coalition activity in hung councils will have to be looked for in policy payoffs, and the focus will shift from executive to legislative coalitions. The distinction between executive and legislative coalitions is important. Legislative coalitions mean that parties outside of the 'administration' may be able to exert considerable influence over policy outputs and that minority governments can be perfectly viable (and stable) solutions to the problems of hungness. There is also less pressure on conserving benefits, which means that surplus majority coalitions may not only be more prevalent, they may have more legitimacy and authority (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.68-69).

For Mellors, the absence of an executive body means that the focus of local coalition activity must shift away from the idea of an act of *formation* to regarding coalitional activity as an on-going *process* (Mellors, 1989, pp.74-75). Laver notes that one consequence of a tendency for legislative coalitions is that "civilised life" can continue during long periods of coalition negotiations, with less pressure for a 'government' to form (Laver, 1989, p.23). There may be more cases where there is 'no administration' in place. Indeed, it may even be that the notion of an 'administration' is unnecessary, with temporary and shifting alliances becoming the norm.⁴

3.1.2. What is an 'Administration'?

Therefore, it appears that we must examine the very notion of an 'administration' itself. If cooperating parties are not sharing committee chairmanships, we need to outline the criterion by which we define an administration, or to be more accurate, how we define the existence of inter-party support. The definition of 'administration' this survey adopted is simple; it relied upon the judgements of chief executives. If

³ The hypothesis that chairs are not valued by coalition actors is tested in Chapter Four, section two.

⁴ It must be pointed out that this is not what previous research into hung councils suggests; relatively stable voting alliances appear to be the norm, although in some councils more "opportunistic" strategies are adopted (see Leach & Game, 1989, p.36). British experience of hung legislatures is limited, and it is likely that considerable sophistication is required for such temporary and shifting alliances to function without considerable problems.

they replied that the administration was, for example, Conservative/SLD, then that is what was recorded. While relying on one person's judgement is obviously problematic, the nearest thing to an objective and knowledgeable actor in local councils must be (in the majority of cases) the chief executive of that authority. The chief executive's assessment of the political arrangements should be more honest than a political leader, who may be either trying to hide (or minimise) their party's involvement or attempting to present the cooperation of other parties as being more than it actually is, for political reasons. This is not to deny that chief executives could have a particular axe to grind, but they will have to be very careful in their assessment of the political arrangements in their council. Their replies should therefore be balanced and generally accurate.

The difficulties of deciding the make-up of administrations without a 'cabinet' as guidance, even for informed chief executives, are apparent. Different surveys have adopted different definitions of 'government'; as Leach & Game point out:

"the two New Statesman surveys ... include all situations in which one party is 'allowed' to form a minority administration, however active or passive the support expressed. Our survey uses more rigorous criteria. To qualify as an expression of inter-party support, one party must have made a *positive* choice in relation to the party holding the chairs, for example either by voting *for* that party, *or* supporting its budget. This definition would therefore exclude the use of abstention as a tactic" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.25).

Leach & Game's definition of "inter-party support", as they acknowledge, is quite rigorous. Leach & Stewart (1988) are also rigorous in their definition; for example, in their classification a 'minority administration' includes those where the minority party has the "explicit or implicit 'support' of another party" (Leach & Stewart, 1988), which the great majority of coalition theorists have long treated as a coalition (see de Swaan, 1973, p.143). Other writers have been both less strict and less *clear* in their definition. Warwick (1979) follows de Swaan's precedent (1973, p.143):

"by including in the governing coalition any parties who were committed, tacitly or openly, to maintaining the coalition in power, even if they did not assume government portfolios" Warwick (1979, p.467).⁵

⁵ Warwick's definition is unclear about the precise meaning of 'tacitly', which could cover a range of tactics, from abstention to secret policy deals.

This survey has followed Warwick in including any example of cooperation. For example, if the chief executive responded to the question, "which parties comprise the current administration?"⁶ by answering 'Conservative with tacit SLD support' (which one chief executive in fact did) this survey treated that as a Conservative/SLD administration. However, an informal agreement to support a party's nominations for committee chairs is obviously not the same degree of support as a formal agreement between two or more parties to share committee chairs or an agreement on substantial budgetary concessions.

It is acknowledged that a considerable weakness of our approach is that in some cases we do not know the criteria behind a chief executive's classification of the administrations in his or her local authority. In most cases the chief executive merely answered, for example, 'Conservative/SLD', without going into more detail, although in the great majority of current administrations we are aware of whether this was a formal or informal arrangement. However, given that we were seeking judgements not just on (initially) 111 current administrations but also on *all* the previous administrations since those councils had become hung, it is difficult to know a better way of deciding than the judgement of the chief executive in a large scale questionnaire based exercise such as this. The fact that a chief executive has decided that some expression of support should be detailed in a question asking '*what parties comprise the administration in your authority?*' implies that such support is meaningful.

Therefore, the judgement of chief executives is our criterion on the 'administration' in place, and where we have the information we classify any example of cooperation as an 'administration', although the differences in the type of cooperation will of course be detailed whenever necessary. The nature of such cooperation (that is, whether in the form of office or policy pay-offs) is examined throughout this thesis, notably in Chapters Four, Seven, and Nine. However, while the nature of the local coalitions which must form is obviously a major problem of analysis, we do know that some form of agreement is essential. Whether such agreement can be classified as "inter-party agreement" is more problematic, as the cohesion displayed by national parties may not necessarily be a feature of local government. The very lack of a cabinet may be a major contributory factor to this, and this potentially problematic area will now be addressed.

⁶ See the Appendix for full details of the four questionnaires sent to local actors.

3.1.3. Are Local Groups 'Unitary Actors'?

The previous sub-sections have noted the problems of deciding both the nature and existence of coalitional behaviour by local party groups. As Chapter One has already noted, the definition of 'coalition' offered by Kelley (1968) appears an adequate starting point in the discussion of local coalitions, covering a wide variety of cooperative behaviour. The assumptions of rationality which underpin formal coalition theory, however, appear to offer even more problems for the study of local politicians behaviour than the admittedly considerable problems they present to a study of the behaviour of national politicians. Potentially, the assumption of parties as rational 'unitary actors' may not be acceptable for the parties in English local government.

Laver (1989) argues that national parties can be thought of as unitary actors because the central role of the cabinet at national level gives national political parties a strong hold on the backbencher. The cabinet is the central decision making body and cabinet portfolios are the aim of ambitious politicians; therefore, "party elites have a very strong hold over the aims and aspirations of the rank-and-file legislator. thereby enforcing party discipline" (Laver, 1989, p.22). Laver maintains that "matters are quite different at local level" and that the "paltry nature of local offices" means party elites have fewer rewards to offer, making discipline difficult to maintain (Laver, 1989, p.22).

However, throughout Chapter Two, the increased politicisation of local government and the control of policy by senior councillors has been seen as a feature of English local government. Despite differences between urban and rural councils, with urban councils consistently more partisan, Widdicombe (1986) reported high levels of party cohesion in council votes. A quite staggering 99 percent of Labour groups and 92 percent of Conservative groups always or usually voted together when in power in full council meetings (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume One, Table 2.3). If the lack of a cabinet means we are looking for legislative coalitions, such figures demonstrate that the two major parties can deliver disciplined voting blocs; not only that, "group solidarity is the norm for *all* parties" in local government (Stoker, 1991, p.39, my emphasis).

There is little doubt that Widdicombe's assessment that it is an almost "universal practice" for party groups to meet regularly and "pre-determine" the party line is indeed the case (Widdicombe, 1986, p.30). Party politics dominates at local level,

with the majority of councillors regarding the implementation of their party manifesto as their "first concern", although it must be noted that a majority of Liberal councillors disagreed with this proposal (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume Two, Table 7.17). Labour and Conservative groups set particular store by ideas of party loyalty,⁷ and although 'Liberals' have traditionally been viewed as composed of more independent minded people, there is some evidence that the new 'Liberal Democrats' are adopting a more disciplined approach, sometimes to the extent of being accused of an "authoritarian style" (see Stoker, 1991, p.49). In contrast to the argument that party discipline has become tighter, Stoker argues that "the politicisation of local government has been accompanied by evidence of a greater degree of division and conflict both between and *within* parties" (Stoker, 1991, p.40, my emphasis). However, the general consensus, as Widdicombe has undoubtedly demonstrated, is that disciplined party politics is the norm in English local government, a finding confirmed by recent research (Young & Davies, 1990).

Despite the general levels of discipline, it is still the case that English local politics is less dominated by party whipping than Westminster, where Members of Parliament have long since surrendered any pretensions to independent thinking. However, it would be a mistake to suppose from this that ruling local parties must constantly be struggling to put together a majority in council. Despite the lack of cabinet places on offer, the picture presented in Chapter Two of senior elites making policy indicates a universal truth of modern party politics, whether at local or national level. Whatever the formal picture, local elites will almost certainly have some form of unofficial forum where policy matters are discussed, and 'invitations' to such a forum will almost certainly not be offered to mavericks. Politicians who wish to attain the positions of power, whether such positions are represented by cabinet chairs or not, must demonstrate during their 'apprenticeship' that they can be trusted, and politicians who consistently vote against the party line will find themselves either deselected or becoming permanent backbenchers. The widespread control of local authorities by party groups is clear, and the idea that without a cabinet elites necessarily lack control over the actions of their minions, is not demonstrated by the disciplined voting behaviour of local groups.

However, if for the purposes of coalition bargaining we can assume that the three major parties are unitary actors, at least one significant 'group' at local level can

⁷ Although the 'new right' of the Conservative party are openly hostile to the tactics of 'traditional' local Tories (see Ridley, 1988, p.29), and Ken Livingstone (1984, p.271) notes the difficulties of the 'urban left' in achieving a rapport with traditional working class Labourism.

not automatically be assumed to be a unitary actor. Independent groups have a long and distinguished history in local politics, and despite their decline with the encroachment of politicisation, they are still a not inconsiderable factor.

Independents: Individual or Group Actors?

The question of the cohesion of Independent groups must be posed; is it right to consider these groups as unitary actors, responding to central direction in a similar way to the major parties? One of the 8 Independent group leaders responding to this survey replied that most of the questions:

"are not really applicable to a diverse group of Independents. I have tried to answer them but there could well be six different answers from my colleagues."

At first glance, this appears to indicate that it would be foolish to consider local Independents as unitary actors and that, especially, any utilisation of formal coalition theory will have to regard these groups as lacking the necessary cohesion.

However, there is another way of considering the problem. Chief executives passed the questionnaire to the people they considered to be the 'leaders' of the Independent group on the council, and the Independent 'leaders' presumably considered themselves competent to answer on behalf of their colleagues. The great majority of Independent groups did not fill in a questionnaire, so perhaps it is justifiable to consider those 8 leaders who did reply on behalf of their colleagues as leading a group which is sufficiently cohesive for our purposes, despite the honest answer of the Independent 'leader' quoted above. Certainly, that is the approach that this research proposes to take. This does not imply that all Independents could be considered as unitary actors, any more than noting a tendency for Independents to co-operate with Conservatives implies that all Independents are closet Tories or that all Conservative groups will naturally gravitate towards Independents.

It must be acknowledged that local parties, for reasons which include the lower profile of local politics, the less rigorous approach to candidate selection, and the surviving conception of local politics as 'non-political', are less cohesive than the equivalent national parties. This may have repercussions for coalition deals, and such agreements may therefore be prone to instability. Despite this, the level of voting discipline is such that considering local groups as unitary actors seems acceptable.

Section Two: The Study of Administrative Duration

It is of the utmost importance that any study of administrative duration define clearly its definition of administrative termination.⁸ Therefore, this section begins with an examination of the definitions adopted by previous research, and defends this study's criterion of termination. Following this, the difficulty of measuring the duration of extant administrations is addressed.

3.2.1. Competing Definitions of 'Government Duration'

The study of coalitions (whether theoretical or empirical) has largely concentrated on coalition formation: the areas of payoffs and duration have received much less attention, although (as noted in Chapter One) recent studies have somewhat redressed the balance. The same emphasis has prevailed in local coalition studies: the seminal works, although not totally ignoring the problems of coalition maintenance, have largely concentrated on the factors influencing administrative formation, with only brief examinations of the problems of maintenance and (especially) payoffs.⁹ Those studies which have given a prominent role to coalitional durability have, however, often differed in their judgement of the criteria to utilise when measuring duration; there is no commonly agreed measurement of government duration. Consequently, comparison between studies is constrained by the knowledge that different criteria will inevitably produce different conclusions regarding the stability of various administrative forms.

Therefore, any examination of administrative durability is immediately faced with a problem of definition. The difficulty of measuring the longevity of an administration is complicated by lack of agreement as to what should be measured. Therefore, a defence of the criteria adopted by this study is necessary before testing the propositions offered to explain coalition durability.

Laver & Schofield list four criteria from which different authors have 'permed' various combinations to define the end of a government:

1. A change in the party membership of the cabinet;
2. A formal government resignation.
3. A change in the Prime Minister.
4. An election." (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.145)

⁸ As Chapter One has shown, one of the many criticisms made by Strom (1988) of the stochastic approach of Browne et al is their failure to define their terms, including 'termination' (a criticism they reject).

⁹ For example, see Leach & Game (1989) and Mellors (1989)

Budge & Keman call these criteria the "standard definition" (1990, p.15), and point out that writers whose definitions of how to determine government duration deviate from these criteria, such as Dodd (1976) who omits elections and resignations, mean that some dominant electoral groups (for example the Menzies 1949 Australian government which lasted 17 years) skew the findings (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.15). However, the definition, as Laver & Schofield note, is far from standard. For example, Warwick eliminated cabinets from his data set "whose termination was unconnected with the idea of instability" (Warwick, 1979, p.468), effectively excluding cases (for example, cabinets ended by elections) other studies had considered. Some studies counted a change of Prime Minister as signalling the end of a government (for example, Browne et al, 1984), while others (for example, Dodd, 1976) did not consider this to signify the end of a government.

Therefore, any criterion of 'government duration' adopted by this study will encounter opposition from some quarters. This study proposes to utilise the criterion adopted by Lijphart, with a change in the party membership of the cabinet being the sole definition of the end of a government (Lijphart, 1984b, p.278). There are a number of reasons for not adopting the remaining criteria when examining English local government coalitions.

In some legislatures there is a formal (or in some instances informal) requirement that governments resign after defeat on a particular issue. For example, if a British government is defeated in a 'vote of confidence', constitutional convention requires resignation and a dissolution of Parliament. No such requirement exists in English local government where elections are for fixed terms and the ruling administration has no power to dissolve the council and hold fresh elections. Consequently, there is little to be gained for opposition parties by defeating a government without having a viable alternative government.¹⁰ If a government did resign, and after a period of 'no administration', the same party or parties re-assumed control, then this would be treated as a new administration; however, according to the information supplied by chief executives, there are no cases in this study where this occurred.¹¹ Also, there are no cases we are aware of in our sample where a government resigned and then

¹⁰ Despite this, it does happen, as the case study of Devon in Chapter Ten demonstrates.

¹¹ There was one local authority where a government resigned, and a period of 'no administration', rather than an alternative government, followed. In this case, a different administration eventually assumed control. Of the other 11 instances of 'no administration' we have information for, 2 were short term initial responses where an administration eventually formed. Of the 9 current examples, 6 councils had never had an administration since becoming hung and 3 councils had previously had a party or parties in power, often for considerable periods of time.

immediately re-assumed control (although this could have happened), so the decision of this study not to include a government resignation as signalling the end of a government could be seen as academic. However, whatever the circumstances, it appears foolish to consider a change of government has occurred if the same combination and weight of parties and the same personalities continue in office. A change of personalities is potentially a different matter.

As Chapter Two noted, Collins (1984), compares local party leaders to Prime Ministers, with the leader seen as "the custodian of policy" at local level. He maintains a change of leader will usually entail a change of policy (Collins, 1984, p.45). However, Collins' study was of leaders in single party majority control councils, and leaders in hung councils may not have the same hold over policy;¹² identifying exactly who is the 'leader' of a local party can also be problematic. In addition, even in majority control governments a change of leader does not necessarily mean the end of a government, and nor does a change of policy direction.¹³ Therefore, this study (along with Laver & Schofield, 1990, see p.146) does not take a change of leader(s) as necessarily signalling the end of a government.

Elections pose a more difficult decision, because even if the same party or parties continue in office the relative weight of parties both in and out of the coalition will probably have been altered. Inevitably, if closeness to minimum winning status (for example) is an important factor on coalitional durability, then a change in the arithmetical balance will be important. However, there is one very good reason for not considering an election as signalling the end of a government in English local authorities. In councils holding elections by thirds the maximum time an administration could last would be only 24 months, and in most cases only 12 months.¹⁴ Regarding an election as signalling the end of a government would be inappropriate in such cases, and the average length of such governments would not reflect reality.

¹² Section three of Chapter Eight examines the possibility of changed power relationships in hung councils.

¹³ For example, the replacement of Margaret Thatcher by John Major as Prime Minister, despite the policy and Cabinet personnel changes that followed, was (like Callaghan replacing Wilson in 1976) not generally seen as creating a 'new government'. However, neither was the Lib/Lab pact in 1977, which this study *would* regard as a change of government. This demonstrates that any definition will create problems and encounter disagreement.

¹⁴ See Chapter Two, section 2.1.4., for an explanation of the different electoral cycles, and Chapter Four, section one, for an examination of their effect on administrative formation.

This study proposes to regard an election (and by-election) as an important event, and will plot the changes in the balance between the parties over the period of hungness in order to check any relationship between numerical strength (however measured) and durability, but will not regard the election as necessarily signalling the end of the government. Importantly, we are not comparing the duration of administrations in hung councils with the duration of administrations in majority control councils. If we were, the argument for considering an election as terminating a government would be overwhelming. Some local authorities have only ever known one party in power, which would make comparison of administrations in such councils with the inevitably more 'up-and-down' hung councils pointless unless an election was used as signalling the end or beginning of an administration.

Given that we are comparing like with like, and that 73 months is the longest period any administration has lasted in our sample of hung councils, the reservations of Budge & Keman (see above) are perhaps less relevant to this study. As Strom notes:

"political or academic conventions specifying when a government begins or ends are arbitrary, and operational definitions must be justified by the research problem at hand" (Strom, 1988, p.927).

To give Lijphart the final word on the subject of measuring government duration:

"it does not often happen in the social sciences ... that the easiest solution is also the best one, but we do find such a happy combination here. The other measures are all refinements of [any change in the party membership of the cabinet]: they all use party composition as their first criterion and then add one or more further criteria. Since these refinements do not strengthen the basic measure, they are not worth the extra effort. The measurement of cabinet durability in terms of the one criterion of party competition clearly offers the optimal combination of validity and simplicity." (Lijphart, 1984b, p.278)

Accordingly, especially given the justifications of Strom (1988) and Lijphart (1984b), only a change of party membership will invariably be treated as a change of government by this study.

3.2.2. Extant Administrations

However, there is another significant problem which must be addressed. A majority of the administrations in our universe of 121 administrations are extant (62 extant, 59 completed), and including extant governments in the analysis obviously raises problems for any study of administrative duration. Some of those administrations have not had time to develop, while others which have been in existence, for

example, for 37 months, may well go on to last much longer. However, to exclude current administrations¹⁵ from the study would not only mean a large number of local authorities which have had the same administration for the duration of hungness would be excluded from any analysis; it would also mean excluding the great majority of coalition administrations in the sample, as there are few coalitions in the sample of completed administrations.¹⁶ However, despite the obvious problems of including extant administrations, this is not seen as a major drawback to this analysis, for the following reasons.

The primary aim of this study is not to assess the adequacy of various predictive theories, whether of formation or duration, but to examine empirically the circumstances which may be affecting the formation and durability of administrations in hung English councils. To exclude a large number of interesting cases for the secondary consideration of assessing or building general theories of coalitional behaviour therefore makes little sense. The data base of English local coalition studies (despite the pioneering work of, especially, Mellors, Leach, and Stewart) is obviously extremely limited. Any additions to the important findings of previous observers is useful, and throughout the analysis of local administrative durability in Chapter Six, the findings will be qualified when necessary. For example, assessments of durability by type of administration will note any differences between completed and extant administrations, and where their inclusion will affect the composition of the relative samples, administrations which have been in existence for a short period of time will be excluded from the analysis. While it is accepted that a large sample of completed administrations would give more conclusive findings, an examination of the findings of this chapter will reveal a number of interesting suppositions which are worthy of further analysis when a larger universe of completed administrations is available.

There is one unavoidable problem with the examination of administrative durability; if experience of hungness is essential for effective coalition bargaining, then coalitions should be more likely to form in long term hung councils. A longitudinal study covering a much greater time span than this study would be necessary to test this hypothesis. This is because most English hung councils have not been hung for long enough to test this hypothesis. Short-term hung councils (which Chapter Four

¹⁵ The use of the term 'current' is to indicate those arrangements pertaining at the time of the primary data collection, Summer, 1988.

¹⁶ Chapter Nine's testing of coalition theory's suppositions regarding duration must set more rigorous requirements of definition, and this precludes the use of extant administrations.

designates as lasting less than 37 months) have not had enough time to 'last'; they will be less durable on average than administrations in long term councils simply because of this factor. Therefore, an examination of such factors must wait until a future study has enough councils with long term experience of hungness. The thesis that long term experience of hungness facilitates the formation of coalitions may then be able to be tested adequately. However, despite these reservations concerning this study, a large number of possible influences on administrative durability can still be examined.

The first two sections of this chapter have dealt mainly with problems of definition. We now move to a general examination of the factors which may be affecting coalition formation in English local government, and detail our approach to the empirical chapters which follow.

Section Three: The Examination of Local Coalitions

This section begins with an assessment of the relevance of the multi-dimensional approach to the study of hung local councils; the difficulty of studying local coalitions using such an all-embracing approach is admitted, and this study does not adopt its approach. It is proposed that this study will use the insights of all traditions in coalition research in an attempt to build up as much knowledge of life in hung councils as possible. The specific empirical approach that this study will take is briefly outlined.

3.3.1. The Multi-Dimensional Approach to the Examination of Hung Councils

A number of factors may influence the formation of coalitions at local level. Mellors (1989), following the multi-dimensional model first proposed by Groennings (1970) and later formulated in detail by Pridham (1986), has detailed a number of possible influences on local coalition behaviour. These follow the seven 'dimensions' identified by Pridham (1986, pp.24-29), and indicate the enormous variety of factors that any truly realistic formal model would have to accommodate. While many of the variables are not capable of being adequately examined by a large scale survey such as this study they are worth listing in full, if only to demonstrate the difficulties formal theorists face in constructing an adequate representation of

coalition behaviour. Mellors identified the major "multi-dimensional influences" on local coalition behaviour as:

Institutional: regulations (e.g. location of executive responsibility, requirement to form an executive, possibility of minority administrations, election periods); legal constraints and competences; political status (e.g. scale, policy-making powers, financial autonomy); arithmetical factors.

Historical: local political traditions; past experiences of conflict and cooperation (between both parties and leaders); evolution of parties in the local authority; shifts in party support; previous patterns of party control.

Motivational: office v. policy-seeking motives (and the relationship between them); the nature of 'power' in local government (office/patronage/policy-making); ideological and personal compatibilities; short-, medium- and long-term strategies.

Vertical/Horizontal: degree of devolution; compatibility or conflict in roles and bargaining styles of respective party actors; ideological space between parties; extent to which local party politics are 'nationalised'.

Party-Internal: extent of national control over local party groups; levels of activism; extent to which national parties have developed strategies for local coalitions and/or see local coalitions as 'laboratories' for national alliances; communication between party levels; extent to which elected parties have dual interests in local and national political arenas.

Socio-Political: degree of party politicisation; nature of local economy; urban v. rural areas; proximity to national elections; electoral volatility; electoral movements (e.g. rise of 'new' parties); extent to which political options are understood by the electorate; turnout; personalities and local leaders.

External: influence of local bureaucrats; perceptions of local media; 'events' (e.g. occurrence of a local crisis or change in local economy)."
(Mellors, 1989, p.7)

Faced with such a large list of potential influences, it is unsurprising that critics of formal theory are sceptical of its ability to model accurately the 'real world' of coalition politics. The multi-dimensional (or atheoretic?) approach does not attempt the predictive aims of formal coalition theories: rather, its aims are to provide the detailed knowledge of the real world of coalition politics that formal theories appear to have minimised or ignored, as some formal modellers agree¹⁷, and to act as an analytical framework for future observers. While the multi-dimensional approach as outlined by Mellors might be criticised for its apparent concentration on political

¹⁷ As Chapter One has already noted, McKelvey & Rosenthal (1978) make this point (see 1.4.2.)

factors at the expense of bureaucratic inputs, with the local bureaucracy in Mellors' model being seen as an 'external' influence rather than as part of the political dynamic, it does point one way forward for future empirical examinations.

While the multi-dimensional perspective has considerable benefits in the empirical study of coalitions, because it provides an exhaustive 'checklist' of influences and recognises the links between, for example, institutional constraints and coalition outcomes often ignored by theorists, it has not been formally utilised in this study. The difficulties of plotting the relationships between the 'dimensions' is apparent and, as Mellors has pointed out:

"if it is to provide a workable framework for the systematic collation of so far uncollected data about sub-national coalitions, then it needs considerable elaboration if it is not to present an impossible task to those who research in the field of local politics" (Mellors, 1989, p.8)

Although Denters (1985) has attempted to isolate certain conditional factors within political systems in order to highlight the importance of context to coalition formation, the difficulties of operationalisation preclude (at the moment) a thorough utilisation of the framework in a large scale questionnaire based exercise such as this. Perhaps the biggest difficulty of the approach is the lack of a base from which a realistic empirical examination can proceed. If everything is important, how does a student of coalition politics decide where to concentrate attention? Thanks to formal theory, we know that office and policy are important. It is easier, and perhaps more productive, to treat these goals as paramount and then look for the constraints that will temper those goals.

3.3.2. The Testing of Assumptions About Life in Hung Councils

There are, of course, many variables which any examination of the factors influencing coalition strategies in hung councils must acknowledge. For example, a personal closeness between the leaders of two otherwise ideologically distant parties might well lead to cooperation. While 'cross-party' friendship between competing political elites might well be more common in the constrained world of local politics than in the high profile national arena, such assessments are outside the general scope of this research.¹⁸ Institutional factors may also present too many problems in assessing their influence on local coalition behaviour. For example, it is apparent

¹⁸ As the case study of Devon demonstrates, this factor (and others identified by Mellors) plays a big role in the strategies of local parties there; see Chapter Ten.

that the importance of national issues to local voting may mean the link between a party's performance and its electoral fortunes is weakened.

Many studies maintain that local elections in Britain are largely determined by the standing of the national parties (for example, Dunleavy, 1980, p.136). If this is the case, then parties can pursue any kind of coalitional behaviour (including 'irresponsible' tactics) without being punished electorally for it. This has repercussions for local coalition studies (see Laver, 1989, pp.27-28); for example, it may mean that local coalitions are less stable, but attempting to isolate cause and effect in such cases is obviously difficult, if not impossible. However, while accepting that isolating cause and effect will be inevitably be problematic in any study of political behaviour (particularly when examining elite behaviour), there are many factors which are capable of being examined.

While a number of the multi-dimensional approach's observations influenced the content of the questionnaires sent to actors in hung and non-hung councils, it must be admitted that the range of variables it cites are so numerous that coherent research utilising the framework is a huge enterprise. The main reason for listing the "multi-dimensional variables" is to demonstrate the difficulty of the task facing any student of coalition politics. Undoubtedly, without the more specific propositions of game theory, the study of coalitions may never have advanced as far as it has. This study has already detailed numerous insights into coalition politics from a number of academic traditions. The intention is to examine the possible veracity of those insights whether they arise from a game theoretical examination in the laboratory or from the observations of a chief executive working in a hung council.

The findings of this research are based upon the replies of chief executives and political leaders to questionnaires sent to them in June, 1988. The questionnaires (see Appendix A) were designed in order to generate information with which a number of general assumptions about life in hung councils, and the differences between hung and non-hung councils, could be empirically tested.¹⁹ The information gathered could also be used to test a number of the hypotheses which coalition theorists have argued influence both the formation and durability of political coalitions. The nature of that examination will now be briefly outlined.

As the introduction to this thesis has already detailed, it is proposed to examine the activities of hung councils under five substantive headings, organised into chapters:

¹⁹ The following section gives details of the nature and fielding of these questionnaires.

Chapter Four *The Local Context*; Chapter Five *Party Strategies and Coalition Formation*; Chapter Six *The Stability of Administrations in Hung Councils*, Chapter Seven, *The Effects of Hungness on Council Practices*, and Chapter Eight, *The Effects of Hungness on Political and Administrative Actors*. Following this, Chapter Nine will be devoted to testing a range of formal theories of coalition formation and maintenance against the data collected in this survey; the attitudes of parties towards office and policy pay-offs will be examined in this chapter. Finally, Chapter Ten will take a different approach, with a case study of Devon County Council which is supported by interviews with all the leading actors. While these divisions inevitably have a touch of artificiality about them, in that factors impinging on coalition activities will be complex and variable, they do allow a measure of coherence to be brought to the study of the 'messy' business of coalition politics.²⁰

As stated above, the bulk of this thesis is informed by the information which was collected by a large-scale questionnaire-based survey, and the method by which the data were collected will now be detailed.

Section Four: The Collection of Data

The final section of Chapter Three details the fielding of the questionnaires which yield the information which this study is based upon. The distribution of the questionnaires is outlined, and the response rates by political and bureaucratic actor, type of authority and political party are detailed. However, the paucity of data provided some initial problems.

3.4.1. Information Problems

The data in this survey derive from the questionnaires which were sent, initially, to 111 local authorities which had been identified as hung, and a representative sample of 27 non-hung local authorities. The information on council composition was taken from the 1987 Municipal Yearbook and checked against other sources, primarily data from the Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre at Polytechnic South West, Plymouth, and from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). However, completely reliable data on council compositions is difficult to obtain. Local authorities have no statutory duty to provide detailed election results.

²⁰ Occasionally, common-sense will dictate that a particular area is investigated "out of turn". For example, the proposal that minimum winning coalitions will be more durable than other types of administration is examined in Chapter Six's overall look at the factors connected with durability and not in the examination of coalition theories in Chapter Nine. Given that section two of Chapter Six, is concerned with examining a variety of numerical factors which have been alleged to affect administrative durability, it appears essential to consider the impact of minimum winning status on durability there.

The results supplied often fail to identify political parties, and by-elections occur more frequently than at national level. Changes of party allegiance by councillors are not uncommon; one chief executive, responding to this survey, frankly admitted that he had no idea how to identify the "fragments" of the Alliance in his authority. In addition, councils with groups outside of the main parties may appear hung but be effectively controlled by, for example, a Conservative-Independent alliance which has no significant ideological differences.

Allerdale District Council is a good example of such an authority. As their chief executive pointed out, in response to our initial letter and questionnaires, the basic statistics of 12 Conservative, 19 Independent, and 24 Labour members "gives a lie to the practical situation at Allerdale". Since 1973, following Labour gains, the Conservatives and Independents had formed what the chief executive termed an "Alliance Group" and since then "there has never been any separate Conservative or Independent groups".

In total, 16 councils responded to the initial enquiry to say that they were not hung, some because of a long standing Conservative-Independent relationship, and others because the council composition had changed in 1987 or been incorrectly listed in the Municipal Yearbook. Therefore, these councils were omitted from the survey, and a revised total of 95 hung councils were surveyed. It may well be that some of the 18 councils in this revised figure which did not respond to the questionnaire might also not consider themselves hung; 11 of the 18, according to our information on council composition, could have been controlled by a Conservative-Independent alliance.

3.4.2. Distribution of Questionnaires

Four different questionnaires were designed for the survey. Questionnaire 1 was designed for the chief executives of hung authorities, Questionnaire 2 for the party leaders or group spokesmen in hung authorities, Questionnaire 3 for chief executives in the control group of non-hung authorities, and Questionnaire 4 for their party leaders or group spokesmen (the appendix contains copies of the questionnaires). A total of 515 questionnaires were distributed; 95 of Questionnaire 1, 315 of Questionnaire 2, 27 of Questionnaire 3 and 78 of Questionnaire 4.

All questionnaires were sent to the chief executive of the authority concerned for completion or distribution as appropriate. This had one significant disadvantage, in that some chief executives shared the views of one of their colleagues who felt that the questions "strayed into sensitive areas on which I do not believe either I or the

party leaders should be stating opinions", and declined to answer or pass on the questionnaires to his councillors. However, sending all questionnaires to the chief executives meant that, in most cases, the coordination of the task of completing them was carried out by the person in the best position to do so. In addition, the chief executive's greater knowledge of the political situation within his or her local authority meant that questionnaires were more likely to reach the correct person, with a better chance of all relevant factions being contacted, and were probably more likely to be completed.

The questionnaires were sent to chief executives under the aegis of the Local Government Chronicle (LGC), with a personal letter from the LGC's Chairman, Mr. Geoffrey Smith. It was thought that this approach would produce a higher response rate, as Mr. Smith was personally known to almost all chief executives. Also, it was felt that the imprimatur of a publication which is well known and respected among local government officers would produce a more favourable response rate than a request for often sensitive information from an academic institution, albeit one with a noted reputation in the local government community.

The questionnaires, with the accompanying letter, were sent out on June 6th, 1988, to 95 hung and 27 non-hung authorities. This date was chosen because (a) memories of the budget making process (usually finalised by the beginning of May) would still be vivid in the respondents memories, and (b) so that the local elections of May would be over and provide no distraction to the task of completing the questionnaire. Possible changes of control after the May 1988 local elections, either creating newly hung councils or returning those hung councils selected to majority control, were considered irrelevant for our purposes, as it was the experience of those councils which had been hung for a year or more which was the focus of this research. A return to majority control (for example, as in St Albans D.C) or a change to hung status by authorities in the control group (which did not in fact occur) did not invalidate the experience of the preceding years. A follow-up letter, again under the aegis of LGC, was sent to chief executives in those local authorities which had not sent completed returns. In addition, a number of councillors who had written with various queries about the research were sent personal letters clarifying its objectives or assuring them of confidentiality.²¹

²¹ In nearly every local authority, requests for confidentiality were made by at least one respondent; in many, a specific assurance of confidentiality was requested. Accordingly, no local authority is specifically identified in the empirical chapters which follow.

3.4.3. Response Rates

These procedures resulted in a final return of 242 completed questionnaires from a total of 515 sent out, an overall response rate of 47 percent. Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 show the detailed response rates to the survey.

It can be seen from Table 3.1 that the response rate of chief executives was considerably higher than that of party leaders in both hung and non-hung councils. There are a number of possible explanations for this. In cases where chief executives refused to complete the form or did not respond to either of our requests for information, it was unlikely that the questionnaires designed for party leaders were distributed. The questionnaires for party leaders required, in general, more subjective assessments than those designed for chief executives and were also longer, which may have led to a greater reluctance on the part of party leaders to complete the questionnaire. In addition, while councillors are ostensibly 'part-timers', party leaders in particular are effectively full-time politicians, with little or no time to fill in 'yet another' questionnaire: the much lower response rate from party leaders in hung, as opposed to non-hung, authorities might also say something about the pressures of time on councillors in hung authorities.

The attitude of the national party organisations may also have affected the response from local politicians. The official policy of both the Conservative Party and, especially, the Labour Party towards local coalitions is hardly encouraging (see Mellors, 1986, pp.22-23), and this may have inhibited local party leaders from responding to the survey.²² This could account for the lower response rates from Conservative and Labour leaders when compared to SLD/Alliance politicians. Given the positive attitude of the Alliance parties to power sharing, it is unsurprising that Alliance group leaders had a much higher response rate than the two main parties. In addition, Local Government Chronicle is a publication aimed primarily at local government officers, and a request for information from LGC would probably not have the same impact upon politicians as upon chief executives.

²² Central-local party relations are examined in Chapter Two, section three. The possible effects of this national party hostility to local coalitions is examined in Chapter Five, Section One.

Table 3.1: Overall Response Rates to Survey

| | Hung Councils | | | Non-Hung Councils | | |
|---------------|---------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------|
| | Surveyed | Responded | Percent | Surveyed | Responded | Percent |
| ch. execs | 95 | 62 | 65.3 | 27 | 20 | 74.1 |
| party ldrs | 315 | 117 | 37.1 | 78 | 43 | 53.1 |
| totals | 410 | 179 | 43.7 | 105 | 63 | 60.0 |

Table 3.2: Response Rates By Type of Authority

| | Hung Councils | | | Non-Hung Councils | | |
|-------------|---------------|-----------|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| | surveyed | responded | percent | surveyed | responded | percent |
| chief execs | | | | | | |
| district | 67 | 39 | 58.2 | 18 | 14 | 77.8 |
| county | 21 | 18 | 85.7 | 4 | 3 | 75.0 |
| met.d.c. | 6 | 5 | 83.3 | 3 | 2 | 66.7 |
| london b.c. | 1 | 0 | - | 2 | 1 | 50.0 |
| party ldrs | | | | | | |
| district | 226 | 69 | 30.5 | 49 | 27 | 55.1 |
| county | 67 | 40 | 59.7 | 12 | 6 | 50.0 |
| met.d.c | 19 | 8 | 42.1 | 10 | 6 | 60.0 |
| london.b.c. | 3 | 0 | - | 7 | 4 | 57.1 |

Table 3.3: Response Rates By Political Party in Hung Councils

| | Conservative | Labour | SLD/Allce | Independent | Others |
|-----------------|--------------|--------|-----------|-------------|--------|
| district | 22 | 15 | 24 | 7 | 1 |
| county | 12 | 14 | 12 | 1 | 1 |
| mdc/lbc | 3 | 1 | 4 | - | - |
| Total | | | | | |
| response | 37 | 30 | 40 | 8 | 2 |
| Total | | | | | |
| surveyed | 95 | 95 | 83 | 28 | 14 |
| Response | | | | | |
| Rate | 38.9% | 31.6% | 48.2% | 28.6% | 14.3% |

The much higher response rate from non-hung councils can probably be best explained by the number of surveys carried out recently into hung councils.²³ It may well be that a certain resistance to filling in questionnaires or answering questions has developed among both the members and officers of hung councils: it is also probable that they are a lot busier as a group. Whatever, at least one response was received from 67 of the 95 hung councils surveyed (70.5 percent), and 21 of the 27 non-hung councils (77.8 percent), and these returns, as well as comparing favourably to other elite surveys,²⁴ offer a good basis for an analysis of the situation in hung councils and the differences in operation (if any) between hung and non-hung councils.

Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to address some of the problems for the study of local coalition building raised by the developments in coalition studies and the nature of the English local government system, and prepare the way for the empirical examination which follows. A number of general points can be made.

It is apparent that the primary goal of local councillors in hung councils is probably not 'office', given the absence of a core elite policy making body. It appears probable that deals between local parties will concentrate on policy concessions of some form, and the focus will therefore shift from executive coalitions to legislative coalitions. The definition of an 'administration' will also have to be broader when legislative coalitions are being considered, and this survey proposes to treat any example of commitment to maintain a particular arrangement in power as an expression of 'inter-party support', and classifies the parties involved in such support as the administration. Deciding which parties are cooperating is more difficult when clear office pay-offs do not exist, but chief executives will be aware of the arrangements current in their authorities, and this is why the judgement of the chief executive concerning both present and previous administrative arrangements will be accepted.

Another potential problem area is the assumption coalition theory makes that political parties will act as rational unitary actors. It is acknowledged that the group discipline of SLD groups and Independent groups may be considerably less than that

²³ For example, the national studies of Mellors, Laver Rallings & Thrasher, Leach & Stewart, and Leach & Game.

²⁴ For example, Norton's (1990) postal survey of English chief executives achieved a response rate of 51.2 percent (Norton, 1990, p.138); the overall response rate of our survey was 47.0 percent, and the overall response rate of chief executives to our survey was 67.2 percent.

of the two major parties, but there is evidence that all local groups, particularly when in power, demonstrate considerable cohesion. While it is undeniable that local parties are generally less cohesive and politicised than national parties, it is concluded that they still act (most of the time) as unitary actors.

Section two demonstrates the need to offer a clear definition of government termination in any study of coalition duration. It is apparent that there is no such thing as a standard definition, and different research has often used radically different criteria. After a detailed study of different approaches, the conclusion is that the best definition for the study of local administrative duration is the simplest one. Only a change in the party membership of a administration will invariably be taken as signalling the end of a particular arrangement. This decision is contentious, as is the decision to include extant administrations in assessments of government duration. However, the majority of administrations are extant, and to exclude these administrations from the empirical analysis of duration because there is no way of knowing how long they will last would be counter-productive. The distinction between extant and completed administrations will be drawn where the findings of any analysis will be affected. The inability to conduct a meaningful longitudinal study of duration was also briefly addressed; most hung councils have not been hung long enough for such a study to be useful.

As Chapter One illustrates, there are different ways to approach any study of coalitions. The multi-dimensional approach, if nothing else, demonstrates the enormous range of potential influences on local coalitional behaviour. It is unsurprising that criticism of the formal approach cites such lists as evidence of formal theory's deficiencies, but formal theory has been the dominant contributor to analyses of coalition behaviour; whatever its weaknesses, its propositions have spurred many writers to examine its claims. This survey proposes to use the insights of all writers on coalition behaviour, whatever their perspective.

The following empirical chapters take a variety of approaches to the study of behaviour in hung councils. The responses of the actors in English local government to the questionnaires sent to them in the summer of 1988 have provided a large data bank from which the following chapters will draw. The analysis commences with an examination of the possible effects of certain institutional factors of local government on administrative formation.

CHAPTER FOUR

COALITION FORMATION: THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Introduction

Section One: The Impact of the Electoral Cycle on Coalition Formation

4.1.1. The Effects of the Electoral Cycle on Administrative Formality

4.1.2. Single Party Minority Government and Formal Status

4.1.3. The Electoral Cycle and Political Arrangements

Section Two: The Administrative Arrangements in Hung English Local Authorities

4.2.1. Current Administrative Types

4.2.2. The Allocation of Pay-Offs in Hung Councils

4.2.3. The Effects of Hungness on the Distribution of Committee Chairs

4.2.4. The Passage of Time and Administrative Arrangements

Section Three: The Effects of Arithmetic on Administrative Arrangements

4.3.1. The Balance of Power and Administrative Formation

4.3.2. The Relationship Between Party System Fractionalization and Administrative Formation

4.3.3. Minority Governments and Oversized Coalitions

Conclusions

Introduction

Wherever its empirical cases studies are derived, formal coalition theory, in general, searches for a 'universal' theory potentially capable of explaining coalition building in a variety of settings, from Supreme Court decision making (Rohde, 1972) to Italian government formation (Axelrod, 1970). However, as we have seen, critics of formal coalition theory have frequently pointed out the fallacy of attempting to produce general theories which take no account of country specific institutional and political factors (for example, see Mellors & Pijenburg, 1989, p.302). In particular, the tendency of formal theory to concentrate on the outcomes rather than the processes of coalition formation has meant that important factors impinging on coalition formation are minimised or ignored.

For example, as the previous two chapters have addressed there is no requirement for an 'executive body' (i.e., in British terms, a 'cabinet') in British local authorities. The lack of a 'cabinet' appears to influence the strategies local parties adopt; research indicates that office payoffs in the form of committee chairs are not the goal of most local politicians (for example, see Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987). If this is so, one of the major assumptions of much formal theory, that politicians seek office as the reward for participation in a coalition, may not be applicable to British local coalitions. Some of the implications of this point are examined later, both in this chapter and Chapter Nine (which tests some formal theories). The basis of this chapter is an examination of factors which will largely structure the strategies parties can adopt; specifically 'political' factors, such as the strategies and attitudes of the various political parties, will be analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four is divided into three main sections, which examine not only potential structural, institutional and local influences on coalition building but also the effects of hungness on some of those institutional factors, such as the distribution of committee chairs. It has been argued that one of the most important structural factors impinging on coalition formation is the differing electoral cycle in local authorities (see for example, Leach & Stewart, 1988) and the opening section deals with the possible effect of this variable on the formality/informality of local administrations. Section one also assesses the impact of electoral cycles on the type of political arrangements made, specifically examining the idea that coalitions are more likely to emerge when hungness will be longlasting. Section two details the current administrative arrangements in hung councils and also addresses some of the difficulties arising from the first section. In particular, the problem of assessing

exactly what type of administration is in place when there is no 'cabinet' to guide the observer in his/her search for office pay-offs between ostensible coalition partners is examined in detail. The effects of hungness on the distribution of committee chairs is assessed and the difference in the allocation of chairs between single party administrations and coalition administrations is compared; some deviations from the hypotheses of previous observers are noted. Completing this section, we examine whether the passage of time leads to greater coalition building or to a propensity for minority administrations to form. The final section looks at some of the effects of 'arithmetic' on the administrative arrangements emerging from hung counties. Among early coalition theorists such as Gamson and Riker the number of legislative seats each group possessed was regarded as the dominant factor in determining which coalitions would form. The theoretical implications of this are considered in Chapter Nine but a different approach is taken here. Stable inter-party accommodations have been predicted on the basis of the distribution (rather than the number) of seats (see Leach & Stewart, 1988). Section three looks at the effect a specific distributions of seats (for example, when all the major parties have a substantial number of seats or when one party is close to a majority) might have on the propensity for coalition or single party administrations to form. This section will also examine, from a number of perspectives, the possibility of a relationship between the number of parties and the type of administration forming, a thesis advanced by a number of authors (for example, Schofield, 1985).

This examination of the factors influencing the types of administration forming begins with a look at the impact of the differing electoral cycles on administrative formation.

Section One: The Impact of the Electoral Cycle on Coalition Formation

There is a growing body of research into hung local councils, and this section will assess a number of hypotheses connected to the different electoral cycles, derived from that literature. We examine whether formal administrations are more likely to occur in councils with quadrennial electoral cycles, and whether within that category, county councils will (because of their higher profile) have more formal arrangements than district councils. Related to this, the thesis that coalitions will be likelier in councils holding quadrennial elections is examined.

4.1.1. The Effects of the Electoral Cycle on Administrative Formality

The English county councils and London boroughs hold elections for the whole council every 4 years, while the metropolitan districts elect a third of the council every

year with the fourth year free of elections. Some district councils have the same arrangements as the counties; others follow the metropolitan pattern. While this might appear eccentric, it could be said to fit in well with a system of local government in which some areas of England are governed by two tiers of local government (the counties and shire districts) while in other areas (the metropolitan districts and London) one tier is deemed sufficient. Mellors argues that there is clearly:

" a greater temptation to fashion a durable solution in a hung council where there are 4 years before the next election than in one where there are just 12 months to wait in anticipation of a more decisive result" (Mellors, 1983, p.233).

It appears at least intuitively likely that Mellors is correct. Support for this view comes from Leach & Stewart, who further argue that stability is also more likely in authorities holding elections every four years, a point examined in Chapter Six (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.52). If Mellors is correct, formal administrative arrangements should be more likely to exist in county councils and in those districts where four-yearly elections are held. In authorities where elections are held by thirds, formal arrangements may be less likely to exist. In such authorities, hungness could be perceived as a temporary affair by the previous rulers. The main point of contention (the budget) will already have been established for the coming year; the annual budget is formally approved before the normal election dates in May. In such situations, former rulers in particular may be reluctant to enter into an agreement which could have electoral consequences in only a year's time.

The generally higher profile among the electorate of issues at shire level (for example, education and social services) may also lead to a propensity for formal arrangements. It appears plausible that political elites will believe there is a greater need for administrations to present an image of competence to the electorate when the issues are perceived as more important (which may also, of course, mean that politicians at district level feel there is more freedom to manoeuvre and less pressure to come to such agreements). If this is the case, we would expect to find more formal arrangements in counties than in districts with a four year electoral cycle. Accordingly, it is hypothesised that:

1.1: FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IN AUTHORITIES WHERE THE COUNCIL IS ELECTED FOUR-YEARLY THAN IN AUTHORITIES WHERE THE COUNCIL IS ELECTED BY THIRDS.

1.2: FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IN COUNTY COUNCILS THAN IN DISTRICT COUNCILS WHICH HOLD FOUR-YEARLY ELECTIONS.

As Table 4.1 (below) demonstrates, the expectations of Hypothesis 1.1 appear to be confounded by the evidence. There were more formal arrangements agreed in councils with yearly elections than in councils with quadrennial elections. The responses of political leaders to the same question supports the evidence of chief executives; contrary to Mellors expectations, formal arrangements are more likely in authorities which elect by thirds than those which adhere to a four yearly election cycle. Over half of political leaders in the former (58.7 percent) reported the existence of formal administrative arrangements, compared to only 41.3 percent in councils holding full elections every four years.

Table 4.1: Administrative Formality By Electoral Cycle

(response of chief executives, n=62; table excludes 'no response')

| Electoral Cycle | Formal Administration | Informal Administration |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Quadrennial (n=36) | 51.9% | 48.1% |
| Annual (n=26) | 60.9% | 39.1% |

Table 4.2 (below) details the responses of chief executives in all four categories (by electoral cycle) of council. Contrary to Hypothesis 1.2, there does not appear to be a greater level of formality in county councils than in districts with the same electoral cycle. If anything, the reverse appears to be the case. However, in both cases 7 of 18 respondents replied that there was a formal arrangement; differences in the number who made no response to this question account for the apparently greater number of formal arrangements in district councils. However, the responses of group leaders lend support to the idea of greater formal administrative arrangements in county councils as opposed to district councils holding quadrennial elections. Table 4.3 (below) shows the responses of group leaders in hung councils. According to the politicians, nearly half (48.6 percent) of group leaders in county councils reported the existence of formal arrangements compared to less than a third (31.8 percent) of political respondents in districts with the same electoral cycle.

Table 4.2: Administrative Formality By Type of Local Authority

(response of chief executives, n=62; table excludes 'no response')

| Electoral Cycle | Type of Authority | Formal Administration | Informal Administration |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Quadrennial (n=36) | County (n=18) | 46.7% | 53.3% |
| | District (n=18) | 58.3% | 41.7% |
| Annual (n=26) | Met. D.C. (n=5) | 60.0% | 40.0% |
| | District (n=21) | 61.1% | 38.9% |

When the results in Table 4.3 (below) are aggregated by electoral cycle they show that, according to party leaders, only 42.1 percent of councils with a four-yearly cycle have formal administrative arrangements compared to 58.7 percent of councils holding yearly elections. This supports the replies of chief executives; contrary to expectations, formal arrangements are more likely to exist in councils holding yearly elections, although it must be noted that the status of many 'formal' agreements is open to question. One SLD leader in a district council suspected the one year agreement between the coalition partners in his authority would only last "until a month before the next election".

Table 4.3: Administrative Formality By Type of Local Authority

(response of group leaders, n=117; table excludes 'no response')

| Electoral Cycle | Type of Authority | Formal Administration | Informal Administration |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Quadrennial | County (n=40) | 48.6% | 51.4% |
| | District (n=26) | 31.8% | 68.2% |
| Annual | Met. D.C. (n=8) | 42.9% | 57.1% |
| | District (n=43) | 61.5% | 38.5% |

Quite why there appears to be a relationship between electoral cycle and administrative formality is more difficult to say, and some possible explanations will now be assessed.

Possible Explanations for the Apparent Relationship Between Formality and Electoral Cycle

However the data are examined, it appears indisputable that there are more formal administrations in councils holding yearly elections than in councils holding quadrennial elections. The reasons for this are more difficult to discern. Certainly, one year seems to be a recurring figure when formal arrangements are examined. Group leaders report that in two-thirds of cases where there is a time limit on formal arrangements (30 of 45 cases) the time limit is one year, a finding supported by the responses of chief executives. A one year time limit on administrative arrangements appears to be the norm, perhaps because this reflects the budgetary cycle of local authorities. Although this does not explain the differences in formal arrangements according to electoral cycle, it does suggest an explanation; it may be easier to come to a formal arrangement when there is only a year to go before a possible change of political control.

Political actors in councils with a four-yearly cycle, faced with four years of hungness to come, may be reluctant to endow any administration with a degree of formality (even for one year) which might imply a 'right to rule'. However, when this research was carried out (June-August, 1988) there was just under a year left before the next county council elections. The counties were half of the sample of authorities holding elections every four years (in the other half of the sample, there were another 3 years to go before new elections). Therefore, one might have expected to find no significant difference between county councils and councils holding yearly elections, as in both cases there is less than a year to go before possible change.

That expectation does not take account of the bigger stakes involved in councils with a four-yearly cycle. It may be that in such situations (i.e. less than a year to go before an election which will decide a council's political fate for the next four years) politicians are not going to risk endowing their opponents with authority by granting them formal governmental status. On the other hand, group leaders may be mindful of the oft-quoted adage 'oppositions don't win elections, governments lose them' and be actively disassociating themselves from any connection with government. For example, it was 15 months before the quadrennial elections that the electoral pact in Devon County Council between the Liberals and the Social Democrats fell apart, with much bitterness, and that particular arrangement should have been the easiest pact to maintain. As Strom notes, "as elections draw close, the value of short-term office holding declines, and electoral considerations become paramount" (Strom, 1988, p.929). The price of failure is four years without power, a much higher price than

that paid by unsuccessful parties in councils electing by thirds. In such circumstances, it would not be surprising if politicians were wary of entering into any sort of political arrangement, either alone or with other parties.

4.1.2. Single Party Minority Government and Formal Status

An alternative explanation for the greater number of formal arrangements in councils which elect by thirds arises from an examination of Hypotheses 1.3 and 1.4 below. It may be that another variable is more important than the electoral cycle; the form of administrative arrangement existing in the local authority appears to be a very important factor.

Table 4.1 (above) shows the relationship between administrative arrangements and electoral cycle. From Mellors (1983, 1989) we expected to find more formal arrangements in councils holding quadrennial elections; this was not the case. It may be that the greater number of formal arrangements in councils electing by thirds can be explained by the far greater number of single party administrations in such authorities. Single party minority administrations are far more likely to have formal administrative arrangements than other forms of administration, as Table 4.4 (below) demonstrates. In addition, Table 4.5 (see below) shows there are far more single-party administrations in councils which hold elections every year; this alone would account for the greater number of formal arrangements in councils holding elections every year.

Table 4.4: Percentage of Formal Arrangements for Coalition and Minority Governments By Electoral Cycle

(response of chief executives, n=62: table excludes 'no response')

| Electoral Cycle | Minority Governments With Formal Admins | Coalition Governments With Formal Admins |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Quadrennial | 75.0% | 42.1% |
| Annual | 85.7% | 22.2% |

Why single party minority governments should be more likely to have formal status is difficult to say. Perhaps there is a reluctance to rule alone in such an exposed and precarious position without some degree of stability being afforded. The price of taking on government in such a difficult situation may be a formal recognition of the 'right to rule'. Opposition parties may then need to be careful not to be accused of

irresponsibility if they attempt to subvert the minority government without being prepared to rule under the same circumstances. Also, given there is often a feeling of hostility (especially initially) to coalition building, there can be a feeling that the largest single party should be allowed to rule alone. In the great majority of cases, the party ruling alone is close to an absolute majority. As Mellors points out "morally, if not electorally, such groups may regard themselves as having the right to form the administration in the council" (Mellors, 1989, p.85). Such feelings appear to be widespread in local government, particularly among the two main parties (see Carter, 1986), and this may facilitate the granting of formal status. Such factors are analysed in the following sub-section.

4.1.3. The Electoral Cycle and Political Arrangements

It must be noted that formal administrative arrangements do not necessarily imply a majority coalition government. It may be that single party or minority coalition governments will be formally constituted. However, Mellors' reference to the desire to fashion a "durable situation" over a four year period can certainly be seen as implying a formal situation where stable voting patterns can be expected. A formal majority coalition is normally seen as the optimum expression of stability in a hung situation. Further to his earlier comments on forming a durable solution, Mellors repeats his view that "there is rather more incentive for political parties to come to some kind of understanding with each other in a hung council when the stalemate is likely to last a number of years" (Mellors, 1989, p.69). This receives support from Clay, who in a remarkably pragmatic and trenchant Liberal party guide to action in hung or, as the Liberals insist on calling them, 'balanced' councils, instructs the party's councillors that their influence may well be less in councils which hold yearly elections, because "the other parties will be prepared to live with uncertainty for a year if they think that after that everything will revert to 'normal'" (Clay, 1982, pp.4-5). While this might appear to contradict the findings of this research (that formal arrangements are more likely in councils electing by thirds) there is no necessary relationship between a formal agreement to allow one party to rule alone and 'a lack of uncertainty', especially when there is no agreement with other parties over policy packages.¹

Mellors argues that formal pacts are unusual, with alliances tending to be "loose, temporary and issue specific" (Mellors, 1989, p.103; see also Leach & Game,

¹ Research has suggested that governments which form without agreements over policy appear to be shorter lived and less stable than formal coalitions (see Budge & Keman, 1990, p.188).

1988, p.39), an argument strongly supported by the figures in Table 4.4 above, which show that minority administrations are far more likely to have formal arrangements than coalition administrations; the majority of coalitions are 'informal' according to our respondents. It would intuitively appear to be harder to sustain such informal arrangements over four years, and this is also given support in Table 4.4, which shows that 42.1 percent of coalitions in councils holding quadrennial elections are formally constituted compared to only 22.2 percent of coalitions in councils electing by thirds.

While the pressure to come to an agreement in councils with a four-yearly electoral cycle does not preclude an understanding to allow a minority government to form, it might appear logical to assume that parties will be more likely to enter negotiations in such a situation. Leach & Game argue that "the knowledge that the hung situation is probably unchangeable for four years is a major force for cooperation" (1989, p.63). If this is so, coalitions (whether formal or informal) should be more likely in councils with a four-yearly electoral cycle; one might also expect to find fewer minority governments in councils with a four year electoral cycle. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

1.3: COALITIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES ARE MORE LIKELY IN COUNCILS WITH A QUADRENNIAL ELECTORAL CYCLE

1.4: MINORITY ADMINISTRATIONS ARE MORE LIKELY TO FORM IN AUTHORITIES WHERE THE COUNCIL IS ELECTED BY THIRDS THAN IN AUTHORITIES HOLDING QUADRENNIAL ELECTIONS.

The above hypotheses propose that coalitions are more likely in councils with a four yearly electoral cycle and minority administrations are more likely in councils electing by thirds. Table 4.5 details the findings of this research, and strongly supports the hypotheses. The majority of governmental arrangements in authorities with a four-yearly cycle are majority coalitions. In councils which elect by thirds, the reverse is the case; the majority of arrangements are for one party to rule alone in a minority government. As mentioned above, this appears to account for the unexpectedly greater number of formal arrangements in such councils, as single-party minority administrations are more likely to be formally constituted.

Table 4.5: Type of Government By Electoral Cycle

| Elect'l Cycle | Type of Auth'y | Single Party Admins | | Majority Coalitions | | Minority Coalitions | | No Admin | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------|------------------------|------|------------------------|-----|----------|------|
| | | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % | no. | % |
| Quad- rennial | district (n=18) | 6 | 25.0 | 7 | 47.2 | 2 | 8.3 | 3 | 19.4 |
| | county (n=18) | 3 | | 10 | | 1 | | 4 | |
| Annual | Met.d.c. (n=5) | 4 | 57.7 | 1 | 34.6 | - | - | - | 7.7 |
| | district (n=21) | 11 | | 8 | | - | | 2 | |
| Total | (n=62) | 24 | 38.7 | 26 | 41.9 | 3 | 4.8 | 9 | 14.5 |

It appears that politicians in councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle are far more likely to engage in coalition agreements (whether majority or minority coalitions) than their counterparts in councils electing their members by thirds. The reasons for this must be open to contention, but Mellors' assertion that 'durability' will be of greater importance when there is four years to wait for the next election must be a plausible explanation. However, this does not answer the question of why there are more four-yearly cycle authorities with no administration in place (19.4 percent) than is the case with councils holding yearly elections (7.7 percent). If there are forces pressing for durable agreements in councils with a four-yearly electoral cycle, one would expect the reverse to be true. It may be (and this is conjecture) that such pressure for agreement pushes together groups who are not ready for the compromise essential to coalition politics over a wide range of issues, and that such groups are incapable of sustaining agreements over such time periods; Devon provides a graphic example of the gradual falling out of two previously close parties, with the SLD and SDP accusing each other of wrecking the administration (see *Western Evening Herald*, 20/2/88, p.7).² On the other hand, the earlier explanation of an unwillingness to form an administration prior to the four-yearly elections seems a highly plausible one.

² Chapter Ten, section three, examines the break-up of the Alliance in detail.

There is, of course, no necessary requirement for parties in hung councils to enter into formal arrangements. Indeed, the history of British politics suggests that the major political parties, including the Liberals, might regard all forms of cooperation between parties with suspicion. As Bogdanor points out "party attitudes and preconceptions ... have [predisposed] parties against coalitions" (Bogdanor, 1983, p.7). Asquith and Lloyd George's Liberal / Conservative coalitions, Labour's memory of Ramsay MacDonald, and the Lib/Lab pact of Callaghan's faltering administration have undoubtedly coloured the perceptions of even present-day politicians towards coalition politics. In addition, British political culture, heavily influenced by the vested interests of the two major parties, has continually emphasised the 'importance' of one party control to 'effective' policy making. In such a climate, those coalitions which did form might tend to be informal, and the emphasis might well be upon single party minority administrations.

There are also good reasons for viewing minority administrations, not as an 'irrational' act by ill-informed politicians hostile to coalitions, but as the result of rational political behaviour. Strom argues that minority governments can be seen as the outcome of "rational party behaviour" (Strom, 1990, p.90-91), and this could offer a feasible explanation for the large number of minority administrations in English local authorities. It is certainly rational for local politicians to hesitate at forming coalitions with electoral rivals when hungness may be a temporary phenomenon (see Mellors, 1989, p.86 for support for this view). Even in councils holding quadrennial elections hungness could be seen as temporary, as by-elections are not uncommon at local level. Blowers notes that in a number of hung county councils "death, illness, or the resignation of members shifted the balance of power from one party to another" (Blowers, 1987, p.43), which may also inhibit rational actors from making deals which could rebound on them.³

It could be that actors will also hesitate to form a minority administration if they are unable to get some indication of at least tacit support from another party or parties. However, opponents might hesitate to 'bring down' an unsupported minority administration without offering a viable alternative as "the electorate is unlikely to look kindly upon those who perpetuate stalemate and chaos inside the council" (Mellors, 1989, p.86). Budge & Laver's "viability criterion" partly explains the success of minority governments by the failure of opposition parties to present a

³Interestingly, Blowers suggests by-elections will be even more common in hung councils as "the burden on councillors ... is intensified under the conditions of minority rule" leading to a higher rate of resignations than in non-hung councils (Blowers, 1987, p.43).

viable alternative (1986, p.488). Rational actors who recognise the unwillingness of some actors to enter coalitions can form a minority government and get at least some of their policy preferences adopted. Even if a party is reluctant to take power without a majority it "may perceive that as the best available alternative" (Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1986, p.13). If opposition parties are reluctant to take office when they cannot be sure of getting their policies enacted, they will probably be unlikely to want to bring down the ruling minority administration and run the risk of such 'irresponsibility' rebounding on them electorally. If this is the case, minority administrations may be more stable than some observers argue, a point addressed in Chapter Six, which examines administrative stability in hung councils.

Most research into hung councils supports the predominance of minority administrations (for example, Mellors 1983, Leach 1985, Carter 1986, Laver Rallings & Thrasher 1987, Leach & Stewart 1988). Indeed, in a few authorities, the provision that the party with the most seats forms the administration (regardless of whether it has a majority) is part of the council's standing orders (see Leach & Stewart, 1988, p. 43). Therefore, given the findings of previous researchers, it would be expected that single party minority administrations would be the most common type of administrative arrangement in hung councils. However, the findings of this research (as Table 4.5 has already indicated) are that such governments are no longer the most common form of administration in English local authorities. Section two will now examine the possible reasons for this change, and assess the research of previous writers in the light of this finding.

SECTION TWO: The Administrative Arrangements in Hung English Local Authorities

This section begins by listing the type of administrations forming in hung councils, and discusses the differing ways administrations in hung councils have been defined by observers and the consequent difficulty of comparison with previous studies. The relationship between 'formality' and type of administration is also investigated, with some unexpected findings. Finally, the area of 'office pay-offs' is examined, with the relationship between the allocation of committee chairs and 'coalition governments' receiving close scrutiny.

4.2.1. Current Administrative Types

According to the responses of chief executives, the arrangements which exist in the hung English local governments can be classified as follows:

- (i) a single minority party rules alone (38.7 percent)
- (ii) a majority coalition rules (41.9 percent)
- (iii) a minority coalition rules (4.8 percent)
- (iv) there is no administration and voting alliances are ad hoc (14.5 percent)

This largely supports the classification of hung authorities by Leach & Stewart (1988), although they further identified councils which were classified as 'knife-edge', in that one party has exactly half the council seats. In such situations, Mellors argues:

"it is unlikely that the opposition parties will attempt to form the administration of the authority, but rather will use their voting strength to win occasional policy concessions from the largest party" (Mellors, 1989, p.85).

There were four 'knife-edge' authorities in this survey. Three of these are classified in Table 4.5 (above) as single party minority administrations; in all three cases the party holding half the seats rules alone, lending support to Mellors' argument. The remaining 'knife-edge' authority is classified in Table 4.5 as a minority coalition. In that council, Labour had exactly half of the council seats (33), and the Conservatives (with 12 seats), Liberals (20 seats) and a solitary Independent had formed a coalition against the previous rulers of the council. This might appear to support the idea that Independents can be more closely identified with Conservatives than other parties, as a Labour/ Independent coalition could have held a majority. However, in two of the three single party minority administrations a Conservative/ Independent coalition could have ruled but did not; in the other a solitary SLD councillor could have helped minority rulers Labour to an overall majority. While there may have been policy payoffs to the single councillor in these three cases, the responses from group leaders all agreed with the assessments of the Chief Executives regarding the administrative arrangements, indicating that there was no such arrangement; political opponents would not be slow to point out such deviancy from the official administrative position. There may be considerable resentment by the two big parties at just one councillor holding the balance of power, a possible explanation for the lack of involvement of what in all three cases appears to be a plausible partner for the party ruling alone.

In their 1988 survey, Leach & Stewart also identified a minority coalition in Grampian. However, that minority coalition of SLD/Independent/SDP had the "tacit support" of the Labour party (Leach & Stewart, 1988, pp.38-40). If, following De

Swaan (1973) and Warwick (1979), we extend the coalition to include "parties who were committed, tacitly or openly, to maintaining the coalition in power" whether or not they took government office (Warwick, 1979, p.467), Grampian (which was not included in this survey) could be seen as a majority coalition. Also, Leach & Stewart argue that "the minority administration is the most common form of hung authority" (1988, p.39). This goes against the findings of this research, which indicates that majority coalitions are the most common form of administration in English hung local authorities.

Leach & Game (1989) presented a slightly modified version of Leach & Stewart's classification, identifying four major types of administration: (i) the formal coalition, (ii) a shared power administration with no commitment to shared policy objectives, (iii) the minority administration, and (iv) no administration (Leach & Game, 1989, pp.13-15). Again, they argued that minority administrations were the most common, although their research was confined to the county councils. As with Leach & Stewart, they included the idea of a minority administration with support from one or more parties. Leach & Game argue that "the extent of such support can range from something resembling an informal coalition ... to an initial agreement enabling one party to form an administration" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.14). The former case must surely be examined as a coalition and not as a minority administration, weakening their assertion that minority administrations are the most common form of administration.

However, Leach & Game's assessments of the administrative arrangements in county councils were made in September 1987, nine months before this survey asked chief executives to detail the current administrative arrangement. It may be that, even allowing for the differences of definition, minority governments were more common then. Indeed, when the 59 previous administrations in our sample are examined, minority administrations dominate; 35 (59.3 percent) of previous administrations are single party minority administrations, 19 (32.2 percent) are majority coalitions, 2 (3.4 percent) are minority coalitions, and in 3 cases (5.1 percent) there was no administration. This suggests that a 'learning process' appears to be taking place, and indicates that experience of hung government is necessary for successful coalition strategies.

The findings of this research suggest coalition arrangements, although not in the majority, are now the most usual form of administration. However, it must be reiterated that our definition of an administration is tied to the judgements of chief

executives. Their answer when they were asked which party or parties comprised the current administration was accepted as the 'administration'. This may tend to produce more 'coalition' administrations than the earlier studies cited, because an answer such as "Conservative, with Independent support", was treated as a 'coalition' administration. In other words, the findings of this research might be artefacts of the definition of an 'administration' we adopted. Chapter Three (see 3.1.2.) details the arguments for using the opinions of chief executives as the criterion for deciding the administration in place. It must be pointed out that the lack of commonly agreed definitions concerning administrative arrangements is a considerable barrier to comparison with previous studies. A common definition of terms such as "formal", "coalition", and "administration" is needed if future studies are not to face the same impediments to comparison, a problem the conclusion to this thesis examines.

Despite the caveat above, chief executives might be expected to think very carefully before categorising the administrative arrangements in their authority. While it must be remembered that "one politician's tacit support is another's formal coalition" (Rallings & Thrasher, 1986, p.12), and therefore one might expect much disagreement concerning the nature of administrative arrangements, group leaders generally supported their chief executives assessments. In 60 percent of local authorities, the politicians responding agreed completely with their chief executive. In a further 22 percent of local authorities, there were minor differences between political and bureaucratic actors, mostly involving one group leader disagreeing over the inclusion (or otherwise) of a minor actor. In only 18 percent of cases were there significant disagreements between politicians and chief executive over the nature of the administration. That said, some of those disagreements were striking. In two authorities, three different coalitions were claimed by the actors involved, indicating the difficulty of comparing this research with that of previous observers.

Some examples of cooperation will be in the form of fairly loose agreements, while other arrangements will be highly formalised. The degree of formality of the administrative types found by this survey will now be examined.

Administrations and Formality

Table 4.6 details the formality or otherwise of the various administrative arrangements, and as Table 4.4 has already indicated, shows that most coalitions are informal. All 3 minority coalitions are formally constituted, which might lend support to the idea offered earlier to explain the large proportion of single party minority administrations given formal recognition. That is, there may be a

reluctance to rule in such a precarious position without a degree of stability (however illusory) being afforded, in this case formal governmental status. This formality does not extend to the sharing of committee chairs in the 3 minority coalitions, where in only one case were chairs shared.

Table 4.6: Formality By Type of Administrative Arrangement

(table excludes those 9 local authorities where there is 'no administration')

| | Formal (n=28) | Informal (n=22) | No Info. re Formality |
|---------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Majority Coalition (n=26) | 7 (28.0%) | 18 (72.0%) | 1 |
| Minority Coalition (n=3) | 3 (100%) | - | - |
| Single Party Minority (n=24) | 18 (81.8%) | 4 (18.2%) | 2 |

Indeed, the use of 'formal' and 'informal' coalitions to describe the administrative arrangements appears to bear little relationship to an agreement or otherwise to share committee chairs and deputy chairs. In those authorities for which the information on chair distribution was available, 5 of 6 formal majority coalitions and 9 of 14 informal majority coalitions shared committee chairmanships. Given the small numbers involved, the slightly greater number of formal coalitions which shared chairs does not appear especially significant. Interestingly, in the 9 'no administration' councils there were 6 in which the chairs were known, and in all these the committee chairs were shared. This might demonstrate the difficulty of classifying administrative arrangements in hung councils; the difference between an 'informal coalition' and 'no administration' might not be apparent to even an informed observer.⁴ What the above findings do appear to show is that the thesis that committee chairs are not sought by local coalition actors (see Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987) needs to be re-examined, and this point will now be closely addressed.

⁴ Taking the subjective assessment of chief executives is not without problems, as this demonstrates. The difference between 'no administration', an 'informal coalition', and an 'all-party administration' will be in the eye of the beholder (see Chapter Five, section 5.2.8).

4.2.2. The Allocation of Pay-Offs In Hung Councils

It has been noted how difficult it can be to classify the administrative arrangements in hung councils. Differences of opinion between the actors involved are not uncommon, although there is usually general agreement. One of the major problems of categorising the administrations in hung councils is the difficulty of observing 'pay-offs' to coalition actors. Formally, there is no central policy making body in British local authorities, unlike at national level, where the Cabinet performs that function. The problem is not confined to British local government; as Thomas has pointed out in a study of sub-national coalitions in Denmark, the existence of a formal executive body at local level makes Denmark "unusual by West European standards" (Thomas, 1989, p.130). Of course, as Mellors points out:

"the formal position has not ... precluded the development of de facto executives in those authorities with well-established patterns of single-party majorities, but such practices have no legal standing and rely entirely on the existence of well-disciplined voting majorities in full council and council committees capable of delivering policies in accordance with the wishes of the majority party. In a hung council this is not the case and the constitutional situation reverts to its more formal nature" (Mellors, 1989, p.74).⁵

Prior to the Local Government Act (1989) introducing proportionality for committee membership, the policy and resources committee fulfilled the function of a 'cabinet' in many single party majority control councils. Widdicombe reported that 94 percent of all authorities had such an 'overall policy' committee, although the majority were not single-party (Widdicombe, 1986, Table A.31, p.277). However, as the case study of Devon in Chapter Ten demonstrates, 'secret' committees of chairman and chief officers meeting regularly are not unknown. Despite Mellors' observation, it would be naive to believe the ruling party/parties will not continue to have some informal group which will effectively function as a local 'cabinet'. For example, one chief executive of a hung council 'confidentially' reported the existence of 'mini-groups' of chairs meeting to discuss strategy before committee meetings.

Mellors makes a significant observation for students of coalition behaviour, pointing out that the existence of a 'cabinet' in most European democracies has encouraged both actors and observers to consider the formation of a coalition and the distribution of portfolios as the definition of coalition activity. After the "distribution of the spoils of office" there is a period of "coalition inactivity" until either the collapse of the coalition or a new election restarts the process. As Mellors observes, "inevitably

⁵ Stewart (1986, p.137) makes the same point.

... we have come to regard coalitions as *acts* or *outcomes* rather than *processes*" (Mellors, 1989, pp.74-75, emphases in original).⁶ Mellors argues that, with the absence of an executive body, "coalitional activity tends to be a more complex and protracted process" (1989, p.75). Coalition theory's concentration on coalition formation rather than coalition maintenance might therefore render much formal theory inappropriate for a study of English local coalitions.⁷

The lack of a formal 'cabinet' in British local government poses serious problems for coalition theories which concentrate on an 'office-seeking' perspective to coalition formation. The majority of studies (see Mellors, 1989, pp. 97-103 for an account of these) have looked for payoffs to actors in the form of committee chairs, and, as is discussed in the following section, have generally failed to find much evidence of this.⁸ The importance of readily observable rewards for coalition participants is not just that it enables theorists to test their hypotheses more easily; it also has important effects on the deals that will be struck by actors. As Laver & Shepsle argue, in the case of cabinet rather than legislative coalitions:

"portfolio allocation becomes the mechanism by which prospective coalitions make credible promises and so inform the expectations of rational agents in the coalition formation process" (Laver & Shepsle, 1990, p.873).

4.2.3. The Effects of Hungness on the Distribution of Committee Chairs

Without the possibility of 'portfolio allocation' in a cabinet setting, it might be thought that local coalition actors would seek office payoffs in the form of committee chairs and deputy chairs. As Mellors points out, such positions are probably "the closest approximation in local government to ministerial portfolios" (Mellors,

⁶ Laver & Shepsle (1990) agree that a weakness of formal coalition theory has been that not enough attention is paid to what happens after the formation of a government, and argue that "rational expectations" of what will happen after the formation process is completed will actually influence "the formation process itself" (Laver & Shepsle, 1990, p.873).

⁷ It must be pointed out that a number of recent studies have attempted to redress the concentration on formation, notably Budge & Keman's (1990) study of coalition formation in twenty states, which also examined the functioning of government and the causes of government terminations.

⁸ Given that committee membership is quite commonly awarded on a proportional basis in non-hung councils (see Mellors, 1989, p.103) the award of committee places is not commonly cited as evidence of payoffs although it can be "an important objective for Liberals" (Mellors, 1989, p.103). Anyway, the introduction of new regulations enforcing proportionality in committees (in the Local Government Act, 1989) means that parties must now be given committee places in accordance with their council membership, and makes it impossible in future to consider committee membership as a possible reward for participation in a local coalition, although this legislation was not in place when this research took place during the Summer of 1988.

1989, p.80). In majority control councils such chairmanships carry considerable power and prestige. It is argued that this changes when a council becomes hung, with the status of chairmanships becoming significantly reduced. Indeed, one chief executive responding to this survey claimed one of the advantages of becoming hung was that it acted as "a useful break on the well known syndrome of chairmen thinking they are ministers". If this is so, actors are unlikely to seek rewards in the form of committee chairs. Mellors goes so far as to maintain that the relatively low prestige and power of committee chairs and deputy chairs "suggests that office-seeking should not be a prime motivation for party groups in hung councils" (1989, p.98).

Mellors' assertion is supported by many observers of hung councils. Only a quarter (12 of 48) of the hung councils examined by Laver, Rallings & Thrasher (1987) had shared administrations, in the sense that chairs were allocated to more than one party. In the other three-quarters of councils one party, usually (but not always) the largest party, took all the chairs and deputy chairs (1987, p.10). Leach & Stewart reported even fewer shared administrations; in their sample only 8 of 103 hung councils had administrations which shared committee chairs. However, it must be pointed out that over a quarter (27 percent) of their sample were classified as 'low partisanship' councils, and that in those councils sharing of committee chairs did take place (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.40).

Whatever, it appears from the authoritative study of Laver, Rallings and Thrasher (1987) that committee chairs do not constitute a bargaining point for the great majority of actors. The large majority of councils have one party taking all the chairs and vice-chairs. One would expect to find that the absence of a formal cabinet would imply that, whatever the type of hung administration which is formed, one party will tend to take all the chairs and deputy chairs. Accordingly it is proposed that:

1.5: HUNG COUNCILS WILL TEND TO GENERATE ADMINISTRATIONS IN WHICH A SINGLE PARTY TAKES ALL COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND DEPUTY CHAIRS.

Chief executives in hung and non-hung councils were asked to detail (where applicable) the party which held the chair and deputy chair on the following committees: policy and resources, education, social services, housing, planning, highways, transport, and finance. In the single party majority control councils comprising the control group for this survey there was no deviation from the principle that the majority party took all the chairs and vice-chairs. However, the

replies from chief executives in hung councils shown in Table 4.7 (below) are at odds with those of earlier studies.

While there are still a majority of authorities in which one party takes all the chairs (53.7 percent), there are a substantial minority of authorities (40.7 percent) in which chairs are shared. The difference between these findings and earlier research can probably be best explained by the passage of time. Experience of hungness is essential to making the hung situation work. It would be more surprising if this research had shown a decrease in authorities sharing chairs compared to the Laver, Rallings and Thrasher survey (carried out in 1986); many of the same councils were included in this survey.

Table 4.7: Chair Arrangements By Type of Administration

| Chair Arrangements | Type of Administration | | | Total (n=62) |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| | Coalition (n=29) | Single Party (n=24) | No Admin (n=9) | |
| Shared Chairs | 65.2% | 4.2% | 66.7% | 40.7% |
| No Sharing* | 34.8 | 95.8% | - | 53.7% |
| No Chairs | - | - | 33.3% | 5.65 |

*In all cases, one party (not necessarily the largest) took all the chairs.

(n.b tables excludes 'no response')

However, whether this reveals that committee chairs should therefore be considered as rewards for office-seeking actors is another matter. It may merely be a recognition that it saves a great deal of committee time to have permanent chairs and deputy chairs and that parties cooperating in a legislative sense should be prepared to cooperate administratively. If this were the case, the allocation of chairs would not be seen as a 'reward' for participation in the coalition, but more as a 'duty' for the ruling group.

The Allocation of Chairs in Minority Control Administrations

What might be distressing to those who advocate the more cooperative nature of hung councils is that only one of the parties ruling alone has chosen to share chairs. A closer examination reveals that this apparent case of cooperation may be misleading. While the chief executive for this district council replied that an SLD administration ruled, the only response from a group leader (Conservative) identified the administration as a Conservative/SLD administration. As the chairs were shared

between these two parties (with the Liberals, with more seats, taking the majority of chairs) the chief executive appears to have been mistaken in his assessment of the administrative arrangements.

In the remaining 21 cases of minority administrations where one party takes all the chairs, that party is also the largest single party on the council. This supports the observations of previous observers such as Leach & Stewart (1988) and Laver, Rallings & Thrasher (1987), although both also found a small number of cases where the group taking all the chairs was not the largest group in the council.

The Allocation of Chairs in Coalition Administrations

Within coalition administrations, while in 15 (65.2 percent) of such cases chairs were shared, in one of these cases chairs were also shared with a party from outside the coalition. Why this should be so is unclear. It may signify a belief that, as Mellors argues (1989, p.80), these positions carry low prestige and are not worth bargaining over. The 'real bargaining' may be occurring over policy issues, and which party is allowed to take the chair may be considered unimportant. However, in this instance an alternative explanation might be advanced. The coalition administration in place was unusual, in that 3 of the 4 partners were 'independent' groupings; the groups involved were Conservative/ Independent/ Independent Labour/ Ratepayers. It appears plausible that Ratepayers groups and Independents (and perhaps Independent Labourites) will see themselves as less partisan than the major political groupings, which could weaken the pressure for conserving benefits to the coalition partners.

Perhaps more significantly, in a third of the 15 cases of coalition government where chairs were shared, one of the major coalition partners did not take any of the committee chairs or vice-chairs. (While these coalition partners may have held other committee chairs whose composition this survey did not elicit, the committees whose composition was requested are generally seen as the most important.) A possible explanation for this lack of participation is that some parties will be reluctant to extend legislative cooperation into 'taking office'. As previously argued, many parties are reluctant to become too closely identified with either another party or with certain administrative arrangements. However, in 3 of these 5 cases the party not taking chairs was the SLD (Labour and Conservatives declined chairs in one case each), which is surprising, given their generally more positive approach to coalition participation (for example, see Leach & Game, 1989, p.29). Of course, such non-participation may be for one of the reasons advanced to explain the taking

of chairs by non-coalition members; if the groups concerned do not see chairs as worth holding, it does not matter who holds these positions. The rewards of coalition membership may be seen as influencing policy, rather than holding relatively unimportant offices (but see below).

In the coalition administrations identified, in 9 cases one party took all the chairs. Unlike single party minority control administrations, it is not always the largest member of the coalition which takes all the chairs. In 4 cases this is so, but in the remaining 5 cases a 'junior partner' in the coalition took all the chairs. It is difficult to give convincing reasons for this rejection of office by the larger party, although the reason given previously could be advanced. That is, these positions are relatively unimportant in hung councils and it does not matter who takes the chairs.

Some evidence for the relative unimportance of office is offered by Table 4.8 below, which details the response of group leaders to the question of whether office or policy was the main motivating force in the negotiating process. Quite clearly, policy payoffs are seen as far more important by political actors in hung councils. Only 17.2 percent see office as the major goal, compared to nearly half who cite policy payoffs as the dominant factor in the negotiating process. Nearly a quarter (23.2 percent) of group leaders replied that they would not negotiate with other groups; unless this was for public consumption, this effectively disbarred them from office, as even a single party minority administration must come to some agreement with other groups to remain in office.⁹

Table 4.8: Relative Importance of Policy and Office

response of group leaders, n=117 (n.b. table excludes 'no response')

| Policy Most Important | Policy Greater Importance | Equal Importance | Office Greater Importance | Office Most Important | Not Willing To Negotiate |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 39.4% | 10.1% | 10.1% | 9.1% | 8.1% | 23.2% |

Despite the finding that policy payoffs are rated considerably higher by politicians than office, when the responses of those group leaders who are actually participating in government are considered (a total of 56 responses), a slightly different picture

⁹The majority of these respondents were 'former rulers', and the motivations of traditional rulers are considered in more detail during the following chapter.

emerges. When asked where the benefits of participating in government had occurred, 37.5 percent said from policy payoffs and 14.3 percent from holding office, while 10.7 percent said they had received no benefits from participation. However, a further 37.5 percent replied that the benefits of participation had been reaped equally from office and policy, an indication that, despite the apparently low expectations of the importance of office, at least half of those participating in government saw real value in holding committee chairs. An Independent group leader argued that holding the chair was important "in that it enables minority parties to gain experience of holding office".

It certainly appears that office-seeking and policy-pursuit approaches need to be considered as what Budge & Keman have called "complementary bases" for explaining the behaviour of political parties in government, and the greater importance of policy (yet with a recognition of the importance of office) tends to support their conclusion that, in general, office is sought as a a basis for attaining policy goals rather than policy being subordinated to office (Budge & Keman, 1990, pp.26-31).

The experience of holding office appears to show some participants the importance of holding office in achieving policy objectives. The importance of experience in coalition politics cannot be over-emphasised; it appears logical to assume that actors need time to learn the correct strategies to pursue. If so, it also appears likely that the passage of time will affect the forms of administrations which occur at local level. In the great majority of cases local politicians have been thrown into a situation totally outside their political knowledge, and will probably take some time to adjust to the new situation; the ramifications of this will now be considered.

4.2.4. The Passage of Time and Administrative Arrangements

While 'time' is not strictly speaking a 'structural' or 'institutional' influence, and might perhaps be seen more correctly as a contextual variable, its passage is certainly beyond the control of even the most devious politician. The importance of time, in the sense of supplying politicians with knowledge of the conditions under which they are operating, has been recognised by many observers of coalition activity (for example, Hinkley, 1976, Pridham, 1984). Whilst it might seem plausible that the longer an authority is hung the more likely formal majority coalitions will occur, some observers have argued that the opposite might be true, as minority government can appear to become an accepted and established feature to

actors (for example, see Blowers, 1987).¹⁰ However, a number of observers have argued that while the largest party may be initially reluctant to bargain, they will modify their strategies if faced with a continuous exclusion from office (for example, see Leach & Game, 1989, Mellors, 1983). If this is the case, it might appear that more formal arrangements will be likely to emerge in long term hung councils.

Rallings & Thrasher (1986) reported that from their examination of hung councils, including a large number which had only recently become hung, it was clear that:

"most local politicians have been schooled in the art of two-party politics and are both inexperienced and, perhaps, antagonistic, towards the idea of having to make pacts with those traditionally regarded as the opposition" (Rallings & Thrasher, 1986, p.12).

Leach & Game note the frustration felt by parties at sustaining this "oppositional role" (1989, p.35) and, in support of Mellors (1983) argue that over time there is a "tendency for ... political parties ...[to]... accept the necessity for a degree of inter party collaboration" (1989, p.57). There is a tendency for minority administrations of whatever party, according to Leach & Game, to be "gradually, over time ... replaced by administrations in which no one party plays a leading role" (1989, p.24). The decline in the number of minority administrations ruling in our sample, reported in Section Two, might also hint at a propensity for more coalition to emerge over time, although it must be noted that many of those previous minority administrations were in 'short-term' hung councils; therefore, the increase in coalitions is not necessarily related to the passage of a considerable period of time.

However, given the general belief among observers of hung English councils on the relationship between the passage of time and more extensive co-operation, and supported by the generally accepted idea in coalition studies that knowledge of coalition situations is necessary for formal arrangements to last, it is proposed that:

1.6: FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IN LONG-TERM HUNG COUNCILS.

1.7: COALITIONS ARE MORE LIKELY TO FORM IN LONG-TERM HUNG COUNCILS.

¹⁰It may, of course, be the case that the longer the council stays hung the more the actors involved grow to dislike each other, effectively precluding coalitions from forming.

Although, as shown in Table 4.9 (below), there are more formal arrangements in long-term hung councils than in short-term hung councils,¹¹ the difference is slight. As previously discussed, in many of these councils four yearly elections were looming, and it might be that there is an unwillingness to grant any administration a degree of formality prior to such important elections (see Strom, 1988, p.929). This appears to offer a reasonable explanation for the relative failure of hypothesis 1.6.

Table 4.9: Formality By Length of Time Hung

| Time Hung | Formal Administration | Informal Administration |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Short Term (n=36) | 53.3% | 46.7% |
| Long Term (n=26) | 60.0% | 40.0% |

response of chief executives (n.b. table excludes 'no response')

Table 4.10: Type of Administration By Time Hung

| Time Hung | Single Party Administration | Coalition Administration | No Administration |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Short term (n=36) | 36.1% | 50.0% | 13.9% |
| Long term (n=26) | 42.3% | 42.3% | 15.4% |

response of chief executives (n.b. table excludes 'no response')

As Table 4.10 indicates, the expectation of Hypothesis 1.7 appears to have been confounded. Contrary to the findings of, for example, Leach & Game, there are fewer coalition arrangements in long-term hung councils than in short-term hung councils. This also fails to support the explanation, given in section two, for the greater number of coalition administrations now than previously in our sample of hung authorities. If a 'learning process' was taking place then long-term hung councils should have more coalition administrations than short-term administrations. Convincing reasons for this unexpected state of affairs are difficult to put forward. It might be that elections are disrupting the 'learning process'. On the other hand, knowledge of the processes involved in guiding policy through a hung council (which must surely increase with time) may outweigh the need for open

¹¹ Short term is defined as less than 3 years, while 'long term' is defined as more than 3 years. The reason for adopting this time period is because all councils hung for 3 years or more had completed at least one electoral cycle. It was also the only measure that gave a reasonably sized group of long term hung councils.

agreements with other parties. Provided the policy preferences of the party or parties required are kept in mind when the single party administration is formulating policy, there may be no need for formal coalition arrangements to be made. The growth in single party administrations the longer a council is hung and the finding already reported of a link between formality and single party administrations (see Table 4.4) appears to explain the greater number of formal arrangements in long term hung councils.

It appears that the passage of time is not a significant factor in the type of administrations which form. However, many observers have posited a crucial role for another variable. Mellors, amongst others, has pointed out that the "arithmetic of the power balance ... is likely to influence the perceptions and, therefore, the behaviour of parties" (Mellors, 1989, p.85). The final section of this chapter will therefore examine some numerical aspects which previous researchers have suggested might affect the types of administrations forming in hung political systems.

SECTION THREE: The Effects of Arithmetic on Administrative Arrangements

The precise distribution of council seats between the parties on the council is vital to coalition formation for a number of reasons. Although the concept of the 'minimum winning coalition' has undergone numerous revisions since Riker's first formulation (1962), it is still an important factor in coalition theory. However, the specific predictions of coalition formation posited by coalition theorists will be examined in Chapter Nine; this section of Chapter Four will examine both less specific theoretical ideas about the type of administration which will form, and the propositions put forward by previous observers of hung British councils. Firstly, the possible effects of the balance of seats on the administrative arrangements prevailing in hung councils will be examined. For example, it seems plausible that when one party is close to a majority it will feel it has a right to rule, which may mean more single party minority administrations will form in such councils. Secondly, the number of 'effective' parties in the system might also be an influence on the type of administrations which form. This section assesses the impact of this variable, using a measure of 'party system fractionalization'. We begin with an examination of the effect the 'balance of power' might have on the type of administration forming.

4.3.1. The Balance of Power and Administrative Formation

The distribution of seats between various groups will largely determine the coalitions capable of forming. In addition, political actors will adopt differing strategies according to the way in which seats are distributed. Although it must be remembered that "the numerical aspect should not be considered in isolation" and, whatever the difficulties of assessment, the interaction "between the numerical and the political" must be considered (Pridham, 1989, p.217), it appears reasonable to assume that when one party is close to an overall majority (which is treated here as 45 percent or more of the council seats) it may regard itself as having a moral right to form an administration (for support for this view see Mellors, 1989, p.85). However, Pridham's caveat must be borne in mind when considering possible administrative outcomes. If, for example, the largest party previously ruled alone as a majority ruler, opponents could plausibly maintain the electorate had rejected them and that defeated former rulers should not be allowed to carry on ruling in a single party minority administration.¹²

The situation is further complicated when two of the party groups are both close to an overall majority, a situation which occurs in 5 of the authorities in this survey. As Mellors points out, "in coalition terms, the minor parties here are 'pivotal parties' holding the key to a majority", and argues that the main parties will be reluctant to enter into deals with a party who could be seen as "spoilers" (Mellors, 1989, pp. 85-86). Mellors assumes that the main parties in such a situation are Conservative and Labour, which is the case in 4 of our 5 instances; in the other case both Conservatives and SLD are close to a majority. It does appear plausible, given the general distrust of coalitions often displayed by both Conservatives and Labour at national and local level, that in such cases one of the big parties will allow the other to rule alone rather than allowing a small third party to exercise influence. However, this was not the case in these 5 authorities; although in 2 cases one of the big parties did rule alone, in the other 3 cases a coalition administration ruled.

Perhaps this is not surprising. When two parties are both close to an overall majority it will be difficult for either of them to argue they have a 'moral right' to rule. However, despite the caveats, it is much easier in councils with a dominant group for that party to claim that it has either a mandate from the electorate or the best chance of providing stable government. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

¹² Carter, 1986, noted this perception in his study of three South West county councils, and the proposition is tested in the following chapter. This feeling was universal amongst former opposition parties in Devon, as Chapter Nine's case study details.

1.8: SINGLE PARTY ADMINISTRATIONS WILL BE MORE COMMON IN COUNCILS WHERE ONE PARTY IS CLOSE TO AN OVERALL MAJORITY.

Additionally, given the proposition that in councils where one party is close to an overall majority it will attempt to form a single party minority administration, it can also be hypothesised that:

1.9: COALITION ARRANGEMENTS WILL BE MORE LIKELY IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES WHERE NONE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IS CLOSE TO AN OVERALL MAJORITY.

Table 4.11 (below) details three arithmetical situations; as well as the two already mentioned, it also looks at the administrative arrangements prevailing in authorities where there are three substantial political groups, in terms of all having at least a fifth of council seats (a criteria used by Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.52). The five councils where two parties are both close to a majority, discussed above, are not included in the councils classified as having one party close to a majority. Table 4.11 demonstrates that both hypothesis 1.8 and hypothesis 1.9 appear to be supported by the evidence. Single party administrations are more common in councils where one or more parties is close to an overall majority. In councils where no party is close to a majority coalition arrangements account for nearly 60 percent of all administrations, indicating that parties may feel a greater necessity to bargain in such circumstances.

Table 4.11: Type of Administration By Distribution of Council Seats

| Type of Administration | One Party Close To A Majority (n=33) | No Party Close To A Majority (n=24) | Three Parties With More Than 20% of Seats (n=17) |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Single Party Admin | 45.5% | 29.2% | 29.4% |
| Coalition Admin | 36.4% | 58.3% | 41.2% |
| No Administration | 18.2% | 12.5% | 29.4% |

Interestingly, when those councils in which three parties all have over 20 percent of the seats (which includes councils from both of the other categories) are examined, there is a greater likelihood of no administration being in place; the remaining administrations are also far more likely to be formally constituted than administrations in the other two categories. Leach & Game argue that where three parties all have a significant percentage, the balance of power is less likely to be

seen as "unfair" or "illegitimate" (1989, p.12). This may account for the greater number of formal arrangements in such situations, two-thirds of administrations in this category being formally constituted compared to just over half in the other two categories.

The nature of the distribution of seats between parties is not the only numerical factor which has been seen to affect the type of administrative arrangements which occur in hung legislatures. Closely related to the distribution of seats is the 'fractionalization' of the party system and the number of parties in the political system, and these factors will now be examined.

4.3.2. The Relationship Between Party System Fractionalization and Administrative Formation

The relationship which theorists have generally posited between the number of parties and the type of administrations forming is not a simple one. While, traditionally, it is assumed that multi-party systems make it more difficult to form coalitions (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.147), the relationship is generally expressed in terms of the 'effective' or 'significant' number of parties in the system, and some measure of 'fragmentation' or 'fractionalization' of the party system is usually adopted (see Strom, 1990, p.13). As Rae's (1967) seminal work on the impact of electoral laws on a country's politics points out, the question of the extent to which competitive strength is distributed among parties cannot be answered without a measure of fractionalization, a concept which cannot be equated with the number of parties in a system. As Rae notes:

"the idea of fractionalization resolves itself into two lesser concepts: (1) the number of party shares, and (2) the relative equality of these shares. A non-fractionalised system has only one share, and that share contains the whole pool of competitive power; this is the 'one-party system', which entails no competitive relationships. Its concrete analog is a whole apple. *A highly fractionalized system has a great many shares of about equal magnitude so that no one of them contains a very large share of the total pool of strength* (i.e. votes). This corresponds to an extreme case of 'multi-partism', with, say, ten parties each polling about one tenth of the total vote. Its concrete analog is an apple which has been sliced into ten equal pieces, no one of which is anything like the size of the original apple. Fractionalization varies by degrees, between the whole apple and ready ingredients of an apple pie. Fractionalization means division into many parts, and all the actual party systems are fractionalized to some degree." (Rae. 1967, pp.53-54. emphasis in original)

Rae's description concerns the fractionalization of vote shares, but we are not concerned here with the relationship between vote share and the number of parties.

It is the relationship between legislative seat share and number of parties which concerns this study, and Rae provides a measure which is "exactly parallel - both conceptually and computationally - to the fractionalization of elective party systems" (Rae, 1967, p.62). Rae's measure of fractionalization in parliamentary systems (F_p), is expressed mathematically as:

$$F_p = 1 - \left(\sum_{i=2}^n S_i \right)$$

where S_i equals the percentage of seats in the legislature. The more parties, and the more evenly the distribution of legislative seats between them, the more fractionalised the legislature is; the closer the index is to 1, the more fractionalised the party system. In a hung system, the smallest index of system fractionalization is 0.5, where two parties both have 50 percent of the legislative seats. Rae's 'index of fractionalization' will be used in this assessment of the effects of fractionalization on administrative arrangements. This is not to deny the importance of other approaches, which will now be examined.

Fractionalisation is seen as an important contributory factor to uncertainty, and hence a contributory factor to both minority administrations and over-sized coalitions forming (see, for example, Dodd, 1976; Sartori, 1976; Schofield, 1985). However, it is not the only measure of the "significant number of parties", and the use of related, but different, criteria by researchers means there can be difficulty in comparing the results of different researchers.

For example, Budge & Keman (1990) use the term "fragmentation", and argue that:

"as fragmentation increases, in the sense that the number of significant parties goes up, surplus coalitions alternate in increasing numbers with minority governments. This alternation can be interpreted as a reaction to the confusion and uncertainty inherent in dealing with too many independent actors, and consequent difficulties in calculating how many are needed for the coalition" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.15, my emphasis).

Unfortunately, Budge & Keman offer no definition of what constitutes a "significant number of parties". Laver & Schofield (1990) use a slightly different measure of party system bipolarity, based on Laasko & Taagepura's measure of the "effective number of parties in a system" (Laasko & Taagepura, 1979, p.5), classifying their systems as 'unipolar', 'bipolar' or 'multipolar' "according to the pattern of one-

dimensional coalition bargaining that they appear to exhibit" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.113).¹³

Rae's 'index of fractionalization' is a simple yet relatively sophisticated measure, widely utilised by students of coalitional behaviour (see Dodd, 1976; Sartori, 1976; Strom, 1990). Unlike the other measures discussed it needs no subjective assessments of the party system in question. Given the diversity of systems in English local government, and the 62 local authorities in this sample where judgements would have to be made, this is a very good reason for adopting this measure. However, the differences of definition between studies needs to be kept in mind.

4.3.3. Minority Governments and Over-Sized Coalitions

While this research has failed to find any convincing evidence of the alternation between minority governments and surplus coalitions identified by Budge & Keman (whether using the number of parties or the level of fractionalization in the system), there is (as already noted) support for the idea of a connection between party system fractionalisation and certain types of administration. Strom (1984) argues that minority governments are associated with a high degree of fractionalisation (1984, p.220), and Laver & Schofield note that in 'multipolar' systems (which have a large number of 'significant' parties) "conventional norms of political behaviour will be less likely to emerge" (1990, p.137) especially when there is more than one salient policy dimension. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

1.10: THE GREATER THE FRACTIONALIZATION OF A LEGISLATURE, THE MORE LIKELY THAT MINORITY GOVERNMENTS WILL FORM.

Another connection between fractionalization and administrative formation can also be proposed. Laver & Schofield's observation (above) might mean that surplus majority coalitions are more likely to form in highly fractionalized party systems. As Chapter One describes, over-sized coalitions have often been seen as an irrational response to hungness (see Sartori, 1976, p.178) and early coalition theories (with their emphasis on minimising office pay-offs) were unable to account either for them or minority governments. Uncertainty could be much greater in highly fractionalized systems with "too many independent actors" (Budge & Keman, 1990,

¹³The term 'polarisation' is, as Strom (1990) notes, often subject to misunderstanding. He uses the term to refer to the "overall ideological distance" between relevant parties, and while he admits that it is "far from obvious to operationalize this concept, it is clearly distinct from a second prevalent conception of polarisation as the extent of party system bipolarity" (Strom, 1990, fn, p.13).

p.15) and politicians may build larger than needed coalitions in order to be sure of a legislative majority. Dodd (1976) makes just this point, arguing that "high fractionalization contributes to information uncertainty" which will lead to both minority and over-sized governments (Dodd, 1976, p.64). This tendency may be more pronounced in English local government which, despite increasing politicisation, still has a greater number of "independent actors" than most national legislatures in Western Europe (Bogdanor, 1983). Therefore, it is proposed that:

1.11: THE GREATER THE FRACTIONALIZATION OF A LEGISLATURE, THE MORE COALITIONS WILL BE OVER-SIZED.

The findings of this research support the suggestion of a relationship between the level of fractionalisation and the type of administration which forms in hung councils. However, the relationship posited by hypothesis 1.10 does not hold. Table 4.12 shows that the systems in which minority governments form are the *least* fractionalized of the four categories listed, although in the two biggest categories the differences are so small that the level of fractionalization seems to make no effective difference to whether minority administrations or majority coalitions form.

Table 4.12: Type of Administration By Level of Party System Fractionalization

(number of councils=62; number of administrations=121)

| Type of Administration | Mean Fractionalization |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Single Party Minority (n=59) | 0.63 |
| Majority Coalition (n=37) | 0.64 |
| No Administration (n=12) | 0.67 |
| Under and Over Sized Coalition (n=13) | 0.67 |

(Fractionalisation: high=0.79, low=0.52. Mean fractionalization of whole sample=0.64)

Low levels of party system fractionalization are associated (generally) with at least one party holding the majority of seats, regardless of the number of parties in the system. The more one party controls the system, whether the system is hung or not, the lower the level of system fractionalization (see Rae, 1967, pp. 47-64, for a full discussion). Table 4.11 (above) has already shown that where one or more parties is close to a majority, single party minority administrations are more common. Therefore, it is not surprising that the results shown in Table 4.12 support this,

and the reasons are probably the same as those advanced above; a party close to an overall majority will feel it has a 'right to rule'.

Hypothesis 1.11 suggests that over-sized coalitions are associated with a high degree of system fractionalization. Table 4.12 lists both under and over sized coalitions and indicates that system fractionalization is associated with these departures from minimal winning status. However, when that variable is broken down, it appears that minority coalitions are not associated with high system fractionalization. The 4 minority coalitions in this sample occurred in councils with a mean fractionalization index of just 0.62, although the small size of this sub-group makes a positive conclusion difficult. Accordingly, there is a high level of party system fractionalization when just over-sized coalition administrations are examined. In those 9 cases, the mean system fractionalization is 0.69, by far the highest level for any type of administration; two of the surplus majority coalitions occurred in the council with the highest level of party system fractionalization (0.79). Therefore, it seems that hypothesis 1.11 is strongly supported, with highly fractionalized systems tending to generate more surplus majority coalitions.

Finally, supporting Rae's point that fractionalization and party system size are by no means the same thing, the number of parties in the system appeared to make little difference to the type of administration that formed, beyond the obvious fact that multi-party systems produced more oversized coalitions than four-party systems.

Conclusions

A number of possible influences on administrative formation have been examined, and some inferences about their effect on local government coalition building can be drawn, although the difficulty of isolating cause and effect must be acknowledged. While the findings of previous observers are generally supported, albeit often with an allowance for the effects of the passage of time, there are results which indicate that previous research findings might need to be modified or that events have changed.

Perhaps the most interesting finding was that majority coalitions are now the most common form of administration in hung councils.¹⁴ When *minority* coalitions are included, nearly half of current hung councils (46.7 percent) are ruled by a coalition, which is against the findings of previous observers, who found a

¹⁴ Again, the caveat that this may be partly a reflection of the definitions adopted must be made.

propensity for single party minority administrations to form in hung councils. The most plausible explanation for this difference might appear to be that experience of hungness has increased the willingness of parties to bargain, as well as increasing their skill in the complicated process of coalition negotiations. There is evidence both for and against this proposition. The majority of *previous* administrations since becoming hung were indeed minority administrations, which does suggest a successful learning process towards cooperation. Despite the plausibility of this explanation, this research has discovered long term hung councils are less likely to be run by coalitions, which suggests the reason initially proffered is inadequate.

That said, administrative arrangements in long term hung councils are more likely to be formalised, which does suggest a growing awareness that some degree of administrative stability is desirable. It helps any organisation to know that policy makers are not likely to be summarily removed from office. Of course, it might appear easier to come to some agreement when there is only a year to go before a possible change of political control, which could certainly explain the greater formality of administrations in councils electing by thirds. Even when a local authority has been hung for a number of years, if the political situation is capable of changing within a year because of elections, parties will probably be reluctant to enter coalitions. However long a council has been hung, politicians are politicians, and the scent of possible victory at forthcoming polls will certainly influence their strategy.

Such pragmatism may also offer the best explanation for the frequency of one year agreements concerning administrative arrangements. That is, local politicians will agree arrangements which, while mirroring the needs of the council (in that the budgetary cycle is yearly), go on for no longer than absolutely necessary. A clear indication is given, both to internal council factors and the voting public, that this arrangement is strictly for one year and carries no hint of any long term arrangement which might too closely link different party groups.

Whether coalitions form or not appears to be related more to the electoral cycle than to the need for time to pass and enable actors to gain the necessary knowledge. As previous observers have implied, coalitions are more likely to form in local authorities with a quadrennial electoral cycle. The need to construct more stable arrangements when a council is going to be hung for a fixed number of years offers a reasonable explanation for the greater number of coalition administrations in such

councils. The electoral cycle is not the only factor which appears to influence the type of administrations forming.

There appears to be a connection between the political balance in the council and administrative arrangements. It certainly appears as if parties are more prepared to deal with rivals when no 'near-winner' emerges, and less likely to attempt to rule alone in such situations; nearly three-fifths of administrations in councils where no party was close to an overall majority were coalitions, and where three parties all had a significant number of seats coalitions were also more likely than other forms of administration. When one party was close to an overall majority, it was more likely to attempt to rule alone (perhaps waiting for a by-election to enable it to regain sole control?).

The level of party system fractionalization also seems to influence the type of administration forming, although the more simple measure of the number of parties in the system appears to make very little difference. While it appears clear that over-sized coalitions, as expected, were more likely to form in councils with a high index of system fractionalization, other expectations were confounded. Although coalitions were more likely to form in systems with 'high' fractionalization, the differences were not striking. More strikingly, contrary to most expectations, both single party and coalition minority governments tended to form in systems with low levels of fractionalization. Despite being the largest single group, single party minority governments had a mean system fractionalization value below the average, which appears a fairly conclusive indication that other explanations for minority governments forming must be sought.

Finally, a point of real significance to formal coalition theory can also be made. Contrary to the findings of previous observers, committee chairs do appear to be valued by local politicians, and this research shows most actors in a coalition will accept them; two-thirds of all coalition administrations shared chairs. While policy payoffs were initially seen as of paramount importance and office appeared to be of minor significance, those participating in government, while still seeing policy benefits as greater, were far more likely to see benefits in holding committee chairs. At the very least, possession of the chair gives an astute operator the ability to structure and guide debate, and the title of 'Chairman' still carries great weight in local government circles. For coalition theorists, the greater importance of policy, while recognising the significance of holding office, supports the idea that policy-

pursuit and office-seeking approaches need to be integrated but that, in general, office is sought by politicians in order to attain policy goals.

An examination of possible influences on the types of administration forming has produced a number of insights. However, it must always be remembered that politicians are, as previously observed, "more than just institution-bound actors" (Pridham, 1987, p.380), and there will be numerous influences unaffected by institutional, structural, or local factors. The strategies political parties adopt will, almost always, be paramount in deciding the political arrangements existing, and the following chapter will closely examine party political strategies, and the factors which affect their tactics, in hung councils in England.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARTY STRATEGIES AND COALITION FORMATION

Introduction

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Conclusions

Introduction

The preceding chapter examined a number of areas which could be influencing political strategies. It appears that certain institutional considerations do influence the nature of the administrations forming; for example, coalitions are more likely to form in councils which hold elections every four years. However, while such constraints will undoubtedly influence politicians in their willingness to negotiate, they may be less likely to influence the composition of the coalitions which actually form. To utilise Pridham's and Mellors' dimensions, it appears intuitively likely that historical, motivational, vertical / horizontal, party-internal, socio-political, and certain external factors (such as a 'local crisis') will have a far greater effect on the deals made between political parties, or even whether deals are made at all, than, for example, the local electoral cycle. This is not to minimise the effects of structural and institutional constraints, but merely to re-emphasise the importance of 'politics' over the structures in which it operates.

This chapter will look at a number of potential party political influences on local coalition building, beginning with an examination of the influence national parties might have on the deals made at local level. If the thesis that there is an increasing 'nationalisation' of local politics is credible, then the views of national parties towards local 'power-sharing' will exercise an influence on the deals that can be made at local level. The different attitudes of the major parties towards coalition politics will be examined and the possible effects of such views on the local administrations formed will be assessed. Following this, section two (the main body of this chapter) will look in detail at the attitude of local party groups, and (in particular) their approach to their selection of partners will be examined in the light of previous research. Certain hypotheses offered by previous observers will be tested against the data collected.¹ Finally, a number of proposals have been made by previous writers concerning the behaviour of 'traditional rulers', those parties which have previously controlled a local authority, often for a considerable period of time. section three will examine the strategy adopted by (and towards) former rulers and assess the significance of the observations made.

¹It has been found to be impractical, given the considerable degree of overlap occurring, to sub-divide this section strictly by party groups. This division is too artificial, and ignores the complexity of the arrangements discovered. That said, each of the particular areas examined (for example, the relationship between Conservatives and Independents) is clearly differentiated, and each of the sub-sections is related to the sub-sections preceding and following it.

It must be noted here that the Liberal Democrats, the Liberals, the Social Democrats (SDP) and other groups connected to the broad 'middle-of-the-road' alliance of the years examined in this survey will be treated throughout as a single party bloc, except where it is necessary to distinguish between them. There were only 6 councils (9.7 percent) in the sample with an SDP group; the SDP had less than 250 councillors nationwide at the time this survey was carried out (Rallings & Thrasher, 1989). In the great majority of cases there was only one group on the council, generally calling themselves 'Liberal Democrats'. If there were different 'factions' there appeared to be a large degree of unanimity between the groups, with the group classified under one title and one councillor clearly seeing him or herself as the 'leader' of the group. A few chief executives remarked on their inability to distinguish the differences between "the various Liberal/Alliance groups on the Council". Therefore, treating the 'Alliance' as one group appears to make sense, and will considerably simplify the following analysis. That said, where chief executives and party leaders have distinguished between the SDP and Liberal Democrats, that distinction will be respected; a Conservative/SLD/SDP coalition will be treated as three-party.

A related problem also arises; what name to give to this 'single party bloc'? The field work for this research was carried out during June-August of 1988. Liberal and SDP working groups had agreed the title Social and Liberal Democrats for the proposed merged party in January 1988 (Coxall & Robins, 1989, p.254) and, if only for the sake of simplicity, it is proposed to use the title Social and Liberal Democrats (SLD), again except where it is necessary to distinguish between, for example, the separate SLD and SDP groups in Mendip and Devon, or when quoting previous research which may have used a different appellation.

Section One: The Central-Local Party Dimension

Section Four of Chapter Two (see 2.4.2.) has already gone into some detail about the relationship between central and local parties. Despite the increasing pressure that the nature of modern party politics brings for 'uniformity' it was established that local parties retain considerable autonomy. Local parties will also span the full range of ideologies within their broad political allegiance. However, despite the attempts by the major national parties to present a monolithic image, local parties often differ considerably from the currently dominant ideology displayed by the leadership of their central party (see Gyford & James, 1983).

5.1.1. Ideological Differences:

An example of such local ideological differences is provided by the SLD. All political leaders were asked to locate their ideological position in relation to their national party, in order to aid the placing of local parties on an unidimensional ideological scale to test formal coalition theories (see Questionnaire 2, Appendix). A number of SLD leaders replied that such questions were applicable only to the other 'old style' parties. However, 37.5 percent (15 of 40 respondents) of SLD leaders did not see themselves as sharing the same political position as the national party, indicating that the SLD also demonstrates differences of opinion at local level; 12 of these 15 saw their local party as 'to the left' of the party's position nationally.² The often bewildering variety of party labels under which 'Social and Liberal Democrat' candidates campaigned during the 1989 county council elections might be taken as further evidence of a lack of homogeneity (see Rallings & Thrasher, 1989). Therefore, it can be reasonably stated that, whatever the advice of the central parties towards local power sharing, not all local groups will follow it.

While, as Mellors points out, it is "inevitable ... that national norms and values will affect what happens at local level" (1989, p. 81), it would be surprising if the possibility of power after years of opposition did not affect the strategy of even the most deferential local party. However, those national norms and values may mean some parties will be more or less likely to engage in local coalitions.

5.1.2. National Party Attitudes to Local Deals

Although it has already been demonstrated (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.2.) that local parties can have considerable autonomy, the evidence suggests central views will, at the very least, be taken into account by local parties in hung councils. For example, official Labour Party policy comes close to prohibiting "local pacts". Carter reported that, in the case of the three shire counties he investigated, "Walworth Road instructed Labour Groups not to form pacts under any circumstances", advice which was accepted, "albeit reluctantly" (Carter, 1986, p.13). While Mellors argued that Conservative Central Office's more "federalist" conception of local government was probably more amenable to power sharing (1983, p.237), as he later pointed out, it "hardly welcomed" local party deals by Conservatives with other party groups (1986, p.23; see also Mellors, 1989, p.81).

In contrast, the SLD and SDP both adopt a more positive strategy at national level towards local coalitions; their lack of power at national level is "likely to strengthen

² See Chapter Nine, section four (Table 9.6) for more details.

their inclination to take advantage of whatever opportunities occur for power sharing at local level" (Mellors, 1989, p. 81). SLD central publications offer frequent advice to their members in hung councils on the best strategies to adopt in influencing policy making, and positively encourage local deals (for example, see Clay, 1982).

Continental observers have often noted the influence pressure from party headquarters can have on local coalition formation (for example, see Loeb-Mayer, 1986, p.13). Carter's observations on the responses of local Labour groups to central directives offers some support that the same pressures might be brought to bear in Britain. Whilst accepting that other variables might be influencing their participation in coalitions,³ given the above, it is proposed that:

2.1: THE SLD WILL BE MORE WILLING TO ENTER INTO COALITION DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES THAN EITHER THE CONSERVATIVE OR LABOUR PARTIES AND, THEREFORE, WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO BE PARTICIPATING IN LOCAL AUTHORITY ADMINISTRATIONS.

Table 5.1: Current Administrations in Hung Councils
(responses of chief executives, n=62)

| Administration | Number |
|---|--------|
| Conservative | 4 |
| Labour | 12 |
| SLD/Alliance | 8 |
| Conservative/SLD | 5 |
| Conservative/Independent | 6 |
| Labour/SLD | 7 |
| Conservative/SLD/Independent | 2 |
| Conservative/Independent Labour/Independent/Ratepayers | 1 |
| SLD/SDP/Independent | 1 |
| Conservative/Labour/SLD/Ind (all-party administrations) | 3 |
| Labour/SLD/Green/Independent | 1 |
| Labour/SLD/Ratepayers | 1 |
| Labour/SLD/Independent | 1 |
| Conservative/SLD/Labour | 1 |
| No Administration | 9 |
| Total | 62 |

³ For example, the SLD's 'pivotal' position ideologically may mean they have a greater involvement in local administrations, a point which is addressed below.

Table 5.1 shows in detail the current administrations, while Table 5.2 (below) lists the total number of administrations the major party groups were participating in at the time the questionnaire was answered. As hypothesized, the SLD were involved in more administrations than either Labour or Conservative; more than half of the current administrations involved the SLD. However, there are a number of possible qualifications to this greater involvement. The following section will examine these qualifications, and look in detail at the behaviour of parties as regards coalition formation.

Table 5.2: Participation of Major Parties In Local Administrations

| Party | Minority Admins | Two- Party Coalitions | Multi-Party Coalitions* | Total Number of Admins |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Conservative | 4 | 11 | 7 | 22 (41.5%) |
| Labour | 12 | 7 | 7 | 26 (49.1%) |
| SLD | 8 | 12 | 10 | 30 (56.6%) |
| Independent | 0 | 6~ | 9 | 15 (28.3%) |

*All parties in this column include 3 all-party administrations comprising all 4 parties in Table 5.2.

~All of these are Conservative/Independent coalitions

Section Two: The Behaviour of Local Political Parties

This examination of the behaviour of local party groups begins with an examination of the SLD's involvement in local coalitions. A number of factors might contribute to the apparently greater involvement of SLD groups in local administrations, and this section will attempt to assess whether the SLD has a more positive attitude to coalition dealing. Following this, we examine the attitude of Conservative groups and the 'special relationship' between Conservatives and Independent groups; whether we can treat Independent councillors as 'groups' in the same way as the main parties is also examined. The factors which might make it difficult for Labour groups to share power in hung councils are then analysed, in particular the idea that Labour is constrained in its choice of 'partner' by its ideological position. Some writers have noted Conservative/ Labour coalitions at local level, and the factors which might

influence the creation of such an unexpected phenomenon are appraised. Finally, the factors which might contribute to 'no administration' forming are examined.

5.2.1. The SLD: A Greater Willingness to Compromise?

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 (above, in section one) appear to offer support to the hypothesis that the SLD will be more involved in local coalitions than the other two main parties. However, the reasons for this apparently greater involvement may not simply be the more positive attitude of local parties, fostered by the greater willingness of national leaders to encourage negotiations. The SLD are also ideally situated in ideological terms, and as coalition theorists have argued, a pivotal position ideologically will probably lead to greater involvement in coalitions (see, for example, de Swaan, 1973).

However, while the SLD's pivotal position ideologically might tend to make them more active in local coalitions than the other parties, it is argued that it is their willingness to enter into negotiations which will be the major factor in their participation in local coalitions. If they are more willing to discuss arrangements with other parties, they will be more likely to be involved in coalitions. The great majority of studies into local coalitions have commented on the more open attitude of the SLD and SDP in a hung situation (for example, see Leach & Game, 1989, p.29). Therefore, it is proposed that:

2.2: THE SLD WILL BE MORE PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE WITH OTHER PARTIES THAN THE CONSERVATIVE AND LABOUR PARTIES.

As expected, this was indeed the case. Only 4 SLD leaders out of the 36 (11.1 percent) answering the question on the relative importance of policy or office in their negotiations with other political parties replied they were 'not prepared to negotiate'. This contrasts with 12 of 29 (41.4 percent) of Conservative leaders and 7 of 26 (26.9 percent) of Labour leaders answering this question who gave the same response. Interestingly, in all 12 cases where the Conservatives answered they were not prepared to negotiate, they had controlled the council prior to it becoming hung; the behaviour of former rulers (both Labour and Conservative) is examined later in this chapter. It also appears inconceivable that an SLD leader could reply, as one Labour leader did, that:

"we will not take control until we have a majority on the Council sufficient to implement our policies, and we will not enter formal or informal coalitions with other parties"

This effectively debarred his party from exercising any influence at all. At first glance, these responses appear to indicate that while it would be foolish to ignore the importance of the SLD's central position ideologically, their greater willingness to enter into discussions could be the most important factor in their apparently greater involvement in local coalitions.

However, while it is undoubtedly the case that the SLD were involved in more coalitions at the time the questionnaire was answered, when participation in all administrations formed since the councils in this survey became hung is examined the picture is markedly different. Table 5.3 shows it is the Conservatives who have been most active in local administrations over the life span of the hung councils in this survey, with over half of all administrations (52.3 percent) involving Conservative groups. However, alone of the four major party groupings, their participation appears to decline with time.

Table 5.3: Total Number of Administrations Party Groups have Participated In Since Becoming Hung

| Party | Previous Admins | Coalitions | Single Party | Present Admins | Coalitions | Single Party | Grand Total |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|----------------|------------|--------------|-------------|
| Conservative | 35 | 15 | 20 | 22 | 18 | 4 | 57 (52.3%) |
| Labour | 16 | 8 | 8 | 26 | 14 | 12 | 42 (38.5%) |
| SLD | 21 | 14 | 7 | 30 | 22 | 8 | 51 (46.8%) |
| Independent | 7 | 7 | 0 | 15 | 15 | 0 | 22 (20.2%) |
| Others | 4 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 8 (7.3%) |

number of councils =62; total number of administrations =121 (including 12 instances of 'no administration' in charge, which are excluded from the percentages above)

It may be that the wider political environment can explain the declining involvement of Conservative groups in hung councils. The early to mid-1980s were a period of decline for the party locally, although they regained some support in the latter half of the decade. For example, the Conservatives performed very poorly in the 1981 county council elections and, although their share of the overall vote still remained higher than Labour and the Alliance, they did even worse in 1985, due to a combination of some significant local factors and poor national opinion poll ratings (see Leach & Game, 1989, pp.85-89). A number of "safe Conservative" counties (see Rallings & Thrasher, 1985) became hung for the first time in 1985, and it

may be that they were in a less powerful bargaining position in these authorities. Two-thirds of the 18 county councils in this sample had previously been Conservative controlled for many years, and one had been previously controlled by a long-term Conservative/ Independent administration which effectively functioned as a single party (according to its chief executive). If the opposition parties perceive this as perhaps their only chance of achieving policy aims (as the opposition actors in Devon did) before the return to 'normality', then the pressures to exclude the Conservatives will be great, and this may partly explain their decline. Their declining local vote could have affected their strength in all councils (not just the counties), and it may be that fewer Conservative groups were in the right position to exercise influence. However, there are other possible reasons for the Conservatives' previous high involvement and subsequent decline, and some of these will now be assessed.⁴

5.2.2. The Conservatives and Local Coalitions: The Independent Factor

There are a number of possible reasons for the apparently greater involvement of Conservatives in local administrations detailed in Table 5.3. As noted above, Mellors has stated that the more "federalist" structure of the Conservatives might make Central Office more amenable to coalition discussions than Walworth Road. Stewart, noting the hostility of certain Labour groups towards hung situations, has argued that this would make them less likely to enter into formal discussions; he posits that such a viewpoint is "less influential in Conservative groups" (Stewart, 1985,p.5). Leach also notes that there appears to be a "much greater readiness" on the part of local Conservatives to negotiate deals with the Liberals (Leach, 1985,p.9).

A New Statesman survey (30 August, 1985, p.4) showed that of the 52 councils then identified as hung the most common arrangement was some form of Conservative/ Alliance cooperation, a finding which is disputed later in this chapter. Nevertheless, this appears to fit with the findings shown in Table 5.3 that in the early stages of hungness Conservatives are more likely to be involved in administrations than other parties, and the SLD are more likely to be involved than Labour. The far greater early involvement of Conservatives in single party administrations might have been predicted, the result perhaps of former rulers desperately clinging on to power. However, Conservatives were also involved in more coalitions than other parties, which suggests, at the very least, that they were more ready to negotiate than the

⁴ The increased willingness of Labour to do deals with the SLD, addressed later in this chapter (section 5.2.4.), could also explain the Conservative decline in involvement.

findings to Hypothesis 2.2 (above) appear to indicate.⁵ The SLD are at least as likely to engage in negotiations as Conservatives; far fewer were 'not prepared to negotiate', as discussed above, so a greater readiness to enter discussions is probably not a significant factor in greater Conservative involvement in local coalitions. A simpler explanation may be the large numbers of Independent 'groups' at local level.

Ideological closeness to Independent groups appears to be an important contributory factor in the greater number of administrations Conservatives have been involved with. In English local government Independents have often been seen as Conservatives in all but name, and Widdicombe reported that 26 percent of Independent councillors were also members of the Conservative party. Although they discovered Independents who were also members of the Labour (2 percent), Liberal (5 percent) or Nationalist (3 percent) parties, in the great majority of cases Independents admitting to membership of a political party were Conservatives (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume Two, Table 4.4, pp.37-38).

This helps to explain the high level of Conservative involvement; in many cases, Independents may be close enough ideologically for negotiations to be relatively painless. Of the 11 two-party coalitions Conservatives were currently participating in, 6 were with Independents, while 6 of the 7 multi-party current coalitions involved Independents. The 6 Conservative/ Independent coalitions were also, as Table 5.1 demonstrates, the only two-party coalitions Independents were currently participating in, although on one previous occasion Independents had formed an administration with Labour. Independents were involved in 15 current administrations: 12 of 15 (80 percent) involved the Conservatives while 8 of 15 (53.3 percent) included the SLD and just 5 of the 15 current coalitions (33.3 percent) involved a Labour group.

Although a very different pattern of Conservative and Independent involvement emerges when previous administrations are examined (see Table 5.4 below), there is still a propensity for Independents to participate in coalitions with Conservative groups rather than other political parties.

Indeed, Leach & Game (1989) argue that where Conservatives and Independents have more than 50 percent of seats there is a "high probability" they will dominate the county council (1989, pp. 6-8). However, this is not supported by this research's

⁵Of course, this greater involvement might not be so in terms of time, and the durability of these coalitions will be examined in detail in the following chapter on coalition stability.

findings. In the 17 councils where these two parties have more than 50 percent of the council seats, Conservative/ Independent coalitions are ruling in only 1 of the 3 counties in that sample and in only 6 of the 17 in all. While a Conservative/ Independent coalition had lasted for 4 years in one district before being replaced by a Conservative/SLD administration, and in one council which was classified as having 'no administration' Conservatives and Independents shared chairs, in the majority of cases Conservatives and Independents were not openly co-operating.⁶

Table 5.4 (below) details the composition of the 59 administrations that had ruled prior to those current administrations shown in Table 5.1 (above), and shows only 2 examples of Conservative/Independent administrations but 20 occasions where Conservatives formed a minority administration. While Independents may have been giving tacit support to Conservative minority administrations, this appears unlikely when one realises that only 4 cases of Conservative minority control currently exist. With Independent support (whether overt or covert) it might have been expected that these Conservative minority administrations could have been more durable, especially in the 17 councils where Independent support would have given Conservatives an overall majority.

As Tables 5.3 and 5.4 indicate, the major difference in the pattern of involvement of Conservatives and Independents is that Conservatives have attempted to rule alone more in the early stages of hungness while Independent involvement is much greater in current coalitions than in previous arrangements. There is support for this from Leach & Game (1989) who described this initial attempt to rule alone as a "characteristic mistake of Conservative groups in the hung situation" (1989, p.34). They noted that numerous defeats, leading to Conservative groups having to carry the burden of responsibility for policies of which they disapproved, forced a change of strategy by Conservative groups in a number of counties; Independents appear to have been the main beneficiaries of this. The failure of Conservatives to maintain these minority administrations also offers an explanation for their decline in

⁶ It may be that the Independent groups in our survey are not the 'unitary actors' which our analysis of unitary status in Chapter Three decided to treat them as. A lack of cohesion offers a very convincing reason for the failure of Leach & Game's hypothesis that with more than a half of the seats between them Conservatives and Independents will usually control the council. A coalition agreement, however informal, requires that the partners are able to offer disciplined voting majorities. If such 'Independent groups' are really no more than a disparate bunch whose major similarity is a dislike of belonging to a political party, it is not surprising if a seemingly rational 'minimum winning coalition' fails to form. Truly independent members may well balk at offering support to a Conservative group that in the majority of cases considered here has just been removed from power by the electorate.

participation shown in Table 5.3. While their involvement in coalitions has been relatively constant, they now rule alone in only 4 councils compared to 20 previous occasions.

Table 5.4: Previous Administrations in Hung Councils
(responses of chief executives)

| Party/Parties Comprising the Administration | Total |
|--|-------|
| Conservative | 20 |
| Labour | 8 |
| SLD | 7 |
| Conservative/Labour | 2 |
| Conservative/SLD | 7 |
| Conservative/Independent | 2 |
| Labour/SLD | 5 |
| Labour/Independent | 1 |
| Conservative/Independent/Rate | 1 |
| Conservative/Independent/Independent Labour | 1 |
| Conservative/SLD/Independent | 1 |
| Conservative/Independent/Independent Labour/Ratepayers/SLD | 1 |
| No Administration | 3 |
| Total | 59 |

Of the 7 previous coalitions Independents were involved in (compared to their involvement in 15 current coalitions) Independents and Conservatives were collaborating on 6 of those occasions. This compares to just 2 collaborations by Independents with the SLD (in multi-party coalitions which also included Conservatives) and only 1 collaboration with Labour (albeit in a two party coalition). The low involvement by Independents in initial administrations is difficult to understand. Perhaps other party groups are less willing to work with a group they perceive as Conservative, while the tendency of Conservatives to prefer to rule alone initially (while noting that they still participate in more initial coalitions than other groups) might mean less opportunities for Independent participation, at least formally. Of the 8 Independent leaders who responded to the survey, none answered that they were not prepared to negotiate with other groups, so it does not appear to be the attitude of Independent groups which is responsible for

their low level of participation initially. The following examination of Conservative tactics may provide an answer to this problem.

5.2.3. The Conservatives: Clinging On To Power?

Stewart (1985) has argued that local Conservative groups, especially where they had formerly been in control, might be more likely to consider discussions with the Alliance parties, "in the expectation that [Conservatives] should continue in power" (1985, p. 5). As mentioned above, Leach supported this assertion. Despite the findings of a New Statesman survey (6 June, 1986, p.5) that the Alliance parties were then more likely to form coalition arrangements with Labour, a finding supported by Leach & Stewart (1988, p.41), Alliance groups (rather than the ideologically opposed Labour groups) will almost certainly come under initial pressure from Conservative groups attempting to hold on to political control, especially if there is no sizeable Independent group. If Stewart (1985) is correct, it appears that:

2.3: CONSERVATIVE/SLD COALITIONS WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO FORM INITIALLY THAN COALITIONS COMPRISING OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTICULARLY IN AUTHORITIES WHERE THE CONSERVATIVES WERE THE FORMER RULING PARTY.

Table 5.5 (below) details the initial administrations forming in hung authorities and demonstrates conclusively that proposition 2.3 is not proven. Only 4 initial coalitions (less than 10 percent) were Conservative/SLD partnerships, with a further 4 multi-party coalitions involving both parties (and 2 of these were all-party administrations). Furthermore, contrary to expectations, where the Conservatives had formerly ruled there were no examples of co-operation between the two parties without the involvement of other party groups. Although 7 of the 8 SLD/Alliance minority administrations were in authorities formerly ruled by Conservatives, given that 42 of the 62 hung councils in the sample had previously been controlled by Conservatives this is not especially significant.

Table 5.5 Initial administrations in Newly Hung Local Authorities By Former Ruling Party

(response of chief executives; n=62)

| Initial Administration | Former Ruling Party | | | | | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------|---------------------|---------|----------------|-------|
| | Cons | Labour | Independ- endent | Con/Ind | Always Hung | |
| Conservative | 16 | - | - | - | - | 16 |
| Labour | 1 | 4 | - | - | - | 5 |
| SLD | 7 | 1 | - | - | - | 8 |
| Conservative/Independent | 4 | - | 1 | - | - | 5 |
| Conservative/SLD | - | 4 | - | - | - | 4 |
| Conservative/Labour | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Labour/SLD | 5 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 7 |
| SLD/SDP/Independent | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Cons/Lab/SLD/Independent | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| t | | | | | | |
| Cons/Ind/Ratepayers | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Cons/SLD/Ind | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Cons/SLD/Labour | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Labour/Independent | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| No Administration | 2 | 1 | 2 | - | 3 | 8 |
| No Information | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Total | 42 | 11 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 62 |

Table 5.6 Involvement of Party Groups in Initial Administrations

(from Table 5.5, above)

| Party | Percentage of Administrations | Number of Administrations |
|---------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Conservatives | 50.8 | 31 |
| Labour | 27.9 | 17 |
| SLD/Alliance | 39.3 | 24 |
| Independent | 16.4 | 10 |

While arguing that Conservatives would be more likely to co-operate with the Alliance in authorities where they had formerly ruled, Stewart also cautioned that "given the tradition of governing alone" former Conservative rulers may actually be reluctant to discuss power sharing with former opposition parties (1985, p.5). With over two-fifths of Conservative leaders 'not prepared to negotiate' with other parties and with 16 cases where the Conservatives initially attempted to rule alone, it appears that Stewart may well be correct in his assessment of Conservative reluctance to share power. However, this is not supported by their involvement in initial *coalitions* which, like their overall involvement in initial *administrations*, is greater than any other party group. Furthermore, although Conservatives only remain in sole control of 4 councils, their involvement in current *coalitions* is only beaten by the SLD (see Table 5.3). This does not suggest a party reluctant to discuss power sharing. What such apparently contradictory findings could demonstrate is that local Conservative responses will vary considerably, and that the pragmatism many Conservatives pride themselves on is alive and well. These figures also hint at a possible reason for the small involvement initially of Independent groups.

An Explanation for the Initial Exclusion of Independents from Governing Coalitions

The large number of hung councils where the Conservative former rulers have initially attempted to rule alone (16 of 41, or 39 percent) offers a possible explanation for the low level of Independent involvement in initial administrations discussed previously. Table 5.5 indicates that Conservatives demonstrate a tendency to attempt to rule alone in councils where they had formerly ruled. Indeed, all 12 Conservative leaders who replied that they were not prepared to negotiate in the formation of a coalition administration were heading parties which had ruled prior to hungness. Table 5.1 (detailing current administrations) indicates that they have not been able to sustain such minority administrations, with only 4 current examples of single party rule by Conservatives. In order to remain in power, or to regain a share of power after their initial exclusion from administrations, it seems likely that they will do a deal with the group ideologically closest to them, which will probably be Independents. Although this remains conjecture, it does offer a convincing explanation for the greater involvement by Independents subsequent to initial administrations.

Table 5.6 (above) demonstrates that it is not only Independents who have a low level of involvement in the initial stages of hungness. Barely a quarter (27.9 percent) of

initial administrations involve Labour party groups, compared to nearly half (49.1 percent, see Table 5.2) of current administrations, and some possible reasons for this increase in Labour's participation will now be examined.

5.2.4. Labour: The Politics of Necessity?

As previously mentioned, Stewart has noted the hostility shown by many Labour groups to coalition discussions (see Stewart, 1985, p.5). However, it can also be proposed that this 'strategy' will give way to greater involvement by the Labour party the longer a council is hung. Despite their initial reluctance to enter discussions, as Mellors (1986) reports, "the growing incidence of hung councils has led the Labour party to re-examine its strategy at local level", however much they remain "reluctant to discuss this re-assessment publicly" (1986, p.22). Leach & Game have noted that in the hung county councils, "once the initial posturing was over" Labour became aware that the effect of their "oppositional" stance was that a Conservative minority administration was able to remain in power. Following the initial stages Labour was prepared either to take an "opportunistic" approach and "exploit opportunities on an *ad hoc* basis" or adopt a "co-operative" approach with Alliance groups (Leach & Game, 1989, pp. 31-37). This willingness of Labour to start seeking deals with the SLD also offers a convincing explanation for the decline in Conservative participation after the initial stages of hungness. Given this, it is proposed that:

2.4: THE LONGER AN AUTHORITY REMAINS HUNG, THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT THE LABOUR PARTY WILL BE INVOLVED IN ITS ADMINISTRATION.

At first glance, Table 5.3 (above) appears to support that contention, with Labour involved in 26 current administrations as opposed to 16 previous administrations. As previously mentioned, Table 5.6 (above) also appears to lend support to the hypothesis, with Labour involved in only 27.9 percent of initial administrations, as against their involvement in almost half of current administrations.

Table 5.7 (below) offers a different perspective of Labour's participation, indicating no significant difference in their involvement in local administrations with the passage of time. Perhaps surprisingly, Table 5.7 also shows the SLD are less likely to be involved in the administrations of long-term hung councils, although the difference is small. There appears to be no significant difference in the involvement of any of the major party groups over time, nor does there appear to be any difference over time in the ability of parties to come to some agreement. There was

'no administration' in 5 of the 36 short term hung councils, compared to 3 of the 24 long term hung councils, 13.9 percent compared to 12.5 percent.

Table 5.7: Party Involvement in Administrations Over Time

| Party | Time | |
|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Short Term Hung (n=36) | Long Term Hung (n=24) |
| Conservative | 33.3% | 37.5% |
| Labour | 44.4% | 41.6% |
| SLD | 52.8% | 45.8% |
| Independent | 22.2 | 25.0% |

To return to Labour's involvement over time, although Table 5.7 deals with current administrations only and does not offer a picture of the development of administrative involvement, it lends no support to Hypothesis 2.4. If the hypothesis was correct, one would expect to find a greater involvement by Labour in those authorities which have been hung the longest, and this is clearly not the case. In support of Leach & Game's findings that after the 'initial posturing' was over Labour was prepared to negotiate, it appears more correct to note that while Labour are less likely to be involved in initial administrations than either the Conservatives or the SLD, this initial reluctance does not appear to last very long.

5.2.5. Labour and the SLD

Labour politicians soon recognise the realities of the hung situation, and Leach & Game (1989) have noticed a predilection for a basis of "mutual co-operation between Labour and Alliance groups" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.36). Even in those county councils where Labour and the Alliance adopted an "opportunistic" rather than co-operative approach, they noted a tendency for "a significantly greater amount of informal discussion between Democrat and Labour groups than there is among other pairings" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.37). Mellors (1989) also noted that the two groups were closer in budgetary matters than any other pairing from the three major parties, and that "Labour-Alliance patterns of support" had become more common as Conservative-Alliance patterns of support had decreased (Mellors, 1989, p.107). Leach & Stewart also found that where arrangements entailed "positive support" two-thirds involved "Alliance support for Labour or Labour support for Alliance (equally distributed)" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.41). They

attributed this to the fact that the majority of hung councils had previously been Conservative controlled, and former opposition parties would naturally tend to co-operate, a point examined in detail in section three of this chapter. Whatever the reasons, it appears from previous observers that Labour and the SLD will be more inclined to come to an arrangement than other party groupings, both by nature of their closeness over budgetary matters and by their mutual status in many hung county councils as long term opposition parties (the SLD as 'Liberals'). Accordingly, it is proposed that:

2.5: LABOUR/SLD COALITIONS WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO FORM THAN OTHER PARTY GROUPINGS, PARTICULARLY IN THE COUNTY COUNCILS.

Table 5.1 (above) lists current administrations and Table 5.4 (above) lists previous administrations in hung councils, and neither lend support to the hypothesis that Labour/SLD coalitions are more likely than other party pairings. Currently, there are 7 Labour/SLD coalitions and 11 other two-party pairings (6 Conservative/Independent, 5 Conservative/SLD). Previous administrations indicate 5 Labour/SLD coalitions and 12 other two-party pairings (7 Conservative/SLD, 2 Conservative/Independent, 2 Conservative/Labour, 1 Labour/Independent). Overall, there are as many examples of Conservative/SLD co-operation as there are of Labour/SLD co-operation, and with 5 current examples of the former this cannot be dismissed as examples of Conservatives doing a deal with whoever will maintain them in power in the early stages of hungness; the average time the 5 councils currently with Conservative/SLD administrations had been hung was 40.8 months.

Labour/SLD coalitions are more common than other pairings, but only for Labour groups. They are far more likely to engage in coalitions with the SLD than with any other party, while the SLD is just as likely to co-operate with Conservatives as with Labour. Labour groups had been involved in 15 two-party coalitions during the period these councils had been hung, and 12 of these (80 percent) were with the SLD, 2 with Conservatives and 1 with Independents. In addition, all 14 of the current two-party or 'multi-party' coalitions (7 of each) Labour groups are engaged in involve the SLD. There were no previous examples of Labour involvement in multi-party administrations, lending more support to the idea that Labour will become increasingly involved in hung councils after its initial hostile reaction has worn off. However, when Labour groups do decide to become involved, they may find their choices are more restricted than the other three main party groupings.

A Lack of Choice for Labour

It appears Labour groups are constrained (for whatever reasons) in their choice of partner, which rules out a number of alternatives at local level. While, given the unimportance of 'Independents' at national level, this constraint may apply equally in national party politics to Conservatives, at local level Conservatives appear to have considerably more freedom of choice in selecting coalition partners. Neither party is as free (or as ideally situated ideologically?) as the SLD,⁷ which is just as likely to do deals with the Conservatives as with Labour. The difficulty of Labour engaging in coalitions with both the Conservatives (for obvious reasons of ideological incompatibility) and with Independents (who, as Widdicombe demonstrates, are generally closer to Conservatives than other party groups) may explain why, despite their high involvement in current administrations (mainly as single-party minority rulers), they are less likely than the Conservatives, the SLD or Independents to be involved in coalitions. If policy proximity is the deciding factor, they might have only one choice of partner (the SLD) in most authorities.

This probably accounts for their low level of involvement in coalitions. Table 5.2 (above) shows Conservatives in 18 current coalitions, the SLD in 22, Independents (despite the far fewer authorities with Independent groups) in 15 and Labour in only 14 current coalitions. Mellors attributed this low level of Labour involvement in "inter-party deals" to a "generally negative approach" (Mellors, 1989, p.94), but this may be unfair to Labour groups. Conservative leaders were far more likely to be hostile to negotiations than Labour leaders, which suggests it is Labour's ideological position, to the left of the other three major groups at local level, which is the major influence in their lower level of co-operation with other parties.

⁷ The advantages the SLD's ideological position gives it are examined in Chapter Nine, after the construction of a unidimensional local policy scale enables it to be placed ideologically. Until that is done, it cannot be assumed that the party *is* the centre party.

Table 5.8: Administrative Arrangements in County Councils (n=18)

| Parties in Administration | Current Admins (n=18) | Previous Admins (n=18) |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Conservative | 1 | 4 |
| Labour | 4 | 4 |
| SLD | 1 | - |
| Labour/SLD | 6 | 3 |
| Conservative/SLD | 1 | 4 |
| Conservative/Independent | 1 | - |
| Conservative/Ind/SLD | 1 | - |
| Labour/Conservative | - | 1 |
| No Administration | 3 | 2 |

However, hypothesis 2.5 also posited Labour/SLD agreements were especially likely in the county councils, and this is certainly the case. There were 18 counties in the sample of hung authorities, and the administrative arrangements lend support to Leach & Game (1989) and Mellors (1989), as one would expect given the similarity of their universe and time-span. Table 5.8 (above) details the arrangements in county councils, and by far the commonest 'pairing' in county councils is Labour/SLD, with a third of county councils currently controlled by this pairing. The increase in this arrangement and decline in Conservative/SLD coalitions lends support to Mellors observation that Labour/SLD coalitions have increased as Conservative/SLD coalitions have declined (1989, p. 107, see above). Given the much lower level of Conservative/SLD co-operation in the counties, it may be that the hypothesis that former 'opposition' parties will combine to remove former rulers from power explains this best; 12 counties were formerly ruled by Conservatives, one by a long running Conservative / Independent "alliance", and 5 by Labour. This hypothesis is examined in detail in section three of this chapter.

Despite the difficulties in coming to terms with groups other than the ideologically adjacent SLD, Labour has formed two-party coalitions with both Independents (once) and Conservatives (twice). Their agreement with an Independent group is unsurprising; not all Independents are Tories. However, their agreement with a party at the other end of the policy scale is more difficult to understand.

5.2.6. The 'Unholy Alliance': Conservative and Labour Co-operation

A number of respondents to this survey used the phrase 'unholy alliance' to refer to the perhaps unexpected spectacle of Conservative/ Labour cooperation. Given the distance generally acknowledged to exist between the two major parties (particularly at national level), under what circumstances might such a coalition emerge? A 1985 *New Statesman* survey found that over a fifth of all arrangements in the 52 councils then hung involved such a coalition (*New Statesman*, 30 August, 1985, p.4). This appears to be a surprisingly high total, especially as this research has indicated no current examples of such a coalition and only 4 cases where Labour and Conservatives are co-operating in a multi-party coalition; also, in 3 of these cases their co-operation is in an all-party administration, while in the remaining case the only members excluded from the governing coalition are two Independent councillors (see Table 5.1).⁸

Of course, the co-operation between the two major parties will almost certainly be less obvious than a formal governing coalition with both sharing chairs. Leach & Stewart say it is apparent that in some authorities "Labour and Conservative groups are working behind the scenes to minimise the ability of the Alliance to wield effective influence" (1988, p.41). They add that this appears to be particularly the case where the Alliance group is "relatively small"; in such cases there is still "widespread mistrust" of the Alliance "coupled with a sense of injustice if any small party group appears to wield influence not commensurate with its size" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.41). It might also be supposed that where the Alliance is both a small *and* 'pivotal' group on the council⁹ both the major parties will:

"particularly in the early days of a newly-hung authority, often find themselves the target of negative attitudes on the part of the other two more long-established party groups, both on account of their successful disruption of the familiar two-party system and the fact that a relatively small number of Alliance councillors are seen as having a degree of influence out of line with their numerical strength". (Leach & Game, 1989, p.20, their emphasis)

⁸In two cases where a Conservative/ Labour coalition was alleged by party leaders, no response was received from the relevant Chief Executive. As it is the judgement of Chief Executives which has been used to delineate the administrative arrangements in these hung councils, those cases do not appear in the relevant tables. Also, these cases cannot be considered with other cases, as the necessary details concerning party/committee composition (given by Chief Executives) are unavailable.

⁹ 'Pivotal' is used in the sense of being capable of constructing a majority with either Labour or Conservative.

As one SLD respondent put it "we were prepared to negotiate, but no one else would", a view echoed by other SLD leaders. Mellors corroborates this, noticing that "some resentment of the Alliance was evident in most councils" (1986, p.15). Perhaps the easiest way for the two big parties to negate the Alliance would be for one to form a minority administration and 'behind the scenes' make private deals with the other, although one wonders how long such an unsatisfactory relationship could exist without 'backbench' councillors creating havoc. In addition, the ideological divide would surely soon create indivisible problems.

Browne has pointed out that the attitude of many European political parties can be that "only some parties should be entrusted with the responsibility of wielding...power" (1982, p.347), and it appears that such attitudes can be observed in British local authorities where the Alliance has the potential for influence beyond its size. Both Labour and Conservative have a vested interest in denying the Alliance opportunities to show it is capable of ruling either alone or with another party, as an unwanted precedent may be set.

Therefore, it is proposed that:

2.6: CONSERVATIVE/LABOUR COALITIONS WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IN THOSE AUTHORITIES WHERE THE ALLIANCE PARTIES ARE A SMALL (I.E. LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF THE COUNCIL) AND PIVOTAL GROUP.

2.7: IN THOSE AUTHORITIES WHERE THE ALLIANCE COMPRISES LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF THE COUNCIL, CONSERVATIVE OR LABOUR MINORITY ADMINISTRATIONS ARE MORE LIKELY.

The use of a figure of less than 20 percent to denote a 'small' third party is of course debatable. Although Leach & Game use the criteria of "less than 15% of the seats" to denote a 'small' third party (1989, p. 12), Leach & Stewart utilise a figure of 20 percent or more of the seats to denote a "significant proportion of seats" (1988, p.52). In most cases less than 20 percent is a small number of councillors (i.e., single figures), and the largest Alliance group under 20 percent only comprises 14 councillors. Therefore, it is proposed to utilise that figure in this analysis, giving a total of 28 authorities where the Alliance is a 'small' party group.

It may be that the large numbers of Labour/Conservative administrations reported in earlier studies were cases of one supporting the other in the formation of what was really a single party minority administration (see Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.39, for an outline of the different degrees of 'support' which could be involved in

such an arrangement). Certainly, this research failed to uncover such a number, and with only 2 cases of Conservative/Labour collaboration reported by Chief Executives hypothesis 2.6 must remain unproven, although those 2 cases do provide some interesting information.

In both instances the SLD was a 'small group' (4 percent and 14 percent), in neither instance were they pivotal, and in both cases the pact lasted less than a year. Where the SLD held 4 percent (2 seats) they could have formed a 'knife-edge' coalition with either Labour or Conservative, and an Independent group was in the same situation. The only two party majority coalition possible was the 'unholy alliance', a truly 'grand coalition' comprising 96 percent of the council seats. This council had only been hung for a year, and this 'grand coalition' was quickly replaced by the former Conservative rulers establishing a single party minority administration and taking all the chairs. In the authority where the SLD held 14 percent of the seats the 'unholy alliance', which followed successive and short lived Labour and Conservative minority administrations, was also short-lived. The Conservatives could have formed a winning coalition with the Independents; instead a Labour/SLD minority administration was allowed to form. Given this, it does not appear from this admittedly small sample that the SLD are being frozen out of government when they are a small group.

5.2.7. Labour and Conservative Minority Administrations and Small SLD Groups

However, as mentioned previously, Labour and Conservative co-operation will probably be less overt, and when the contention of hypothesis 2.7 is examined (i.e., that small SLD groups will encourage the two major parties to form minority administrations) it might at first appear that there is some evidence to support the contention that covert action is being taken to exclude the SLD in some authorities where it is a small group.

As Table 5.9 shows, where the SLD has less than 20 percent of the seats 29 of 67 (43.3 percent) of all administrations which had formed were minority administrations of one of the main parties, while in those councils where the SLD had over 20 percent of the seats only 17 of 53 (32.1 percent) administrations were Conservative or Labour minority administrations. This apparent difference is misleading, and the higher number of Labour and Conservative single party administrations where the Alliance is a small party is almost certainly not significant.

Table 5.9: Relationship Between SLD Seat Share and the Formation of Minority Administrations

| SLD Seat Share | Con or Lab Minority Administrations | All Minority Administrations |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| SLD | 43.3% | 47.8% |
| (Minus 20%) | (29 of 67) | (32 of 67) |
| SLD | 32.1% | 54.7% |
| (Plus 20%) | (17 of 53) | (29 of 53) |

The difference can be quite simply explained by the fact that when the SLD is also a significant party grouping it will limit the number of occasions when the two traditional rulers can form minority administrations. Where it was a small group the SLD had, unsurprisingly, formed only 3 short-lived (all less than a year) minority administrations and all 3 were in the same metropolitan district council. That council had had 9 administrations in 9 years of hungness, all of them single party minority administrations. In contrast, 12 of the 53 administrations which had formed (22.6 percent) in authorities where the SLD was a significant grouping were SLD minority administrations, including the 8 cases detailed in Table 5.1 listing current administrations. As Table 5.9 indicates, where the SLD was a small group, nearly half (47.8 percent) of all administrations were single party administrations; where the SLD was a large group just over half (54.7 percent) of all administrations were single party administrations. This difference would be expected, and there is no evidence that the two main parties are acting to exclude the SLD from office when it is a small group.

What does emerge from an examination of SLD participation is that they have increased their participation in administrations over time, as the data presented in previous tables have indicated. They are involved in 48.4 percent of all current administrations compared to only 35.6 percent of previous administrations, and if those administrations where 'no administration' was in place are excluded they were involved in 56.6 percent of all current administrations. As Table 5.2 has indicated this is by far the greatest total of any party group. This increase in involvement over time might indicate that the two main parties initially attempted to freeze them out. However, this can also be accounted for by less 'sinister' explanations; the initial attempts by the two main parties (especially the Conservatives) to rule alone can be

explained at least as convincingly by the historical attitudes of the main parties to 'coalitions' as by a concerted attempt to keep this upstart third party out of government.

This is not to deny that the size of the SLD group might have a bearing on the process of coalition building in a local authority. However, this is a difficult point to prove, as the following assessment will demonstrate. The difficulty of 'isolating' the impact of the various party groups concerning the variables discussed must not be underestimated.

5.2.8. The Possible Effects of SLD Seat Share on 'No Administration' Forming

There are 28 councils where the SLD holds less than 20 percent of the seats and 33 councils where they hold 20 percent or more. The former had seen a total of 67 administrations, and the latter 53 administrations in all, an indication that there may be a connection between the percentage of seats held by the SLD and administrative stability; this point is examined in the following chapter.

One area in which there appears to be a connection between SLD seat share and administrative formation is when no administration forms. Where chief executives responded 'none' to the question concerning administrative arrangements, then 'no administration' was recorded as the administrative arrangement. There were a total of 12 'no administrations' in the history of our sample of hung councils, and 10 of these were in councils where the SLD seat share was over 20 percent. An overwhelming majority of current cases of 'no administration' (8 of 9) were in authorities where the SLD was a significant force, varying from 21 percent to 48 percent of the council. There is also a difference between the SLD 'variable' and 'all-party' administrations; all 3 'all-party' administrations were in councils where the SLD had less than 20 percent of the seats.

The high incidence of 'no administrations' where the SLD is a significant force, may indicate a difficulty for the other two parties in accepting the SLD as a coalition ally when it is the senior partner in terms of members and will therefore almost certainly insist on a majority of committee chairs and seats. That said, this is not supported by Leach & Stewart's assertion that Labour and the SLD supported each other in roughly equal measure (1988, p.41). It may be that large SLD groups are

less likely to want to rule alone in a minority government and more concerned with establishing the principle of power-sharing.¹⁰

An important point needs to be made here; the difference between an 'all-party' administration and 'no administration' might be in the eye of the beholder. When the distribution of committee chairs and deputy chairs of the 9 current authorities with 'no administration' is examined 6 of them appear to have some sort of arrangement in place, at least when it came to sharing out committee chairs, and in four of these cases there was a multi-party chair system.¹¹

Perhaps the only sure thing these findings indicate is a point made previously. It is difficult to decide with any certainty the administrative arrangements existing when there is no formal distribution of 'cabinet' seats. The situation is even more difficult in English local government, with no cabinet and with no necessary relationship between the administrative arrangements and the allocation of committee chairs. Given that a sizeable minority of coalitions at local level, even when 'formal', do not share chairs (see section three, previous chapter) it is unsurprising if chief executives or party leaders are unsure about how to designate the administrative arrangements. Despite this, it does appear that there is a relationship between (a) no administration forming, and (b) an all-party administration forming, and a sizeable SLD group on the council.

However, Mellors' "multi-dimensional influences" provide a reminder that what appear to be significant differences may be due to a number of local factors, and that making assumptions from quantitative data could be misleading. It may be that influences such as "local political traditions" and "the personalities of local political leaders" (see Mellors, 1989, p.7) account for some findings, rather than an overall pattern from which general assumptions about party behaviour can be made. That said, many of the differences which occur between the four major party groupings participation in administrations, detailed in this chapter, have been plausibly explained in general terms. The temptation to use 'local factors' to explain all variations which defy easy explanation needs to be avoided.

¹⁰ Apart from the greater number of authorities without an administration in place when they were a large group, there appears to be little difference between the types of administration which form and SLD seat share. Whether the SLD was a large or a small group did not significantly affect the propensity of coalitions to form, or the number of single party minority administrations which formed.

¹¹ No information is available for the distribution of chairs in administrations prior to current arrangements

That said, general inferences may be more easily drawn from some variables. One variable which Mellors has mentioned in his list of 'multi-dimensional influences' might well have a more discernible effect than others on the local coalitions which form. A number of observers have argued that the "previous patterns of party control" (Mellors, 1989, p.7) will influence the coalitions that can form, and this will now be looked at in some detail.

Section Three: The Role of Traditional Rulers In Hung Councils

This section will scrutinise a number of proposals put forward to explain attitudes to, and the behaviour of, those political groups which previously controlled the local authority. The contentions that former opposition parties will act to exclude 'traditional rulers' from power, and that where traditional rulers do retain power it will tend to be as a minority administration, will be assessed.

5.3.1. Former Rulers and Local Administrations

The supposed reluctance of Conservative former rulers to share power has already been briefly discussed, and it does appear that Conservative former rulers will attempt to retain power by forming a minority administration, as Table 5.5 (section 5.2.3. above) detailing initial administrations indicates. However, it may be the case that former opposition parties are reluctant to talk to the Conservatives, effectively excluding Conservative former rulers from participation in ruling coalitions in the newly hung council, and some evidence was put forward to support this view (see Table 5.8, section 5.2.5. above). Further support for this comes from Carter (1986), who argues that coalitions at the shire level will tend to exclude the Conservative "traditional rulers". During their long period of domination in the shire counties Conservatives behaved as if they had "a God given right to rule" (Carter, 1986, p.6). In the authorities examined by Carter, he argues that "crucially, the Conservatives accepted that the electorate had rejected their policies". Furthermore, the previous Conservative administrations:

"certain of their unassailable position, were seen to rule in an elitist, often arrogant manner....consequently, there was little basis upon which a working relationship could be built" (Carter, 1986, p.10).

Carter's thesis can also be applied to those authorities traditionally controlled by Labour. Stewart argues that in such authorities, "the Conservative Party will probably be ready to enter into ... discussions, in order to gain power" (1985, p.5).

Mellors provides support for the view that opposition parties will be inclined to co-operate to remove traditional rulers from power. Mellors maintains that "above all, coalitions essentially operate against the previous winning party" (1983, p.283), and argues:

"a taste of power after long exclusion is an enticing goal. There is great temptation for Labour groups to wrest power from Conservatives in their county strongholds and [for] Conservatives to sample the delights of control in the urban based districts long held by the Labour party." (Mellors, 1983, p.238)

Mellors also noted a tendency for the Liberals to "engage in coalitions with whichever party had not been in power" (1983, p.241). He found the Liberals were more likely to support Labour in the shires and the Conservatives in the cities (1983, p.241), indicating a desire by the Liberals to form alliances against former rulers. Given the above, in part contradiction to hypothesis 2.3 (above), it would be expected that:

2.8: FORMER RULERS WILL TEND TO BE EXCLUDED FROM LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS.

2.9: THE SLD WILL ENGAGE IN COALITIONS WITH WHICHEVER PARTY WAS NOT PREVIOUSLY IN POWER.

Despite this proposition being tentatively offered to explain the low level of Conservative involvement in county councils (which it has earlier been suggested may be partly because of their poor electoral performance in 1985), the evidence strongly suggests that hypothesis 2.8 is incorrect. Former rulers had taken part, either alone or with other parties, in administrations at some time during the period of hungness in 41 of the 57 local authorities (71.9 percent) examined. This does not indicate a process from which ex-rulers are excluded to any great degree.¹²

Table 5.10 details the degree of former ruler involvement in initial and current administrations. As Table 5.10 shows, in over half of the cases examined (32 out of 57, or 57.1 percent) former rulers were involved in the initial administrations; in 35.1 percent of cases (16 Conservative and 4 Labour) they initially attempted to rule alone (see Table 5.5, section 5.2.3.).

¹² Of the 62 authorities in this sample, in 4 cases the authority had always been hung and in 1 case there was insufficient information to test this hypothesis

Table 5.10: Former Rulers Involvement In Hung Councils

| Former Ruling Party | Initial Admins | Current Admins |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Conservative (n=41) | 25 (61.0%) | 16 (39.0%) |
| Labour (n=11) | 5 (45.5%) | 7 (63.6%) |
| Independent (n=4) | 2 (50.0%) | 2 (50%) |
| All Ex Rulers (n=56) | 32 (57.1%) | 25 (43.9%) |

%= percentage of former rulers involved in administrations

The involvement of ex-rulers is not confined to initial administrations; this is not just a demonstration of politicians attempting to remain in office in the aftermath of defeat. Although there is an appreciable decline in the participation of Conservative former rulers, when current administrations are examined, former rulers are involved in 25 cases (43.9 percent), a not insignificant total. In 10 (17.5 percent) of those cases, they are ruling alone; all 4 of the current Conservative and 6 of the 12 current Labour minority administrations comprise former rulers. In 6 of these 16 cases other administrative arrangements had lapsed and the former rulers had resumed sole minority control.

Even more convincingly rebutting hypothesis 2.8, in 15 (26.3 percent) out of the 57 local authorities for which the relevant information is available former rulers have remained in power for the whole time the council has been hung, in 4 cases alone and in 11 cases with other parties. The average time these 15 councils had been hung was 3.3 years, so the 15 cases are not just newly hung councils where former rulers are desperately clinging on to power. The evidence of this research does not support the hypothesis that former opposition parties act to 'freeze out' former rulers, and if they do attempt to act in this way, they appear to have been unsuccessful.

However, Carter's observation that beaten former rulers appear to accept that their policies had been rejected (Carter, 1986, p.10) was based on an examination of three county councils, and the phenomenon of former rulers being excluded from administrative involvement does appear more prevalent in the counties. When the 18 county councils in this sample are examined, the figures for former rulers involvement are far less. Former rulers were involved in only 7 of the initial 18 administrations (38.9 percent) and only 5 of the 18 current administrations (27.8 percent), which as Table 5.10 indicates is much below the overall involvement of former rulers. Therefore, the hypothesis appears to be more relevant for county

councils, which have usually had a long tradition of Conservative domination. There was a definite policy among the former opposition parties in Devon County Council to exclude the Conservatives from any agreement reached (see Chapter Ten).

5.3.2. Former Rulers and Coalition Administrations

Hypothesis 2.9 proposes that the SLD will form alliances with whichever party had previously been in opposition. This proposition is examined below, but it also suggests that former rulers might be especially excluded from taking part in coalition administrations. Their involvement could tend to be confined to single party minority administrations where they attempt to rule in their traditional manner, without regard to the changed circumstances. Again, this is not supported by the evidence.

Excluding examples of 'no administration', there are a total of 109 administrations in the lifetime of the hung councils in our sample, 2 of which occurred in authorities which had previously always been hung. Therefore, a total of 107 administrations can be checked against former rulers participation; 49 of these were coalition administrations and 58 single-party minority administrations, indicating the propensity of single party minority administrations to initially form (as the previous chapter reported, a plurality of administrations are now coalitions). Former rulers had taken part in 27 (55.1 percent) of the 49 coalition administrations which had formed and in 32 (55.2 percent) of the 58 single party administrations. Although Table 5.10 indicates that Conservatives are now less likely to be involved in their former kingdoms than Labour are in theirs, this is due to Conservative inability to maintain their minority administrations. Labour are more likely to maintain the minority administrations they form in the authorities they formerly controlled. Indeed, as mentioned above, half of the current Labour minority administrations (6 of 12) are cases of former rulers in power, including 4 examples where they have taken over when other arrangements have broken down. This may be because Labour, even when it is a 'traditional ruler', will find it easier to find allies (which even a minority administration must have) at local level than Conservatives when a Conservative central government is seen as 'hostile' to local government and responsible for considerable cuts in local authority finance. That said, Conservative involvement in the authorities they formerly controlled, whether in minority administrations or in coalitions, is not insignificant.

Quite clearly, former rulers are not specifically excluded from the coalitions which form, nor have they been prevented from forming minority administrations. It

seems traditional rulers, whatever their initial hostility towards sharing power, quickly learn to play by the new rules coalition politics dictates. Although their involvement in administrations does decline slightly over time this can be attributed to the failure of the minority administrations they initially attempt to form, especially in the case of Conservatives.

5.3.3. SLD Involvement With Former Rulers

Allied to the thesis that former opposition parties will combine to prevent former rulers taking power, which does not appear to be the case, hypothesis 2.9 proposes that the SLD will engage in coalitions with whichever of the major parties was their partner in opposition. At first sight there might appear to be some support for this hypothesis, but a closer examination suggests that the reality is more complex.

The SLD has taken part in a total of 36 coalitions in the lifetime of the hung councils in this survey, and 24 of them have been two-party coalitions. Half of these 24 have been with Labour and half with Conservatives. The majority of Labour/SLD coalitions (10 of 12) have been in authorities formerly ruled by Conservatives; this includes one council where a 'nominal coalition' of a permanent Conservative/Independent group had previously ruled and was still in place (if not in power) after 3 years of hungness. This finding appears to support the hypothesis, but the majority of Conservative/SLD coalitions (7 of 12) have also been in authorities formerly ruled by Conservatives.

However, these findings are hardly surprising, as most of the hung authorities had previously been controlled by Conservatives (43 of 62 including the council with Conservative/Independent former rulers). Therefore, one would expect to find that the majority of SLD coalitions were in councils formerly ruled by Conservatives. 69.4 percent of councils were formerly ruled by Conservatives, and 70.8 percent of SLD two-party coalitions (7 with Conservatives and 10 with Labour) were in those authorities. Ex-Labour councils account for 17.7 percent of the sample and 29.2 percent of SLD two-party coalitions (5 with Conservatives and 2 with Labour) were in ex-Labour councils. There are more cases of SLD cooperation with Labour in ex-Conservative councils and more cases of SLD co-operation with Conservatives in ex-Labour councils, so some support for the hypothesis is evident, but it hardly appears conclusive. The hypothesis that the SLD will engage in coalitions with whichever party had not previously been in power must remain unproven.

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter, the difficulties of isolating cause and effect have been apparent. The complexities of political life in English local government make drawing firm conclusions from quantitative data difficult. However, certain patterns have been observed in the behaviour of political parties in hung councils, which appear to indicate some general truths.

When current administrations are examined, the SLD are more likely than Labour or Conservative to be involved. Although more administrations overall have involved the Conservatives, this is explained by their initial attempts to rule alone in the councils they formerly ruled. When this strategy has broken down, the Conservatives appear to have been remarkably pragmatic; their involvement in current coalitions is only exceeded by the SLD. Labour has appeared to be more intransigent, with half of all current minority administrations involving them and with Independents (despite the far fewer councils with an Independent group) exceeding Labour in their involvement in coalition administrations. However, there may be forces which act to place Labour in the most difficult position of all the local parties, and the apparent pragmatism of Conservatives may also be misleading.

It is likely that the encouraging approach of the national party organisation, the open attitude of local SLD groups towards negotiations with other parties, and their ideological position all contribute to a greater SLD involvement in current administrations. Which of these variables is most important is impossible to say; all these factors support one another. Their relatively low level of involvement in initial coalitions is also probably best explained by a combination of factors, including Conservative former rulers attempts to rule alone, the attitude of the two main parties towards 'coalition' government, and a dislike by Labour and Conservative groups of a third party wielding influence beyond its size. SLD groups seem just as likely to do deals with either of the two main parties, and the previous status of other party groups seems to make little difference to their willingness to negotiate; SLD groups do not generally hold to the thesis that former rulers have been defeated and therefore should not be negotiated with. The close relationship between them and Labour, posited by a number of observers, was not readily apparent when observing their choice of partners. However, from the point of view of Labour groups, a relationship with their SLD colleagues on the council appears to have been almost unavoidable if they wanted a share of power.

Labour were initially involved in barely a quarter of administrations, and despite their involvement in half of all current administrations they are less likely than any of the four main groups to be involved in coalition agreements. At first sight this suggests, as Mellors believes (1989, p.94), a negative attitude towards inter-party deals by Labour groups. However, Labour's choice of partner is constrained; a large majority of their two-party coalitions are with, or have been with, SLD groups, and all their multi-party coalitions include the SLD. By contrast, Conservatives are involved in current two-party coalitions, in roughly equal measure, with both the SLD and Independents. All of the current Independent two-party coalitions were with Conservatives, and ideological proximity to Independents seems to be an important contributory factor both in the high involvement of Conservatives in coalitions and the ability of Conservative former rulers to remain in power. It appears Labour, in order to gain a share of power, has to come to an arrangement with the SLD. The Conservatives have another alternative.

The high levels of Conservative/ Labour co-operation reported by some previous observers were not evident, although the large numbers of initial Conservative minority administrations, and current Labour minority administrations, may conceal cases where one of the two has abstained or voted to put the other in possession of committee chairs. There were cases where, for example, Labour leaders admitted doing this for the SLD, but none where either of the two main parties admitted to this strategy, so this remains conjecture.

Finally, the belief that former rulers will be excluded from power is not supported by this research's findings. Former rulers do show a propensity to attempt to rule alone, particularly in the initial stages of hungness, but they appear to come to terms with the new situation quickly. Their involvement in current administrations, while not as great as their initial involvement, is not inconsiderable.

A number of these findings suggest that certain administrative arrangements, for example, where former rulers initially attempt to rule alone or where Labour are initially excluded from the administration, may be less stable than others. It has also been suggested in this chapter that there may be a relationship between SLD seat share and administrative stability; in addition, a number of observers have accused the Alliance parties of opportunism, switching their support at crucial moments (for example, Leach, 1985, Stewart, 1985). The following chapter will examine these and other possible influences on the stability of the administrative arrangements this chapter has detailed.

CHAPTER SIX

THE STABILITY OF ADMINISTRATIONS IN HUNG COUNCILS

Introduction

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Introduction

Chapter Three (see 3.2.1) gives the definition of duration/termination that this chapter will utilise. The problems of measuring extant administrations was also dealt with there. To briefly summarise, only a change in the party membership of an administration will be invariably treated as signifying the end of a 'government'. In addition, extant administrations will be considered here as completed administrations except where this will significantly distort any findings.

One of the enduring myths (especially in Britain) about hung legislatures is that they are characterised by instability. The example of Italian government coalitions, rather than the post-war West German experience, is used to 'prove' the thesis, which is often allied to a defence of the 'first-past-the-post' electoral system as providing stable and 'effective' government (for example, see *The Independent*, 'Giving Coalitions A Bad Name', second leader, 16/11/87). Hung local government in England has not escaped this criticism (see Blowers, 1987). Even a sympathetic study of hungness talks of the "inherent instability of administrative forms in hung authorities" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.21). It is undeniable that hung governments are more likely to experience changes of administration than non-hung governments, but this is not inevitable.

Unsurprisingly, in the control group of authorities where one party has a clear overall majority, in all cases the same party remained in control for the duration of the period examined. When one party can control the direction of policy without regard to other parties there are few pressures affecting the stability of that administration; it is in place for the duration of that electoral period, and one hundred percent 'stability' is the norm.

In contrast, a number of factors may affect the stability or otherwise of administrations in hung councils. The political history of an authority, electoral factors which could determine the amount of time an authority is hung, the type of administration formed, and the proportions of seats held by the actors, have all been identified as being of major importance (for example, see Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.52; see also Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.147-148). These factors will be examined in an attempt to determine their impact on the stability of coalitional arrangements.

The type of administration formed is seen as an important influence on administrative durability, with minority administrations traditionally being seen as

the most unstable (see Taylor & Herman, 1971). Section one will examine the relationship between the type of administration which forms and the length of time it lasts, look at the stability of initial administrations and examine the effects of former rulers attempting to cling on to power in the new environment. The effect of the political composition of an administration on durability will also be assessed. Section two forms the main body of this chapter, and will examine a variety of numerical factors which have been alleged to affect administrative durability, beginning with an assessment of the effects of small and pivotal groups on government duration. The relationship between durability and various distributions of seats will also be looked at; for example, there could be a difference in administrative duration when one party is close to a majority and when there are three 'significant' party groups on the council. The hypothesis that a greater number of parties means a greater turnover of administrations receives a critical examination, as does the related thesis that greater party system 'fractionalization' or 'fragmentation' means more unstable governments. The number of parties in a coalition might also affect duration, with multi-party coalitions being seen as more difficult to manage than two party coalitions, and this is examined. Finally in this section, many observers have argued that closeness to 'minimum winning status' is an important determinant for duration, and this and related hypotheses are examined. Finally, section three examines some of the possible effects of the passage of time. Chapter Four has already posited a relationship between the electoral cycle of an authority and administrative formation; section three looks for a relationship between the electoral cycle and administrative duration, and also investigates the thesis that previous experience of hungness will be a factor in greater administrative duration.

One very important hypothesis concerning coalitional duration will not be examined in this chapter; the ideological diversity of a coalition has been frequently cited as an influence on administrative durability (from Axelrod, 1970). However, such a proposition involves a detailed discussion of ideological ordering which is better suited to Chapter Nine, where we look at local administrations in the light of formal coalition theory. Accordingly, the possible impact of ideology on duration is analysed there.

Section One: The Durability of Minority Administrations

The most unstable form of government has usually been seen as one which is unable to command a legislative majority. Although, as many observers have pointed out, for

a number of reasons "a government can survive quite comfortably for a considerable period with less than 50 per cent of legislative seats" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.34), it appears at least intuitively likely that the maintenance of minority administrations will be more difficult than for a majority administration. Indeed, Strom describes minority governments as a "counter intuitive phenomenon" (1984, p.200), and our examination of governmental stability, therefore, begins with a look at the problems faced by minority administrations.

6.1.1. The Conventional Viewpoint

Coalition theorists have traditionally seen minority administrations both as inherently unstable and as an expression of a troubled political system. For example, for Von Beyme they represent a "crisis symptom" (1970, p.570), Taylor & Herman see their position as "precarious" (1971, p.31), and to Dodd they are "vulnerable" (1976, p.51). Their inability to command a legislative majority means that government policy runs the constant risk of being rejected by the legislature. While rejection of an administration's policy does not automatically entail resignation in most legislatures, this does not appear to be a good recipe for administrative stability.

There is convincing evidence that outside the world of English local government, minority governments are less stable than majority governments. In a study of 12 European democracies, Laver & Schofield found that (with the exception of Sweden) majority coalitions lasted considerably longer than minority governments (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, Table 6.2, p.152). Budge & Keman's study of 20 countries, while noting some exceptions, also concluded that in the majority of political systems "minority governments are generally the shortest lived" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.170). Despite his generally positive view of minority governments, Strom also finds that "minority governments are less durable than majority coalitions" (Strom, 1990, p.238). While, in an examination of the allocation of policy portfolios, Austen-Smith & Banks (1990) argue that "stable allocations ... can exist with minority governments" (1990, p.891), the majority of writers agree that minority administrations are more unstable than majority coalitions.

Many students of hung British councils also agree that minority administrations are more unstable than other forms of government. For example, Leach argues that minority administrations in British local councils find government "extremely frustrating", and their inability to carry items put through the committee chairs

normally results in chairmen of the minority administration stepping down from office (Leach, 1985, p.17). Leach argues this leads to a period of political instability, a view with which Blowers (1987, p.32) and Mellors (1983, p.239) concur.

However, another viewpoint is that opponents might hesitate to 'bring down' an unsupported minority administration without offering a viable alternative. Budge & Laver's "viability criterion" partly explains the success of minority governments by the failure of opposition parties to present a viable alternative (1986, p.488). If opposition parties are reluctant to take office when they cannot be sure of getting their policies enacted, they will probably be unlikely to want to bring down the ruling minority administration and run the risk of such 'irresponsibility' rebounding on them electorally. Some observers of hung English councils concur, pointing out that "the electorate is unlikely to look kindly upon those who perpetuate stalemate and chaos inside the council" (Mellors, 1989, p.86). If this is the case, minority administrations may be more stable than some observers argue. In addition, minority administrations in hung councils are far more more likely to have formal status than coalition administrations (see Chapter Four, Table 4.4), which might also imply a greater degree of administrative stability. It certainly seems likely that 'formal status' will be a factor in prolonging the duration of an administration.

Despite these caveats, the recent research of Laver & Schofield (1990), Budge & Keman (1990), and Strom (1990) strongly suggest minority administrations are shorter-lived than majority coalitions, and the observations of Leach (1985), Mellors (1983) and Blowers (1987) imply the same might be true of administrations in English local authorities. The consensus of observers of coalition politics, whether in European parliaments or English local councils, is that single party minority administrations formed without a commitment from other parties for further support are less stable than other forms of administration; such a 'governmental strategy' often necessitates a change of administration before too long (see Leach & Game, 1989, pp.32-34). Even when minority party leaders reach agreement with political rivals, deals worked out on an ad hoc basis between party leaders in order to construct a legislative majority can be frustrated by an unresponsive legislature. This may be more common at local level, as local politicians in England are traditionally more independent of the party line than their national counterparts. In majority control councils councillors usually follow an agreed party line (see Widdicombe, 1986, Report, p.30), but many observers argue

discipline is less easy to enforce in hung councils, as "the importance of individual councillors is enhanced" (Blowers, 1987, p.42). In such circumstances, party leaders trying to maintain a minority administration may find the experience frustrating and unrewarding. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

3.1: MINORITY ADMINISTRATIONS ARE UNSTABLE, AND WILL THEREFORE BE SHORT-LIVED WHEN COMPARED TO MAJORITY COALITION ADMINISTRATIONS.

Table 6.1: Time In Months of Minority and Majority Administrations

| | Minority Admins | Majority Admins |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| All Administrations | 21.8 (n=64) | 20.2 (n=45) |
| Previous Administrations | 19.7 (n=37) | 19.1 (n=19) |
| Current Administrations | 24.5 (n=27) | 20.2 (n=26) |
| All Initial Administrations | 27.0 (n=30) | 23.9 (n=24) |
| Initial Admins (completed) | 23.3 (n=21) | 20.8 (n=11) |
| Initial Admins (extant) | 34.3 (n= 9) | 31.0 (n=13) |

Total=109 administrations: 64 minority, 45 majority

The evidence indicates that hypothesis 3.1 is incorrect. The average length of all administrations in hung councils is 21.1 months. As Table 6.1 shows, all minority administrations (including 5 minority coalitions) last 21.8 months on average, compared to the 20.2 months average of majority coalition administrations. Whatever qualifications are made (for example, comparing only those administrations which had been completed) Table 6.1 shows minority administrations are more durable than coalition administrations. The average time councils with minority administrations and councils with coalition administrations had been hung was almost identical, so the length of time councils had been hung was not a factor.¹

Some Explanations For the Greater Stability of Minority Administrations

The finding that minority administrations last longer on average than majority coalition administrations is not necessarily surprising, as English local authorities are steeped in a political culture which emphasises single party rule as the 'norm'

¹ Councils which included minority administrations had been hung an average of 4.2 years, compared to an average of 4.1 years for councils which included majority coalition administrations. There was obviously some overlapping, because some councils had experienced both minority and coalition administrations.

and sees coalition politics as leading to, amongst other things, shady deals and a loss of principles. Given this view of coalition politics, a lack of trust between partners might lead to more frequent break-ups. Coalition politics will be intrinsically more difficult for participants in English local government, and while minority administrations may have to make more ad hoc deals to ensure a legislative majority, this may (paradoxically) lead to greater stability. The minority government will be under no illusions about their 'partner(s)' in the deal, and a consequent about face by an erstwhile partner will not be seen as the act of 'treachery' it might be to the partners in a 'coalition' administration. Budge & Keman's attempt to construct an integrated theory of democratic party government includes the assumption that governments will attempt to survive in order to carry out their policy preferences (Budge & Keman, 1990, Table 2.1 Assumption 2, p.34). One implication of this assumption is that "the less governments agree over policy, the more likely they are to terminate for involuntary internal reasons"; this leads to the further implication that "single-party governments are less likely to terminate for involuntary internal reasons than coalitions" (Budge & Keman, 1990, Table 2.4, Implications 5 (i) and 5 (ii), p.51), although as mentioned above, their research found that minority governments are "generally the shortest-listed" (p.170). However, this does offer a feasible explanation for the greater longevity of some minority administrations, and the idea of policy closeness contributing to longevity is examined in detail in Chapter Nine (section 9.4.5.).

Local coalitions are often legislative, with one-third involving no sharing of committee chairs (see Chapter Four, Table 4.7), and in such cases there may be less pressure to keep the coalition together when disagreement arises. If so, this could help to explain the lesser average duration of coalition administrations. Connected to this, minority administrations are far more likely to be 'formal' (Table 4.4), implying a degree of acceptance by opposing parties. This may also be helping to prolong most minority administrations, although as details of formal and informal administrative arrangements are only available for current administrations, it is impossible to say if formal status has an impact on administrative duration. That said, it appears intuitively likely to affect the length of time an administration can last; one Labour formal minority administration has remained in control of its district council for over 6 years.

Other explanations can also seem persuasive. For example, (as section two of Chapter Two details) despite the official position that officers are both responsible to and available for information to all councillors regardless of party, the working

practices of English local authorities are adapted to a political and bureaucratic elite who effectively control the flow of policy.² Given this, single party minority administrations will fit the working practices of most councils more easily than coalitions of parties, despite the difficulties minority administrations present to decision making. When hungness is seen as a hopefully temporary phenomenon, forming a minority administration might seem to make more sense; why make deals with long term rivals if elections will restore the status quo in 12 months time?³ If elections do not bring a majority for one party, minority administrations may then become the new *status quo*. This may partly explain the longevity of minority administrations.

6.1.2. The Stability of Initial Minority Administrations in the Counties

Single party minority administrations may even have their attractions when hungness will last, barring a series of by-elections, for 4 years. At a time of apparent chaos, single party minority administrations may seem a reassuring link with previous practices. This may explain the otherwise puzzling phenomenon observed by Leach & Stewart of a general readiness by parties in the hung counties (with the exception of a few Labour groups) to assume minority control at the onset of hungness without even a majority in committee (Leach & Stewart, 1985, p.6).

This immediate response might also indicate a naivety concerning the realities of governing in a hung situation, and therefore it might be expected that the initial minority administrations formed in the counties would last for a much shorter time than the norm. As well as this, Leach argues that on the collapse of the initial minority administration, the second largest party may fill the "vacuum" (Leach, 1985, p.17).

Neither of these proposals is supported by the evidence. In the 18 hung counties in this survey, there were 7 examples of initial minority administrations forming and the average duration was 32.9 months, compared to the 25.6 months average duration of the initial coalition administrations formed. Two initial minority administrations (one Conservative and one SLD) were still ruling after more than 3 years of hungness. This does not indicate a predilection for instability among initial minority administrations. Likewise, while in 2 of these 7 cases the second largest

² Temple (1991, pp.27-31) sums up the general findings concerning power in majority control councils.

³ Supporting this point, Table 4.5 (Chapter Four) shows single party minority administrations are far more common in councils holding yearly elections.

party took minority control on the breakdown of the initial minority administration, this is hardly surprising, and other outcomes (for example, a coalition of two non-administration parties) were just as likely.

6.1.3. The Minority Administrations of Former Rulers and Stability

One situation where such an 'anti-administration' coalition might be more readily formed is when former rulers attempt to maintain control of the council. The findings discussed in section three of Chapter Five showed that, contrary to expectations, former rulers were neither excluded from coalitions in their former 'kingdoms' nor prevented from forming minority administrations. However, their involvement in administrations does decline slightly over time and this was attributed to the failure of the minority administrations they initially formed. There are now far fewer single party minority administrations run by former rulers than was initially the case (see Table 5.5, Chapter Five). There are a number of possible reasons for this. As Leach points out:

"parties which have become accustomed to control with a clear majority may expect to continue in power on a minority basis (particularly if they are the largest single party) without recognising that different political style and skills are required in the new situation. Indeed, inexperience of hungness can lead to errors of judgement or tactics on the part of the party in this position which weaken their credibility and their ability to sustain a minority administration over time" (Leach, 1985, p.16).

Carter's observations on the "bitterness" between former rulers and other parties, perhaps inevitable after years of often "elitist and arrogant rule" (Carter, 1986, p.11), support the idea that former rulers will encounter fierce opposition in any attempt to maintain sole control. In such cases, electoral rivals might be more prepared to bury differences, particularly as instability and frustration (two qualities often associated with hung authorities!) are likely to be more prevalent when 'traditional rulers' attempt to carry on governing with a minority after they have been 'rejected' by the electorate. If former opposition parties are willing to cooperate to remove long term rulers from power (as also argued by, for example, Stewart, 1985, p.5; Mellors, 1989, p.241) it certainly appears likely that former rulers will find it difficult to maintain their hold on power for any length of time. If this is so, and given Leach's observations above, it is proposed that:

3.2: WHERE TRADITIONAL RULERS FORM A MINORITY ADMINISTRATION IN NEWLY HUNG COUNCILS, THAT ADMINISTRATION WILL BE SHORT-LIVED.

Despite the wealth of *prima facie* support for the proposition, hypothesis 3.2 is not backed by the evidence of this survey. Traditional rulers formed an initial minority administration in 20 of the 62 local authorities in our sample, and the average time those administrations lasted was 27.4 months, considerably above the norm for all administrations (21.1 months) and also above the norm for all initial administrations (25.9 months). In four cases the former rulers were still in power, including one case where a Labour minority administration had ruled for over 6 years. These results indicate that, far from being unstable, administrations formed by traditional rulers are more stable on average than other forms of administration. Of course, there were a number of instances where minority administrations formed by traditional rulers were short-lived, but there were more examples where they lasted a considerable time. However, there was a difference in longevity of administration between the two main parties.

6.1.4. The Party Political Composition of Administrations and Administrative Longevity

In the 16 cases where Conservative former rulers had formed an initial minority administration, the average time of those administrations was 25.7 months; in the 4 Labour cases the average administration time was 33.5 months. The greater length of Labour minority administrations in administrations they had formerly ruled may indicate that the SLD finds it harder to come to an agreement with Conservatives to remove Labour than vice versa.⁴ However, as the results shown in Chapter Five indicate, in contrast to the observations of many observers (for example, Carter, 1986, Mellors, 1989) the SLD is just as likely to come to an arrangement with Conservatives as Labour, although the evidence indicates the SLD find it harder to maintain agreements with Conservatives than they do with Labour.

Table 6.2 lists the average time of administrations by political composition.⁵ Quite clearly, Conservative/SLD coalitions are short lived compared to Labour/ SLD

⁴ Budge & Keman find that administrations with a "socialist" input last longer than those with a "bourgeois" input, perhaps because "divisions between Social Democrats and Left Socialists will be of degree rather than direction" (Budge & Keman, 1990, pp.173-174). Although they lack precise enough information to come to clear conclusions, this does offer another possible reason for the greater longevity of administrations with a Labour input compared to those with a Conservative input (with the exception of Conservative/ Independent coalitions, as Table 6.2 shows).

⁵In order to prevent misrepresentation arrangements with only one or two examples are excluded. For example, the average time of 37 months for 'all-party' administrations (Conservative/ Labour/ SLD/ Independent), which implies a degree of stability in such arrangements, appears less significant when one realises the two cases we have information on time for lasted the two extremes of 13 and 61 months.

coalitions, which appears to support Mellors (1989; p.107) in his assessment of a greater closeness between Labour and SLD. Indeed, Conservative/SLD administrations are even shorter lived than periods of 'no administration' (which average 15.6 months), which certainly indicates a high degree of volatility. However, the greater longevity of Labour/SLD administrations may merely indicate further support for the proposal in Chapter Five that Labour has little choice but to 'like the SLD or lump them'; if this is the case, then the longevity of Labour/SLD coalitions compared to Conservative/SLD coalitions can be easily explained. The relative longevity of SLD minority administrations can also be explained by this, as Labour will again have little choice ideologically other than support the SLD or lose influence.⁶

Table 6.2: Administrative Stability By Political Composition

| Political Composition | Number of Admins | Average Duration (months) |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Conservative | 22 | 21.0 |
| Labour | 19 | 22.5 |
| SLD | 14 | 26.6 |
| Conservative/Independent | 7 | 28.1 |
| Conservative/SLD | 11 | 15.3 |
| Labour/SLD | 12 | 19.9 |
| No Administration | 9 | 15.6 |

Table 6.2 also indicates that administrations formed by Labour or Conservative former rulers are far longer lasting than administrations formed by these parties in councils which they did not formerly rule. The average time of former rulers administrations of 27.4 months is far above the average for all Labour (22.5 months) or Conservative (21.0 months) minority administrations, indicating former rulers find it easier to rule. The most likely explanation for this could be that their knowledge of running a council is greater and their relationship with officers will necessarily be much closer.⁷ Former opposition parties attempting to rule alone may well find the experience especially dispiriting. Not only do they lack political experience, they have to acquire the knowledge of how to run the council at

⁶ Section two (below) explores this proposition further.

⁷ However, former rulers tended still to be the largest single group, and it *may* be that the electoral result has been interpreted in their favour; if so, their greater longevity would be expected. However, despite the Conservatives being the biggest group in Devon, the other groups were determined they should not continue in power.

the very time it is most difficult to run. Perhaps it is not surprising that such minority administrations are relatively short-lived. What is also unsurprising is the relative longevity of Conservative/ Independent administrations (28.1 months). As previous chapters have argued these two groups will generally be ideologically close, and agreement between them will be much easier than for other groups.

Section One has demonstrated that, contrary to most expectations, minority administrations are more durable than majority administrations in hung councils and that former rulers can also continue ruling alone for long periods despite their lack of a majority. Previous chapters have indicated that whether single party minority administrations or coalitions of parties assume control appears to be influenced by certain arithmetical factors. Section two will now examine whether such variables are also affecting the durability of the administrations which form in hung councils.

Section Two: The Importance of Numbers

A number of arithmetical variables have been cited as possible contributions to administrative durability. The first, and most far-reaching for formal theorists, is the connection that has been made between minimal winning status and durability, most famously by Dodd (1976). A correlation has also been posited between durability, and both the number of parties in a political system (e.g., Blondel, 1968) and the number of parties in a particular administration (e.g., Sanders & Herman, 1977). Chapter Four has indicated that the level of 'fractionalization' of the party system may influence the type of administration forming, and studies have suggested a relationship between fractionalization and administrative durability (for example, Laasko & Taagepura, 1979). These factors have received little consideration in the largely empirical studies of hung councils in Britain. Before assessing their influence on administrative stability, it is proposed to examine those arithmetical factors which have been especially noted to affect administrative durability by observers of British hung councils; these are all connected with the distribution of seats between the parties.

6.2.1. The Impact of Electoral Arithmetic on Administrative Stability

Some of the effects of electoral arithmetic on coalition formation have been shown in the previous two chapters. Chapter Four demonstrates a relationship between electoral arithmetic and the administrative arrangements which form in hung councils; coalitions are more likely to occur when no 'near-winner' emerges, and

when one party is close to a majority it is more likely to try and rule alone. In addition to this, Chapter Five notes a relationship between SLD seat share and either 'no administration' or an 'all-party' administration forming. These chapters also offered hints of a relationship between the number of seats held by party groups and the stability of administrations; for example, more administrations had formed in councils where the SLD was a small group than in those where it held a significant number of seats, indicating a possible relationship between small SLD groups and administrative instability. The relationship between electoral arithmetic and stability will now be examined, beginning with a look at the SLD, which, for reasons of both ideological position and general smallness of group, has found itself most likely to be accused of undermining administrative stability.

The 'Opportunistic' SLD: An Unfair Criticism?

Several observers maintain the SLD is more likely to switch support in hung councils than other party groups. For example, Blowers argues that small Alliance groups tend to behave in an opportunist way, "favouring whichever side appears to offer greatest electoral advantage" (Blowers, 1987, p.42), and Leach notes a tendency for the Liberals to switch support at crucial junctures in order to increase their influence and demonstrate independence (Leach, 1985, p.16). Certainly, SLD advice to its councillors in hung authorities has tended in the past to lay as much emphasis, if not more, on obtaining the maximum benefit from policy concessions as it has to ensuring stability. As Clay puts it, in a handbook for Liberal councillors in hung councils:

"while Liberals will try to be responsible politicians and to ensure that the government of the area continues as coherently as possible this has to be set against the overall political objective [control of the council]. For much of the time these aims will not conflict but there will be 'crunch' moments, particularly when the other parties try to put pressure on you. Often they will demand that you are 'responsible' when they are not being so themselves - don't be taken in by this" (Clay, 1982, p.4).

Such claims of 'irresponsibility', and the widespread feeling found by some observers that "the Alliance cannot be taken too seriously" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.34) may contribute to views of the SLD as 'opportunistic'. However, it may be that SLD groups are being unfairly maligned by comments on their opportunistic nature, and that any instability observed could be caused by the arithmetic of the situation rather than by the tactics of the SLD. In other words, any small party group wielding influence 'beyond its size' may cause instability. However, while Mellors notes that "constantly regrouping voting coalitions" could benefit any smaller parties in hung authorities, he maintains the Liberals have been "especially adroit" at ensuring

maximum policy payoffs from their voting strength (Mellors, 1983, pp.241-242). It is therefore proposed that:

3.3: IN HUNG AUTHORITIES WHERE SMALL SLD GROUPS (I.E. LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF THE COUNCIL) HOLD THE BALANCE OF POWER, ADMINISTRATIONS WILL TEND TO BE UNSTABLE.

The evidence strongly supports this proposition. There are 12 local authorities where SLD groups are both small and pivotal, and 32 administrations have ruled since the 12 became hung (they had been hung an average of 49 months, close to the overall average of 50.4 months). The average time of those 32 administrations is 18.4 months, less than the norm of 21.1 months. To further illustrate the point, in those authorities where the SLD seat share was over 20 percent the average time of all administrations was 25.7 months (see Table 6.3 below for details).

It was noted above that small SLD groups might be being 'unfairly maligned' by the comments about their opportunism, and that any small and pivotal group will generate administrative uncertainty. However, in the 6 local authorities where another party group is both small and pivotal,⁸ the initial administration was still in place. The average time of both hungness and administrations was therefore the same, 35.0 months; although these authorities had been hung for a comparatively short time, the administrative duration was far above the norm. This appears to support the proposition that SLD groups are far more likely to behave opportunistically than other small groups. However, the longevity of administrations where Labour is small and pivotal is almost certainly the result of Labour's ideological position rather than a more 'responsible attitude' to government; Labour has less choice of partner.

Again - Labour Has Little Choice of Partner

As would be expected from the arguments put forward in Chapter Five to explain Labour's favourite choice of coalition partner and the arguments advanced in Section One of this chapter to explain the greater longevity of Labour/SLD coalitions compared to Conservative/SLD coalitions, the SLD is the beneficiary of the ideological constraints imposed on Labour. In all 5 cases where Labour is small and pivotal there is an SLD minority administration in place. In each case the SLD minority administration had been in power for the duration of hungness (ranging from 13 months to 49 months), and was presumably able to remain in power for so long because of tacit Labour support (in none of these cases were Labour rewarded

⁸ In 5 cases Labour is pivotal and in one case a Conservative group is pivotal.

with committee chairs). That said, there is little evidence for tacit Labour/SLD arrangements; in only one case was there evidence of policy deals, minor concessions in transport policy being agreed between the two parties. However, party leaders were more likely to claim that concessions had been obtained than to admit to granting them, making such tacit deals hard to discover.⁹ In the single authority where the Conservatives are small and pivotal there is no Labour group, and a Conservative / large Independent group coalition had remained in power for the duration of hungness at the expense of a large SLD group. The 'natural coalition' of Conservatives and Independents accounts for this stability; as Table 6.2 shows, Conservative/ Independent coalitions are longer lasting than other two-party coalitions.

From these results, a feasible relationship could be proposed between small and pivotal Labour groups and administrative stability, at least when there are large SLD and Conservative groups in the hung council; "where there is a small and pivotal Labour group, a stable SLD minority administration will form" appears, from the admittedly small number of cases considered here, to be a highly plausible maxim.

The results of this research tend to support the general thesis that the existence of small SLD groups will tend to generate administrative instability. Observers of hung councils have noted that it is not only small groups which will affect administrative stability. A number of other factors related to party size have been alleged to affect stability in English local government, and these will now be examined.

6.2.2. The Effects of Seat Distribution on Administrative Stability

It has been suggested that the proportion of seats held by the parties is a significant influence on the durability of administrations in hung councils. Leach & Stewart argue that if each of the three major parties has a significant proportion of seats and neither is likely to obtain a majority in the foreseeable future, more stable "inter-party accommodations" will be likely to exist (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.52). Leach also proposed that where all three groups had roughly the same number of seats, stability was more likely than where the third party was small and held the balance of power (Leach, 1985, p.16). Inter-party accommodations do not necessarily entail a coalition; it may be that the agreement is to enable one party to rule alone for a specified time. However, such 'stable inter-party accommodations' also suggest that any coalition arrangements which are reached might be more durable. Therefore, it would be expected that:

⁹ Chapter Nine deals with policy payoffs in more detail.

3.4: STABLE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MORE LIKELY IN THOSE AUTHORITIES WHERE ALL THREE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION (I.E. OVER 20%) OF COUNCIL SEATS.

3.5: COALITIONS IN AUTHORITIES WHERE ALL THREE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE A SIGNIFICANT PROPORTION OF COUNCIL SEATS WILL BE LONGER LASTING THAN COALITIONS IN OTHER AUTHORITIES.

Table 6.3 (below) details the results of testing hypothesis 3.4; the table also examines administrative stability when (a) no party is close to a majority, (b) when one party is close to a majority, (c) the SLD is small and pivotal, (d) one party (including the SLD) is small and pivotal, and (e) where the SLD has over 20 percent of the council seats. Obviously, there is some overlapping of these categories.

Table 6.3: Administrative Duration By Council Seat Distribution

| Distribution of Seats (n= number of councils) | Time in Months | |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|
| | Average Time Hung | Average Time Admins |
| Three Parties Over 20% (n=17) | 52.4 | 19.9 |
| No Party Close To Majority (n=24) | 63.6 | 26.5 |
| One Party Close To Majority (n=38)* | 45.7 | 18.7 |
| One Party Small & Pivotal | 44.3 | 21.0 |
| SLD Small & Pivotal (n=12) | 49.0 | 18.4 |
| SLD Over 20% (n=33) | 48.7 | 25.7 |
| Overall Averages (n=62) | 50.4 | 21.1 |

* In 5 of these 38 councils, two parties are both close to a majority with each having over 45% of the council seats.

At first sight (as Table 6.3 indicates) neither of the above hypotheses is supported by the findings of this research. The average time of administrations in councils where all parties have a substantial number of seats is 19.9 months, and there is no difference in time between coalition administrations and single party minority administrations. It could be proposed that in these authorities each of the three parties might feel it has a 'right to rule', and under such conditions instability might therefore be expected. However, Leach & Stewart offered the qualification that the stability of 'inter-party accommodations' would be enhanced if no party was likely to gain a majority in the near future (1988, p.52). In 6 of the 17 cases where three parties had a significant number of seats one party was close to a majority, and

would therefore be looking towards forming a majority administration after the next election; such a hope would be less likely to be held by parties in councils where no party was close to a majority.

If we examine the 11 councils where all three parties held over 20 percent of the seats but none was close to a majority, there is support for Leach & Stewart's hypothesis. The average time of administrations is 22.3 months, above the average, and the average time of coalitions in these authorities is 27.8 months, although the sample is small (just 5 of the 16 administrations we have information on time for are coalitions). Whatever, Leach & Stewart's observations are confirmed by this evidence; other expectations were generally confounded.

Contrary to expectations, where one party is small and pivotal administrations last 21 months on average, very close to the overall average of 21.1 months, and longer than where all three parties had a significant number of seats. These results somewhat contradict the findings of Laver & Schofield (1990) on the impact of the bargaining environment on stability. They found that administrations in bipolar systems¹⁰ were much longer lasting than those in multipolar systems, which councils with three significant party groups would be (Laver & Schofield, 1990, Table 6.5, p.159). However, the longevity of administrations in councils with a small and pivotal third party is (as discussed above) largely due to the longevity of the 6 administrations in the authorities where Labour or Conservative are small and pivotal. Also, Laver & Schofield's sample of 'bipolar systems' includes systems where the third small party is not pivotal, making comparison problematic.

Administrations also last a shorter time than the norm when one party is close to a majority. It is difficult to find a convincing reason for this, especially when it is considered that single party administrations (which as section one details last longer than coalition administrations) are more common in these authorities; therefore, one would expect to find administrations lasted longer when one party was close to a legislative majority. Perhaps the best explanation for the relative instability of administrations in such councils is that actors may feel the council is more likely to return to single party minority control sooner than other categories, either as the result of the next election or one or two by-elections. Such a situation may mean politicians are reluctant to enter into agreements.

¹⁰ Bipolar systems were defined as "effectively 'two-and-a-half' party systems with two large parties and a much smaller one which may nevertheless hold the balance of power" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.114).

Table 6.3 does detail one category in which the average administration is much longer lasting than the norm. Administrations in authorities where no party is close to a majority last an average of 26.5 months. It may be the greater time these councils have been hung (63.6 months compared to the overall average of 50.4 months) has enabled more stable administrative arrangements to emerge. However, this durability may well be due to the fact that no party is close to a majority. The actors involved will have to view the hung situation as a more permanent feature, as by-elections are unlikely to lead to a return to the 'normality' of one party majority rule.

The distribution of legislative seats has been shown to have some influence on the durability of administrations, although attaching convincing reasons for some of the unexpected findings is difficult. Arithmetical features unconnected with electoral arithmetic have also been cited as an influence on stability, and such factors constitute our next area of concern, commencing with a look at the effect of the number of parties in the political system on stability.

6.2.3. Multiparty Systems And Stability

Traditionally, multi-party systems have been assumed to make coalition maintenance more difficult (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.147). Coalition stability is assumed to be more difficult in multi-party systems because of the variety of alternatives actors are presented with; if a party is not happy with the reward from its participation in government there is assumed to be a higher probability it can form a new coalition with another party or parties. If "the stability of cabinets is appropriately modelled as a problem of individual decision-making under uncertainty" (Browne, Frensdreis & Gleiber, 1984, p.191) then factors increasing uncertainty will affect stability, and the greater the possibility of alternative coalitions forming, the greater the uncertainty. Also, multi-party systems could mean that multi-party coalitions are formed more often, and the more partners there are the more difficult it becomes to find policies acceptable to all coalition actors (the stability of multi-party coalitions is examined later in this chapter).

Laasko & Taagepura (1979) show some disagreement with the general thesis that governmental instability is related to the size of the party system. Although they note that instability "may or may not be correlated" with fluctuation in the "effective number of parties" (relating to both the number of parties and their comparative

weights), they argue that "it certainly is not merely correlated with the mere effective number of parties in our sample" (Laasko & Taagepura, 1979, p.20).¹¹

However, despite some caveats, Laver & Schofield found "very clear evidence ... that countries with bigger party systems have less stable cabinets" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.149). Therefore, it is proposed that:

3.6: THE GREATER THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES, THE GREATER THE ADMINISTRATIVE INSTABILITY.

In direct contrast to the findings of Laver & Schofield (1990),¹² this research strongly suggests that the more parties there are in an authority the more likely it is that administrations will be long lasting (see Table 6.4 below). Although the numbers of administrations in councils with 5 or 6 parties is small, and therefore the correlation may be suspect when applied to these councils, the relationship appears to be quite clearly demonstrated in the differences between councils with 3 or 4 parties. However, there was a clear discrepancy in the average time these groups had been hung, which has almost certainly influenced the figures. The far shorter average time which councils with 3 parties had been hung (34 months) compared to councils with 4 parties, which had been hung an average of 20 months longer (54 months), will mean that current administrative arrangements will have had less time to develop. This appears to throw doubt on the correlation observed.

Table 6.4: Administrative Duration By Size of Party System

| No of Parties | No. of Councils | No. of Admins | Time Hung | Average Time in Months | | |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | | | | All Admins | Completed Admins | Coalition Admins |
| Three | 16 | 31 | 34.0 | 17.6 | 11.2(n=15) | 17.3 (n=9) |
| Four | 34 | 70 | 54.0 | 22.3 | 21.3(n=36) | 18.5(n=29) |
| Five | 9 | 13 | 77.3 | 44.8 | 26.0 (n=1) | 31.5 (n=5) |
| Six | 3 | 7 | 45.0 | 19.3 | 30.0 (n=4) | 19.3 (n=7) |

¹¹Laver & Schofield found that "cabinet duration was more likely to rise than to fall when the size of the party system increased ... [suggesting] ... the operation of other factors that change from country to country and are related both to cabinet stability and to the size of the party system" (1990, p.149).

¹² It must be admitted that Laver & Schofield's examination covered a number of systems with an effective number of parties ranging from an average of 2.2 to 5.8 parties, a far greater range and scope than this analysis, where the great majority of 'local systems' were of either 3 or 4 parties.

However, if we delete all those current administrations from the sample which have been hung 2 years or less, we still find a significant difference in the average administrative duration. The average administration in councils with 3 parties is then 21.0 months, compared to an average of 25.8 months in councils with 4 parties. Therefore, it appears plausible to suggest that, at the very least, administrations last longer in authorities with 4 parties than in authorities with 3 parties. Not only that, but *coalitions* are also likely to last longer in authorities with 4 parties than with 3 parties, 18.5 months compared to 17.3 months.

Quite why administrations last longer in multi-party systems is difficult to understand, as this appears counter-intuitive. Also, percentage-wise, there are more single party administrations in three-party systems than multi-party systems which alone should have increased the average duration; minority administrations usually last longer than majority administrations (see Table 6.1). However, minority administrations are relatively unstable in three-party systems, lasting only 18.7 months on average compared to the 25.6 months average of single party minority administrations in four-party systems. It may be that when there are only three parties in a system, discussions are much easier to effect, and contrary to received wisdom, alternatives may be easier to arrange than in a multi-party system. Each party only needs to reach agreement with one other party to bring down an administration or improve its share of the 'reward' of participation in a winning coalition.

However, the dominant reason may well be the relationship between time hung and closeness to a majority. Compared to four and more party councils, three party councils had experienced hungness for only a short period, 34 months on average, and memories of single party control are more recent. Perhaps more importantly, one party was close to a majority in 15 of the 16 three-party systems, and Table 6.3 has already detailed the relative instability of administrations where one party is close to overall control. The number of parties is also a crude measure of 'party system size', and a more sophisticated measure may well illustrate the expected relationship between party system size and instability. Therefore, Rae's index of party system fractionalization will now be utilised to examine this possibility.

6.2.4. Levels of Fractionalization and Administrative Stability

While the number of parties in the council has not produced the expected effect on administrative durability, it may be that a more subtle measure of party system size is needed. A 'six-party system' may, in reality, contain only one significant party, the remaining five holding only a handful of seats, while in a 'three-party system' all the parties may be significant actors. As discussed in Chapter Four when assessing the impact of party system fractionalization on administrative *formation*, Laver & Schofield's assessment of the effects of party system size on stability was conducted in terms of "the effective number of parties" (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.116-117) from a measure put forward by Laasko & Taagepura (1979). Laver & Schofield found a strong correlation between instability and 'multipolar' systems. They also suggested that the 'events' approach of Browne, Frenreis & Gleiber (1984), which makes the general assumption that government downfall is caused by random and unpredictable "critical events" (Browne et al, 1984, p.628), compliments the "bargaining system stability" approach:

"The combined approach suggests that coalition cabinets exist in a bargaining environment that is continually changing in unpredictable ways. These changes may be produced by the random events that are liable to occur in any social environment. Some bargaining systems (those we have called multipolar systems) are more likely to be disturbed by such changes than others; they are thus inherently more unstable" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.160).

Such systems are more unstable because the members of coalitions in multipolar systems are more likely to find themselves "in a situation in which they suddenly develop incentives to unscramble the deal that forms the fundamental basis of the coalition" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.160). A model that synthesises the 'events' and 'attributes' approaches has been produced, reporting that the higher the degree of fragmentation and polarisation, the less durable the government (King, Alt, Burns & Laver, forthcoming, see Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.161).

Despite the reported success of the above models,¹³ it is proposed to examine the relationship between the 'effective' size of party systems using Rae's 'index of fractionalization' (1967). Rae's index has already been used, with some interesting findings, in an examination of administrative formation (see Chapter Four), and this measure will again be used as a less subjective index than (for example) the

¹³ Although as noted in the opening chapter, Strom, 1988, is highly critical of the approach of Browne, et al (see section 1.3.3).

unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar categories adopted by Laver & Schofield in their "bargaining system stability approach" (1990, p.160).

If the findings of previous observers are supported, it would be expected that the greater the degree of fractionalization, the more difficult it would be to maintain the administration, especially when a coalition administration is in place (see Rae, 1967, pp. 62-63). Accordingly, it is proposed that:

3.7: THE GREATER THE INDEX OF PARTY SYSTEM FRACTIONALIZATION, THE LESS DURABLE THE ADMINISTRATION WILL BE.

3.8: THE GREATER THE INDEX OF PARTY SYSTEM FRACTIONALIZATION, THE LESS DURABLE COALITION ADMINISTRATIONS WILL BE.

Table 6.5 details administrative duration by the degree of party system fractionalization, and it appears that Hypothesis 3.7 is not supported by the evidence.¹⁴ If anything, the reverse appears to be the case, although the differences in duration are not great. Perhaps party system fractionalization is not an influence on English local government administrations, although, as shown earlier in this section, other 'numerical' factors, such as the closeness of one party to an overall majority, do appear to have an effect on administrative duration.

Table 6.5: Administrative Duration By Party System Fractionalization

| Party System Fractionalization | Average Duration in Months | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| | All Administrations | Coalition Admins |
| Low (n=37) | 20.4 | 14.0 (n=11) |
| Medium (n=44) | 19.3 | 18.7 (n=12) |
| High (n=40) | 22.9 | 28.3 (n=11) |

As noted above, Laver & Schofield (1990) suggest that coalition administrations in 'multipolar' systems will be less durable because the 'bargaining environment' is frequently changing in unpredictable ways. Therefore, given the similarity of the indices of 'high fractionalization' and 'multi-polarity', we would expect to find a relationship between coalition durability and party system fractionalization, as hypothesis 3.8 predicts. However, as Table 6.5 shows, the more fractionalized the party system is, the longer the average length of coalition administrations. While

¹⁴The same criteria as those detailed in Chapter Four (see section) were used to categorise party systems as 'low', 'medium', and 'high' fractionalization.

systems with high fractionalization had generally been hung for longer than systems with low fractionalization, this can only partially explain the difference. Also, coalitions (and under and over sized coalitions have been excluded from this test of hypothesis 3.8) were very evenly distributed between the three categories of system fractionalization, so it is less likely to be the case that a few unusual cases are skewing the result. Such an unexpected (and again, counter-intuitive) result is not easy to explain.

Party system fractionalization does not seem to offer an explanation for administrative durability in English local government, as it certainly goes against all previous observers to argue that the more fractionalized the system is, the more durable an administration will be. As shown above, studies of European party systems have consistently found a link between 'fragmentation' and durability. Again, it must be pointed out that English local councils have a different history in regard to coalition politics and different institutional and organisational structures to European national legislatures which will probably be greater influences on local political behaviour than the number and weight of the parties themselves. In other words, explanations culled from systems with a history of coalitions, and organisational structures adapted to coalition politics, may be lacking when applied to hung councils. More specific local factors may be accounting for the variance shown in Table 6.5.

Other numerical factors may have more relevance to coalition bargaining and maintenance whatever the system, and one that intuitively appears likely to affect the durability of a coalition will now be examined.

6.2.5. The Influence of the 'Bargaining Proposition'

A numerical factor which might affect stability is the number of parties involved in the coalition. Leiserson's (1968) 'bargaining proposition' suggests that the fewer parties there are in a proposed coalition, the easier it is to reach agreement; Leiserson therefore proposes that two-party coalitions are likelier to form than three-party coalitions, and so on (Leiserson, 1968, pp.70-87).¹⁵ If bargaining is easier the fewer parties there are, it appears intuitively likely that coalition maintenance will be easier the fewer parties there are, as the compromises necessary for coalition maintenance should be easier to make when there are fewer

¹⁵See Chapter One, 1.2.2. for an assessment of bargaining theory. Its proposition regarding formation is briefly considered in Chapter Nine when testing theories of coalition formation.

partners to consult, an argument put forward by Rae (1967, p.63). There is support for this from observers of hung governments. Sanders & Herman (1977) argue that the fewer parties there are in a coalition, the longer it will last (Sanders & Herman, 1977, p.358). For Warwick also, the number of parties is a "significant influence" on coalitional duration, with the fewer the parties the longer the coalition (Warwick, 1979, pp.469-474). Lijphart (1984b) lends further support to this argument. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

3.9: THE FEWER PARTIES THERE ARE IN A COALITION, THE LONGER IT WILL LAST.

There is some support for the hypothesis, as Table 6.6 (below) indicates, although the small numbers of local coalitions which have more than two partners means any conclusion can be considered as no more than tentative. The average time of all two-party administrations (21.1 months) is exactly the same as the average for all administrations in hung councils. The average time decreases sharply for three-party administrations, such coalitions lasting for only 13.1 months on average. The higher average duration of multi-party coalitions (21.8 months), which appears to contradict the proposition, is mainly because of the long duration of one of the 2 extant 'all-party' administrations in the small sample of 4 administrations, which has so far lasted 61 months.

Table 6.6: Administrative Duration By Number of Parties in Coalition

| Parties in Coalition (n=number of coalitions) | Time in Months | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------------|
| | All Administrations | Completed Administrations |
| Two (n=33) | 21.1 | 20.3 (n=16) |
| Three (n=9) | 13.1 | 16.0 (n=3) |
| Four/Five (n=4) | 21.8 | 12.0 (n=1) |

Of the 46 coalitions for which we have information on duration, 33 (71.7 percent) are two-party coalitions while only 9 (19.6 percent) are three-party coalitions, making comparison problematic; there are too few three-party coalitions to come to clear conclusions (offering some preliminary support for Leiserson's 'bargaining proposition'). It does appear that coalitions last longer the fewer partners there are, although another factor may be contributing to the relative instability of multi-

party coalitions. They are obviously more likely to be 'surplus majority governments', and the general view of theorists is that surplus majority coalitions are relatively short-lived, as the possibility of alternative winning (and more minimal) coalitions among the members of the surplus majority coalition adds an extra element of instability (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.151). Coalitions which are 'minimal winning' have normally been seen as the most stable form of coalition administration. That proposition will now be examined.

6.2.6. 'Minimal' and 'Minimum' Winning Status and Duration

As discussed in more detail in Chapter One, minimal winning coalitions are coalitions which will be rendered 'losing' if they lose one of their members. The minimal winning criterion (from the work of Von Neumann & Morgenstern, 1945) is the most exhaustively tested proposition in coalition theory, and its predictive failures, particularly the inability to account for the large number of minority and over-sized governments which form in the 'real world' of coalition politics, are often cited as evidence of the inadequacy of formal theory (see Browne, 1982, pp.336-344, and Pridham, *passim*). However, as Laver & Schofield note, its performance is often misrepresented. While it is more often wrong than right, being successful in only about 40 percent of cases, it does better than "picking coalitions out of a hat ... [and] ... does add significantly to our understanding of what is going on." (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.97)

However, while the large number of predictions made by the minimal winning criterion helps it to perform better than both Leiserson's bargaining theory and the minimum winning criterion,¹⁶ its lack of specificity reduces the statistical significance of its predictions, as well as limiting its usefulness to those wishing to predict which of a number of possible coalitions will form. Also, as the high proportion of two-party coalitions indicates, most of the *coalitions* which form in local government are minimal winning. Therefore, while the minimal winning criterion cannot explain the formation of minority governments, it will probably out-perform more specific accounts of which coalition will form in English local government.¹⁷

Riker's minimum winning criterion (1962) was the first more specific criterion to be offered by coalition theorists. *Minimum winning coalitions* are a 'subset' of minimal winning coalitions, and can be considered as 'bare majority coalitions'

¹⁶ See Franklin & Mackie (1984) for an assessment of these theories.

¹⁷ Chapter Nine tests this and other proposals.

which comprise the smallest total weight of members in the legislature. Given the emphasis on minimum winning coalitions by coalition theorists from Riker onwards, and the connections that have been made between such status and durability (for example, Dodd, 1976) it might be expected that oversized coalitions will be less durable than minimal winning coalitions (which two-party majority coalitions in a hung situation must be) which should in turn be less durable than minimum winning coalitions. Those possibilities will now be looked at.

It must be noted that the concept of minimum winning status was first suggested as an explanation of coalition formation, and that "theories that are useful for explaining which coalitions form often are of little use for explaining which coalitions are most durable" (Wright & Goldberg, 1985, p.704). However, there is considerable support for a connection between minimum winning status and longer coalition duration. As Chapter One has noted, Dodd (1976) was the first observer to posit a systematic relationship between cabinet coalitional status and cabinet durability (see section 1.3.2.). His research indicated "minimum winning cabinets are durable; as cabinets depart from minimum winning status, cabinet durability decreases" (Dodd, 1976, p.159). It was not just oversized cabinets which were unstable; Dodd also argued "undersized coalitions [i.e., those not commanding a majority in the legislature] will face a tendency for larger coalitions to arise and replace them" (Dodd, 1976, p.140). Warwick agreed, finding that:

"minimal winning status is a very powerful independent influence on durability: even ideologically diverse coalitions ... will last longer if they cannot afford to lose a member party without losing their majority" (Warwick, 1979, p.490).

Other empirical support has been offered for Dodd from, for example, Norpoth (1982) in a study of West German coalitions and Grimsson (1982) who, in his study of both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary coalitions in Iceland, found "strong evidence in support of Dodd's hypothesis" (Grimsson, 1982, p.181). On a wider scale, Laver & Schofield also offer support for Dodd, finding that minimal winning cabinets tend to last longer than both surplus majority and minority cabinets (1990, pp.150-155). However, the results of this study indicate minority administrations last longer on average than majority coalitions in English councils (see Table 6.1). While this suggests Dodd's proposition that a departure from minimum winning status increases instability may also be invalid for English local government coalitions, it might be that the presence of surplus majority coalitions in our sample of coalition administrations contributed to this result. Dodd found that "oversized cabinets" are generally much shorter-lived than "under-sized cabinets"

(Dodd, 1976, pp.196-197). Again, there is dispute on this: against their expectations, Budge & Keman found that surplus majority coalitions lasted longer than minimal winning coalitions in 6 of 9 democracies (Budge & Keman, 1990, pp.170-171). A possible explanation for this durability is forwarded by Schofield, Grofman & Feld (1988) who argue that, perhaps contrary to the findings of n-person laboratory games:

"in the party political context, bare-minimum majorities [i.e. minimum winning coalitions] are unsafe, because they are too vulnerable to blackmail through threats of defection" (Schofield, Grofman & Feld, 1988, p.207).

If this was the case, minimum winning coalitions would be more unstable than surplus majority coalitions.¹⁸ Certainly, there is no necessary relationship between surplus coalitions and instability. Laver & Shepsle (1990) point out that a good reason for surplus majority coalitions forming is that the inclusion of a particular party may be "vital to the credibility of a proposal for a government even if it is 'surplus' to its legislative majority" (Laver & Shepsle, 1990, p.885). If this is so, that party will continue to be essential to the credibility of the government throughout the government's lifetime, and such a 'surplus majority coalition' would therefore have strong political factors influencing its stability in a positive manner.

Another potential problem is that what little research has been carried out on coalitional durability has concentrated on cabinet durability. If in English local government there is "little evidence" of bargaining for office and "coalitional behaviour shifts to the legislative arena" as Mellors (1989, p.108) maintains (see also Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987, p.508), the absence of a cabinet in English local government may mean there is not the same incentive to restrict coalition size. Unlike office payoffs (in the form of ministerial portfolios) to actors in cabinet coalitions, policy payoffs are not 'zero-sum', and consequently there may be less need to restrict the size of the coalition forming. If this is the case, Dodd's hypothesis regarding coalition size and durability would be less applicable to coalitions in English local government. Despite these reservations, it is proposed that:

3.10: THE CLOSER COALITIONS ARE TO MINIMUM WINNING STATUS, THE MORE DURABLE THEY WILL BE.

¹⁸ Bare-minimum majorities are also vulnerable to defeat because of by-elections.

Table 6.7: Administrative Duration By Administrative Status

(n.b. See also Table 9.6)

| Type Status of Administration | Average Duration in Months | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|
| | Current Administrations | Completed Administrations | Aggregate |
| Single Party | 27.6 | 19.6 | 23.0 |
| Minority | (n=24) | (n=35) | (n=59) |
| Minority | 1.0 | 21.0 | 9.0 |
| Coalition | (n=3) | (n=2) | (n=5) |
| Minimum Winning | 23.2 | 24.9 | 23.8 |
| Coalition | (n=12) | (n=7) | (n=19) |
| Minimal Winning | 22.8 | 17.4 | 19.5 |
| Coalition | (n=5) | (n=8) | (n=13) |
| Surplus Majority | 16.4 | 12.0 | 15.0 |
| Coalition | (n=9) | (n=4) | (n=13) |

*All 3 current minority coalitions had been in place for just one month.

Table 6.7 offers support for Hypothesis 3.10, with minimum winning coalitions lasting longer than any other status of administration. Also, if we ignore the three current minority coalitions in Table 6.7 (which seems sensible) then despite the general findings of Budge & Keman discussed above (1990, pp.170-171), surplus majority coalitions conformed to most observers expectations as the most unstable of all arrangements. However, as previous hypotheses in this chapter have already indicated, current minority administrations are the most durable of all arrangements (see Table 6.1). Even when current and former administrative arrangements are aggregated, single party minority administrations rival minimum winning coalitions in durability, lasting 23.0 months compared to the 23.8 months average of minimum winning coalitions. This goes against the findings of most previous research, which predicts minority governments will be the shortest lived of all possible arrangements (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, Table 6.2, p.152; Budge & Keman, 1990, Table 6.4, p.171).

The longevity of minority administrations can only be understood by supposing that other parties are not prepared to take power and therefore not prepared to bring down a minority administration. There may be factors in the organisation of English hung councils which counter the forces which have been seen as contributing to

greater instability in minority governments. The knowledge that concessions must be granted in order for the annual budget to pass can justify a strategy of allowing a minority administration to form, and the loss of 'office' this strategy entails may not be seen as a great loss. Without a cabinet, the lure of office consists of committee chairs and vice-chairs; such 'rewards' may appear unappetising when the full council can overturn any decision reached there, even if committee places are fixed to ensure a majority for the minority rulers (see Leach & Game, 1989, p.33).¹⁹

As the first section of this chapter has already suggested, the longevity of minority administrations (as well as their formation) may best be explained by Budge & Laver's (1986) "viability criterion"; parties may hesitate to bring down a minority government without a viable alternative as they could suffer the electoral consequences of such 'irresponsibility' (see Mellors, 1989, p.86). This could account for the long duration of the minority governments in this sample of hung councils.

The greater longevity of minimal and minimum winning coalitions when compared to surplus majority coalitions can be understood in a number of ways. For example, the conventional explanation that bare majority coalitions cannot afford to lose a member party so there will be greater emphasis on working together amicably (Warwick, 1979), appears a reasonable assumption. Also, the parties concerned will both receive a good return in terms of 'office'; as previous findings have indicated, two-thirds of local coalitions share committee chair. Finally, policy concessions are easier to reach without an extra partner's position to consider. Despite the contention that policy payoffs "evaporate" the logic of minimal winning coalitions because there is "no cost to a coalition in carrying passengers" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.69), it must be the case that when policy compromise is necessary it will be easier without an extra position to take into account. Laver & Schofield's assertion is only totally valid when there is unanimity of policy goals, which observers might feel is relatively rare in the adversarial conflict of British party politics.

A number of propositions concerning the influence of numerical factors have been examined in this section, and the results have suggested that what often appear to be powerful predictors of durability for cabinet coalitions in Parliamentary democracies may be less relevant when applied to the largely legislative coalitions which dominate hung English local government. However, one of the major reasons

¹⁹ This possibility is examined in the following chapter.

for the failure of some hypotheses may merely be the novelty of coalition bargaining in England; politicians are not used to the compromises that must be made when one party fails to achieve a legislative majority. Perhaps the passage of time will familiarise actors with the strategies required both to form and maintain coalitions; the increase of coalitions, and the consequent decline in the frequency of single party minority administrations (see Chapter Four, section two) suggest this may so. Previous chapters have shown 'time' certainly appears to be an influence on the types of administrations which form and on the strategies of both the Labour party and the Conservatives. Section three will now look at the influence of time, with particular reference to the impact differing electoral cycles may have on administrative stability.

Section Three: The 'Time' Factor

The previous two chapters have investigated a number of hypotheses connected with the passage of time; some expectations have been confounded. For example, if experience of hungness is necessary for successful negotiations, coalitions should be more likely to form in long term hung councils, but this does not appear to be the case (see Chapter Four). It might also be that the longer the council is hung the more likely it will be that the administrations which form are long-lasting, because, for example, greater knowledge of the processes of forming a durable coalition has been acquired. Unfortunately, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, such an hypothesis would be difficult to test without a longitudinal study covering a far greater time-span than this study. If administrations are more durable in the 'long-term' hung councils in this survey it may simply be because administrations have had 'more time' to last longer. Administrations formed in 'short-term' hung councils would be, on average, less durable than those in long-term hung councils because there could be no administrations which had lasted longer than 3 years; therefore, such a proposal cannot be examined in this study. However, other hypotheses connected with 'time' are certainly capable of closer examination.

6.3.1. The Electoral Cycle and Administrative Stability

In English local coalition studies, perhaps the main connection that has been made between coalition duration and the passage of time concerns the electoral cycle of an authority. Chapter Four (section one) noted a relationship between coalition formation and electoral cycle, with (as expected) coalitions being more likely to form in councils holding quadrennial elections. Some observers of local government argue the electoral cycle also influences coalitional stability, and this appears a promising hypothesis which deserves further analysis. It might also be that

government duration depends on the time the government is formed during the 'parliamentary term', with those formed earlier demonstrating greater stability, and such a possibility will be examined. Also connected with 'time' is the argument that rural authorities will exhibit greater stability than urban authorities because they are more likely to have had past experience of hungness (Leach & Stewart, 1988). These possibilities will now be explored, beginning with an examination of the possible relationship between the length of an administration and the electoral cycle.

As noted in previous chapters, there are differing electoral cycles in English local councils, with county councils and some district councils holding elections every four years and the metropolitan districts and some district councils holding elections by thirds. A number of studies have posited a relationship between administrative stability and the electoral cycle. Leach & Stewart argue time is a significant factor, and that:

"if the hung situation is seen as long-lasting - which is more likely in authorities holding elections every four years (unless hungness could disappear as a result of one or two by-elections) - then stability is more likely" Leach & Stewart (1988, p.52).

Leach & Game offer support for this, noting that non-cooperation appeared to be more prevalent outside the shire counties. They maintain:

"the system of elections means that, by-elections excepted, whatever result an election produces is likely to hold for four years ... a long time to sustain oppositional or opportunistic / disruptional tactics. The knowledge that the hung situation is probably unchangeable for four years is a major force for co-operation" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.63).

It certainly seems intuitively probable that arrangements will become more stable with time, and the experience of such long term hung authorities as Cheshire might appear to support this. However, Mellors points out that while Cheshire might be cited as proof of the hypothesis that deals are more likely to stand when there are four-year intervals between elections, other hung county councils which have long experience of hungness have less stable arrangements. Bedfordshire demonstrates that "such a generalisation does not always stand the test of real life" (Mellors, 1989, p.86). Despite this reservation, most observers support the idea that stability is more likely in councils with a four-year electoral cycle. Therefore, it is proposed that:

3.11: AUTHORITIES WITH A QUADRENNIAL ELECTORAL CYCLE WILL TEND TO GENERATE MORE STABLE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS THAN AUTHORITIES WHERE THE COUNCIL IS ELECTED BY THIRDS.

Table 6.8 demonstrates that despite the longer time councils with quadrennial elections have been hung, they do not last significantly longer than administrations in councils which elect by thirds. There appears to be no connection between administrative durability and the differing electoral cycles in English local government.

Table 6.8: Administrative Duration By Electoral Cycle

| Electoral Cycle | Average Time in Months | |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Time Hung | Administrative Duration |
| Quadrennial (n=36) | 55.0 | 22.4 |
| Annually (n=26) | 49.4 | 21.6 |

Even though elections can change the political balance more frequently in councils electing by thirds, which does not appear a good recipe for stability, the differences in administrative duration are slight. A possible explanation for this is that minority administrations are more common in councils electing by thirds (see Chapter Four, Table 4.5), and the greater duration of minority administrations (see Table 6.1) may be influencing the figures. While this may offer a partial explanation, given the support for Hypothesis 3.11 from observers of hung English councils it is difficult to find general reasons for the failure of the hypothesis, apart from re-iterating Mellors' warning about making generalisations when examining hung councils. These are separate political systems with different histories and political cultures, and the factors affecting both administrative formation and duration may be beyond the bounds of general explanations. That said, some general explanations concerning administrative durability should hold true whatever the political system.

6.3.2. Durability and 'Cyclical Variation'

For example, Strom notes that "durability may vary cyclically, with governments formed very late in a parliamentary term less durable than those formed just after elections" (Strom, 1988, p.926), irrespective of electoral considerations (see also Taylor & Herman, 1977). This possibility is not easy to examine, as deciding whether a government broke up because of 'electoral considerations' is obviously difficult. Also, administrations formed in councils electing by thirds will have to be excluded from any examination, as the notion of a 'parliamentary term' makes little

sense in councils electing by thirds. However, an examination of the 36 councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle found no evidence to support Strom's contention that administrations which formed late in the four year term were less durable; when an administration formed appeared to make no difference to its duration.

We now move to an examination of a factor, 'rural stability', that appears to sit a little uneasily in a section devoted to 'time'. However, the impact of the rural factor on administrative duration is connected with past experience of hungness, and hence the ability to learn from that past, a point made by a number of theorists emphasising the importance of 'time' to successful coalitional activity (Hinckley, 1976; Browne, 1982).

6.3.3. Rural Stability

According to Leach & Stewart, "rural or semi-rural counties or districts" are more likely to exhibit stability than urban authorities because they are more likely to have had recent experience of hungness (1988, p.52). Presumably, the reason for this is that patterns of political control have been more likely to be regarded as an "alien presence" (Widdicombe, 1986, para. 4.16) in rural councils, while "formal party politics" has long been the norm in "big-city authorities"(see Stoker, 1988, p.40). Therefore, a greater number of Independents in rural areas will mean they have more experience of, at least, 'nominal hungness'. It is certainly the case that political parties, with their emphasis on voting discipline, are a more recent addition to the the rural scene (see Bains, 1972; Widdicombe, 1986) and inter-party cooperation might therefore be easier; of course, the reverse might be as true. That said, the tradition of "closed bargaining groups" (Mellors, 1983, p.238) will probably be less well established in rural areas. While there are considerable difficulties of classifying authorities as 'rural' or 'urban' (and worth pointing out that 'stability' is not synonymous with administrative duration) it does seem plausible that more 'stable' authorities will produce more stable administrative arrangements. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

3.12: STABLE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO OCCUR IN HUNG RURAL AND SEMI-RURAL COUNTIES AND DISTRICTS THAN IN HUNG URBAN AUTHORITIES.

Finding an acceptable definition of the categories 'urban' and 'rural' is not easy; there is no consensus on the precise meaning of these terms. For example, Uzzell & Provencher (1976) note that 'experts' define urbanism without precision or consistency. While they acknowledge that "size and density are used most often to

define urban places probably because of their simplicity rather than any more cogent reason" they note a number of other variables (such as occupation) which may also have some bearing on any definition (Uzzell & Provencher, 1976, pp.4-5). Different countries also have different conceptions, and therefore, different definitions, of these concepts. The problem is intensified by the highly urbanised nature of much of England (which many definitions would classify as exclusively 'urban) and the 'artificial' nature of some local government units. For example, using a population density figure of less than 2 people per acre to signify 'rural' local authorities means that areas most people would regard as 'rural' (for example, Dorset) will be classified as 'urban', while Humberside is therefore classified as 'rural'. Therefore, a combination of population density figures (noting Uzzell & Provencher's comments, above) and subjective analysis (with the help of Polytechnic South West's Geography Department) was adopted, producing 24 'rural' and 38 'urban' authorities. The result of this analysis was that there appears to be very little difference in administrative stability demonstrated when utilising the urban/rural divide. On average, administrations in rural authorities lasted 21.0 months compared to the almost identical average duration in urban councils of 21.1 months. Hypothesis 3.12 is, therefore, not proven by the available evidence.

Conclusions

A number of variables which may affect the duration of administrations in hung councils have been examined, including the type of administration, arithmetical factors, and the impact of time. There are undoubtedly other factors which will affect administrative duration. For example, long-term experience of hungness and the attitudes of the participants themselves are almost certainly important (see, for example, Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.52), and although beyond the bounds of this study are deserving of any future investigation. Once again, it must be admitted that this study encounters unavoidable problems when examining the factors which may be affecting administrative duration. Some initial administrations are still extant, and some councils in this sample have been hung for too short a time to enable a potentially crucial variable (the passage of time) to be adequately assessed. That said, this research has covered a large number of possible influences on administrative duration. A number of hypotheses have been supported, while some expectations have been confounded.

This investigation of administrative duration began with an examination of the longevity of minority and coalition administrations. The traditional view of minority administrations as unstable is not borne out when they are compared with coalition

administrations. Despite their legislative majority, coalitions in hung councils last a shorter time than minority administrations, and a number of possible explanations were advanced for this. The culture of English local government, and the difficulty actors not familiar with 'coalition politics' will undoubtedly face in constructing durable solutions with long term political opponents, are crucial factors in this finding. Initial minority administrations, often seen as examples of political naivety, were also long lasting, even when former rulers appeared to be 'clinging on to power'.

The role of traditional rulers in hung councils was not what was generally expected. The idea, common among observers of hung councils, that traditional rulers will tend to be excluded from the ruling process when a council becomes hung was not supported by the findings in Chapter Four; the related hypothesis that the administrations former rulers construct will be short-lived was also not generally supported. While there are undoubtedly local authorities where the attitude of the former rulers or the feelings of former opposition parties initially precludes co-operation, a large number of former rulers remain involved in the administration of their authority many years into hungness. Indeed, administrations formed by Conservative and Labour former rulers are far longer lasting than administrations formed by these parties in authorities in which they had formerly had an oppositional role. Perhaps experience of ruling and knowledge of the processes of government is important for effective and durable government in hung systems.

The party dimension reveals, unsurprisingly given the findings discussed above, that SLD minority administrations are 'outlasted' only by Conservative/ Independent coalitions. The Conservative and Independent tradition of co-operation, and general closeness of ideology, offers a plausible explanation for the relative durability of such coalitions. The SLD's ideological position in the middle of the two other major parties, offers the most plausible explanation for the relative longevity of their administrations, although their generally positive attitude to coalition politics will obviously reinforce this. SLD coalitions with Labour lasted longer than their coalitions with Conservatives. The former oppositional status in most councils of both parties helps to explain this, and Labour's ideological position may also be relevant; if Labour want a share of power they have little alternative but to support the SLD. The same factors may well be important if a future general election was to produce a hung parliament.

Factors connected with party system and electoral arithmetic formed the bulk of this chapter, and the examination of numerical factors in section two revealed a number of interesting findings. It certainly appears to be the case that small and pivotal SLD groups contribute to more unstable governments. Conversely, small and pivotal Labour groups appear to enable SLD minorities to rule for considerable periods of time, and the ideological positions of Labour and the SLD again offer plausible explanations for these findings.

More stable administrations are in evidence when none of the parties is close to a majority than when one of them is close to obtaining overall control. The possibility of the situation changing as the result of an election or by-election is less likely in the former case, which may explain this. Parties in councils where no party is close to an overall majority may feel they have to work together for some time whatever their feelings about it, and this may produce more stable administrative arrangements than those in councils where one party can realistically feel a return to single party control is imminent.

The number of parties in a political system has long been felt to be an important influence on administrative duration. However, the findings of this research have confounded the generally held notion that the more parties there are the more unstable a 'government' will be; multi-party councils appear to produce more durable administrations than 3-party councils, although the fact that 'multi-party' councils are predominantly composed of only 4 parties weakens one's confidence in this finding. This finding may be more convincingly explained by the far shorter time which local authorities with only three parties had, on average, been hung. In addition, one party was close to a majority in the majority of three-party systems, and such systems (see above) tend to produce less durable administrations. That said, a more sophisticated measure of party system size, utilising Rae's index of fractionalization, supported the above findings. Surprisingly, highly fractionalized systems produce longer lasting administrations, and it is difficult to find a convincing reason for this beyond those advanced above.

The notion of 'minimal' or 'minimum winning' coalitions has dominated the development of coalition theory, and only recently have studies begun to escape the shackles of the minimising criterion, whether applied to numbers or ideology. Nevertheless, the connection between minimal status and administrative longevity is well established in coalition studies, and this research offers some further support for the thesis that as coalitions depart from minimum winning status their duration

decreases. While current minority administrations are the most durable of all administrations, an examination of all completed administrations demonstrates minimum winning coalitions (in the sense that they are the smallest possible legislative weight) are the most durable of coalition administrations. Minimal winning coalitions (in terms of the minimal number of parties) do not last as long, while surplus majority coalitions are the least durable of all administrations.

Finally, again contrary to expectations, the differing electoral cycles of hung councils did not appear to make a significant impact on the duration of administrations; councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle did not have more durable administrations than councils electing by thirds. This may be partly explained by the larger number of minority administrations (which last considerably longer than coalitions) in councils electing by thirds. Likewise, the urban/rural dimension did not appear to be a factor in administrative duration.

A number of potential influences on administrative durability have been examined in this section. Many hypotheses have received little support from the findings of this research. However, it must be understood that coalition politics in English local government is still in its infancy. If knowledge of the hung situation is essential to producing effective coalition strategies and durable government, which appears unarguable, then it is unsurprising if this research often fails to support the findings of many observers of coalition politics. Local councils are not European parliamentary democracies, and there will be different influences on local coalition actors. Also, while local actors exist in a shared national political culture, attitudes at local level will vary. Much more research is needed into hung councils before general conclusions can begin to be drawn.

We now move from an examination of the factors which might influence the formation and maintenance of 'coalitions' in hung local authorities, to an examination of the changes hungness brings to the working practices of authorities and the behaviour of the actors involved. Hung councils are manifestly not the same as those where one party has a working majority, and it would be unrealistic to expect that the practices which work well enough when one party is in control will suffice in the absence of a relatively disciplined party group which can formulate policy without worrying about its ability to carry a vote in committee or full Council. If this is so, then the sources of power in hung councils will probably be different to those in single party majority control councils. Chapter Seven will examine the changes

hungness brings to the working practices of hung councils, and Chapter Eight will study the effects of hungness on the actors involved.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE EFFECTS OF HUNGNESS ON COUNCIL PRACTICES

Introduction

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7.3.1. Access to Chief Officers

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7.3.5. Public Access

Conclusions

Introduction

As previous chapters have noted, the ability of hung councils to operate efficiently has been questioned by a number of observers. Hung councils have been characterised as, amongst other things, conflictual, disorganised, unstable, and uncertain (see Blowers, 1987; Mellors, 1984). For example, Blowers argues that a "climate of uncertainty" permeates hung councils leading to political instability and policy making which is characterised by "drift and impasse" (1987, p.32). If this view of hung councils is correct, then we would expect to find a predominantly negative view from the respondents to this survey. However, some observers have been more optimistic.

For example, while Leach & Game (1989) admit that there are still some hung authorities "in which an atmosphere of mistrust and frustration prevails", they argue that the majority of hung county councils they surveyed demonstrate the fallacy of viewing hungness as an inevitable recipe for "confusion, delay, ad-hocery and inconsistency" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.59). Their view of hung councils is largely positive:

"Hung authorities can work very effectively indeed, and in so doing typically generate a series of benefits in terms of the quality of democracy; more open government; more real debate in committee and council; more genuine inter-party discussions at an informal level; and a clarification of the guidelines governing member-officer relationships and the rights of *all* parties to a full involvement in the decision making process" (1989, p.59, emphasis in original).

While Leach & Game's research was confined to the hung counties, their findings offer substantial evidence that the approach by the main actors to a hung situation is the significant determinant in whether the process of government is characterised by chaos or smooth running. That said, if organisational structures remain geared to majority party rule the best motives of actors may well be frustrated. Undoubtedly, the adoption (or not) of new conventions (which might also be seen as reflecting the attitudes of the actors involved) will greatly influence the functioning of hung councils. This chapter proposes to examine the changes hungness brings to the organisation of local authorities in England.

Leach & Stewart (1988) argue that 'settled' hung authorities will be distinguished from 'unstable' authorities by, amongst other things, the introduction of new conventions, greater access for all party groups to chief officers, and equal briefing rights for party spokespersons (Leach & Stewart, 1988, pp.53-54). Leach & Game

(1989) go further in arguing that procedures which are often unclear or unfair in majority controlled councils "are invariably clarified (typically in the form of conventions) in hung authorities" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.38, my emphasis). Leach & Stewart (1988) had earlier pointed to a paradox about conventions, in that those authorities which introduce conventions are often least in need of them, while those in need of them the most are unlikely to introduce them (Leach & Stewart, 1988, pp.47-48), which suggests that 'unfair' procedures may not 'invariably' be clarified.

There is one change, however, which might appear inescapable when no party has an overall majority. The introduction of proportionality for committee membership is often seen, for a number of reasons, as a necessity in hung councils. Section one compares the distribution of committee seats in hung and non-hung councils, and assesses the reasons for deviations from the principles of proportionality in both types of council. The thesis is advanced that certain deviations from proportionality can be best explained as examples of pay-offs for participation in a winning coalition. It appears probable that the widespread introduction of proportionality will not be the only 'deviation' from normality exhibited by hung councils, and section two looks at the introduction of other new conventions, in particular those involving the operations of committees and the process by which committee chairs are allocated. The effects of a number of variables, including the passage of time and the different electoral cycles, are examined. The form such new conventions take are detailed, and a number of possible reasons for the changes found are then advanced. Finally, section three takes a close look at those changes which will affect the officer-councillor relationship, in particular the factors influencing the access of party groups to chief officers. The most crucial time for such relationships is at budget making time, and this section also examines the thesis that there will, in particular, be much wider access to chief officers during the making of the annual budget.

Section One: The Introduction of Proportional Representation

This section will begin with a comparison of the distribution of committee seats in hung and non-hung councils, and then detail the factors which appear to be influencing the adoption of proportionality in both hung and non-hung councils. A number of hung local authorities have administrations in which one party will take a majority of committee seats despite its lack of an overall majority, and the factors which influence both this and other deviations from proportionality are assessed.

7.1.1. The 'Natural Solution'?

As would be expected, previous research has indicated that whatever the type of authority or its location, in councils in which a single party has overall control the majority party generally takes a majority of council seats. Although single party committees are rare, the majority of committees did not follow strict proportionality prior to the introduction of regulations requiring this (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume, Table 2.8). Despite this, the Widdicombe Report has noted widespread acceptance of the general principle of proportionality on committees amongst local authorities, whether hung or not. Given this, and the general concurrence with government legislation for proportionality on council committees (in the Local Government Act, 1989; see Local Government Chronicle, 13/1/89, p.5), one would expect to find that proportionality on committees was an established feature in hung councils. Wendt calls proportionality the "natural solution" (Wendt, 1986, p.373) and the evidence tends to support this. For example, Leach & Stewart report that "the vast majority" of hung counties they surveyed "operated the principle of p.r. on all committees and sub committees" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.46). Other research into committee composition has also shown that proportionality is the norm:

"On only one of the forty-two relevant hung councils were seats on the policy committee not given to all three of the main parties ... not only were all parties represented ... their representation was very close to proportional" (Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987, p.507).

Therefore, the general hypothesis can be proposed that:

4.1: HUNG COUNCILS WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION FOR COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP THAN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

This research asked chief executives to detail the membership of a number of committees in their local authority. For ease of analysis, Table 7.1 (below) details the assessment of the distribution of places in just one committee, albeit the committee usually seen as the most important, the policy and resources committee, which Widdicombe found occupied a central role within the great majority of local authorities (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume 1, p.111). However, other committees were also checked for any deviance from proportionality, and, with the exception of the inevitable differences caused by the number of committee places not permitting strict proportionality, the general finding was that the committees of a

council share the same characteristics. That is, if the policy and resources committee has proportionality, so do the other committees.¹

As Table 7.1 demonstrates, more than two-thirds of hung councils had proportionality for committee membership. In 34 of the 50 local authorities for which the information on committee places was available, the number of committee places all the parties had received was according to its share of council seats. There were a few cases where strict proportionality was not possible for arithmetical reasons, but in those cases the party concerned usually received a redress in other committees. The findings shown in Table 7.1 raise a number of interesting points which will now be explored, beginning with an assessment of the distribution of committee places in non-hung councils.

Table 7.1 Distribution of Committee Seats in Hung and Non-Hung Councils

| Committee Seat Arrangements | Hung Councils (n=50) | Majority Control (n=19) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Direct Proportionality | 68% | 31.6% |
| Minority Party Given Majority | 18% | - |
| One Party Over-Represented | 14% | 57.9% |
| One Party Takes All Seats | - | 10.5% |

Committee Seat Distribution in Non-Hung Councils

In majority control councils, in not one case did the largest party receive less than its 'share' of committee seats, and in 10 of the 11 authorities where one party received significantly more committee seats than its 'entitlement' it was also the ruling party. In 8 of these 10 authorities, all the remaining party groups suffered a consequent loss in their entitlement under proportionality, while in the other 2 cases, a Conservative group suffered at the hands of a Labour and a SLD administration respectively. In one of the 10 authorities where the largest group awarded itself more places than it was due proportionally, a Conservative administration which had one more seat than its entitlement also gave an extra seat to an eleven-strong Ratepayers group. It also gave a committee seat to the single Labour and single SLD councillors; an Independent group of 7 councillors paid for this

¹Obviously, those committees with co-opted members (such as many Education committees) did not follow the same pattern of seat distribution as the policy and resources committee.

benevolence. The remaining case was in another Conservative controlled administration, where another Ratepayers group was awarded 3 committee seats, one more than its entitlement proportionally; this was also at the expense of an Independent group.

In two cases (a Conservative district council and a Labour metropolitan district) the largest party took all the seats. In the latter case, Labour had over 90 percent of the council seats, but in the former case the Conservatives had taken all committee places with only 57 percent of the councils seats; a substantial Labour group received no representation on the policy and resources committee. In both of these cases there was all party representation on the other main council committees, although the ruling group still took more seats proportionally than proportionality would have indicated.

These findings appear to demonstrate that in the majority of cases the ruling party in a non-hung council could, before the 1989 Local Government Act which introduced proportionality on committees as a requirement, control the award of committee places without undue regard to notions of equity. Table 7.1 clearly demonstrates that in non-hung councils less than one-third (31.6 percent) of councils had proportionality on committees, in contrast with hung councils, where over two-thirds (68 percent) of hung councils had proportionality for committee places. This indicates that a fairer attitude towards the distribution of committee seats prevails in hung councils, and is conclusive proof of hypothesis 4.1. The findings also fully support the observation that it is the "overwhelming norm" (Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987, p.8) for all-party representation on council committees, whether the council is hung or not.

Committee Seat Distribution in Hung Councils

However, two-thirds of councils allocating committee places on a proportionality basis is not the 'vast majority' found by Leach & Stewart (1988). An examination of those two-thirds reveals a variety of administrations, with no discernable pattern between party composition and proportionality on committees in the sample as a whole.

However, 14 of the 15 county councils in the sample had proportionality on committees, a very high proportion. It may be that the higher profile of county councils with the electorate puts greater pressure on actors to be seen to be acting 'fairly'. It may also be that the principle of proportionality in counties is more

firmly established than in district councils. For example, in Cheshire, proportionality "has been an accepted and understood feature ... ever since 1889, whatever the composition of the council" (Wendt, 1986, p.373). While these factors are almost certainly important, another explanation for the high proportion of county councils with proportionality may be the position of the SLD in those councils. In 8 of the 15 county councils the SLD was part of the administration, in 3 it had previously been part of the administration, while in all 15 cases (including the remaining 4 county councils where it had never been involved in the administration) it was capable of forming a 'winning' administration with at least one other party. In such situations, the SLD will put great pressure on other parties for proportionality on committees, which it has seen as one of its prime objectives (see Clay, 1982, p.5). The SLD does not have the same hegemony in district councils, and it appears that its position as a major 'power-broker' in county councils offers the best explanation for the predominance of proportionality in committee membership.

Perhaps the most interesting councils are the one-third of hung councils who do not have proportionality for committees. These local authorities beg a number of interesting questions. In particular, in what circumstances might a minority party be permitted to award itself a majority of committee places, and why might one party receive more than its 'fair share'? Inevitably, the desire to keep the Alliance from a share of power is seen by many writers as the driving force behind such tactics, and this proposition will now be investigated.

7.1.2. The 'Unholy Alliance'

As already mentioned, many observers saw the centre parties as being especially vocal in demanding representation. For example, Mellors (1989) argues that the pressure for proportionality will generally come from the Alliance parties, and that in some cases "the failure of the Liberals to achieve their due share of committee places caused considerable bitterness" (Mellors, 1989, p.103). Stewart (1985) also sees the Alliance in the vanguard demanding proportionality, pointing out that while "in some authorities, such demands have been conceded ... in others, the Conservative and Labour parties have united against them" (Stewart, 1985, p.5). While Leach & Stewart report the widespread practice of proportionality in hung councils, they note that the most significant exception to this practice occurs when one party is given the 'right to govern' by another. This may be because it holds nearly half the council seats, or because of:

"a strong desire by two of the three parties to exclude a third from significant influence. Typically this involves an understanding between Conservative and Labour groups to prevent an Alliance party group from fully exploiting its 'balance of power' position. It is often accompanied by an allocation of committee places giving the administration a bare majority on each committee." (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.47)

If the above observations are correct, we would expect to find that:

4.2: WHERE ONE PARTY IN A HUNG COUNCIL IS GIVEN A MAJORITY IN COMMITTEES, THAT PARTY WILL BE LABOUR OR CONSERVATIVE.

Once again, Table 7.2 (below) demonstrates the difficulty of deciding what administrative arrangements are in place in hung councils, when there is no 'cabinet' to give a clear and unequivocal statement of the distribution of office pay-offs. The distribution of chairs corresponded to the stated administration in the only Labour minority administration and in one of the SLD minority administrations, where in both cases the party concerned held all the chairs. One of the two Conservative/ Independent coalitions also distributed the 'rewards of office' between the coalition partners. However, in the remaining cases there was no obvious relationship between the stated administration and the allocation of committee chairs. Whatever payoffs may have been made to coalition actors, they were not necessarily in the form of committee chairs or deputy chairs.

Table 7.2 Characteristics of Single Party Majority Committees in Hung Councils

| Administration | Response of chief executives. | | (% = % of council seats held) | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Party Given Majority | Majority on Other Cttes? | Policy Ctte Chair/Deputy | Other Ctte Chairs |
| Labour | Lab (48%) | yes | Lab/Lab | Lab Only |
| SLD | SLD (49%) | no | SLD/SLD | SLD & Con |
| SLD | SLD (47%) | yes | SLD/SLD | SLD only |
| Con/Ind | Con (49%) | yes | Con/Ind | Con & Ind |
| Con/Ind | Con (46%) | no | Con/Con | Con only |
| Con/SLD/Ind | Con (48%) | yes | Con/Con | Con only |
| Con/Lab/SLD/Ind | Con (44%) | yes | Ind/Con | Ind & Con |
| No Admin'n | SLD (46%) | yes | Ind/SLD | Con, Ind, SLD & Other* |
| No Admin'n | Ind (37%) | no | Con/Ind | Con, Ind,SLD & Lab |

* Other= 7 councillors of 'undeclared allegiance'

Whatever the difficulties of deciding the precise nature of administrative arrangements, hypothesis 4.2 is not supported by the evidence. As hypothesised, in 5 cases either Labour (once) or the Conservatives (four times) is the party taking a majority of committee seats. However, the SLD itself takes a majority on committees in 3 councils. In the 5 cases where either Labour or Conservative take a majority, the SLD is a small (but not pivotal) group in 2 councils, a large group (48 percent of council seats) in one council, a medium group (19 percent of council seats) in one council, while in the fifth case it has no councillors. The evidence does not suggest that either 'resentment' of the SLD's position, or the number of seats it holds, is a factor in Labour and Conservative assuming numerical control of committees. Leach & Stewart (1988) offer an alternative explanation which may offer a more plausible reason for one party being given the 'right to govern'.

7.1.3. Possible Reasons for Minority Parties Taking Committee Majorities

The alternative reason offered by Leach & Stewart is that the party allowed to take a majority of committee seats held nearly half the council seats (1988, p.47), and this appears to be a convincing reason for the phenomenon. As Table 7.2 shows, in 7 of the 9 cases the party taking control has between 46-49 percent of the seats, and in another the party taking control has 44 percent of the council seats.

In the remaining case, an Independent group with only 37 percent of councils seats was given a majority of places on the policy and resources committee but not on the other main committees. On the remaining committees, the other three parties (although none was given a majority) received larger shares to make up for their losses on the policy and resources committee, and as Table 7.2 shows, chairs were shared between all the groups on this council. The Independents were the largest group, which may be the reason they were given a majority on the policy and resources committee. However, overall the distribution of committee seats in this district council was close to proportional, and finding a convincing explanation for the Independent group being given a majority on one committee is difficult. As the large Independent group suggests, this district council had never had overall control by one party, so one would expect an equitable distribution of committee seats to be the norm. Perhaps the other councils in Table 7.2 will provide more clues to the problem of finding out under what circumstances minority parties assume overall control of the committee structure.

As noted, in the remaining 8 local authorities where one party took all the seats on the policy and resources committee it was close to a majority in 7 councils and had 44 percent of the seats in the remaining council.² In 6 of these authorities it also took a majority of seats on the other committees. There is only one county council in these 8 local authorities (and see above for a discussion on the possible reasons for the large proportion of county councils with proportionality), with the remaining 7 councils being district councils. While this suggests that the *type* of council may be significant, a more important factor after the closeness to a majority may be the electoral cycle. In 6 of these 8 councils the electoral cycle is quadrennial, and it may be the combination of electoral and arithmetical factors which provides the best explanation for one party taking control. As Mellors argues, when one party is close to a majority "morally, if not electorally" it may regard itself as having the right to form an administration (Mellors, 1989, p.85).

In addition, all these 8 administrations, with the exception of the 'no administration' where no concrete information on administrative duration was available, had been in place at least since the 1987 district council quadrennial elections. When there are four years to go before another election parties may feel better placed to demand a 'right to rule' which gives them greater control over the decision making process. Despite the possibility of certain decisions being overturned by the full council, committees have considerable discretionary powers. A majority in committee will, at the very least, enable a minority government to control the process of decision making and allow it to structure committee debates.

However, these explanations are not very convincing, especially when it is realised that there is a much larger total of 30 councils where one party is close to a majority but does not take a majority on any committee. That said, the pressure for proportionality on committees in hung councils is considerable, and a relatively small number of deviations from this principle is not necessarily surprising. Intuitively, it certainly seems likely that large parties will be more likely to take a majority on committees, and the findings of this research support this. It may be that the high proportion of such councils which are also district councils and hold quadrennial elections is a less important factor, and that closeness to an overall majority is the important variable.

²'Close to a majority' has been previously defined as having 45 percent or more of the council seats; see Chapter Four, section four.

7.1.4. Other Deviations From Proportionality: Office Payoffs In Operation?

Table 7.1 (see above) also shows another deviation from committee proportionality in hung councils. There are 7 examples of one or more parties receiving more than their 'fair share', but not to the extent of being given an overall majority in committee. Such a practice is widespread in non-hung councils, and almost invariably involves the controlling party giving itself more seats than proportionality would allocate. However, in hung councils the possibility exists that some sort of payoff is taking place, and this offer the best explanation for the deviations from proportionality. In 3 of the 7 examples the difference does not appear to be significant. That said, there is a minority Labour administration in 2 of these cases, and in both these councils the Conservatives received one extra seat at the expense of the SLD. This could offer a small measure of support to Leach & Stewart's assertion in support of hypothesis 4.2 (see above), that Labour and Conservative groups act to exclude the SLD from significant influence, although there may be other reasons specific to those councils. However, the evidence strongly suggests that in the remaining 4 councils the explanation for the deviation from strict proportionality is that one party is being rewarded for its participation in a winning coalition.

In one case, a Labour/SLD/Green/Independent coalition has 'over-rewarded' the Independent group, mainly at the expense of a large Conservative group (with 39 percent of the council seats). The small Independent group could have formed a minimum winning coalition with the Conservative former rulers, so the extra committee seats given to the Independents may be to prevent its defection. The Independents have also been given the chair of the housing committee, and the deputy chair of the policy and resources committee, which might support this supposition; these are 'plum' appointments for a small group.

In the second case, a small Conservative group have been given double their entitlement (at the expense of the SLD) in a majority Independent/ Conservative coalition; the Independent group has 43 percent of the council seats, and the pivotal Conservatives could have formed a majority coalition with the SLD. In the third example, another Conservative/ Independent majority coalition, the Conservatives have taken one less seat than their entitlement in order to give one extra seat to the small Independent group. In the fourth case, a large Conservative group (47 percent of council seats) receives one less seat than it should, to the benefit of the combined Labour/SLD coalition. All these 4 cases appear to indicate that the deviation from

proportionality is for political reasons, in the first 3 examples to reward an essential partner who might otherwise form an alternative coalition, and in the final example to ensure a minimum winning SLD/Labour coalition more than a bare majority of committee seats.

As expected, it has been demonstrated that proportionality is more widespread in hung councils than in single party majority control councils. The hypothesis that Labour and Conservative groups act to prevent the SLD from receiving their fair share of committee places has received little support. The main influences affecting a deviation from proportionality in committees appear to be (a) numerical, in that when one party is close to a majority it may be granted (or may demand) a majority on committee, or (b) as a payoff for participation in a winning coalition. However, in the majority of cases the principles of proportionality appear to be well established in hung councils.

We now move to an examination of other changes introduced by hung councils to reflect and cope with the new demands placed upon actors by hungness. There are a variety of responses to no party having an overall majority, and the following section analyses some of those reactions.

Section Two: The Introduction of New Conventions

This section will first examine the proposition that hung councils will tend to introduce new conventions for business, and then examine the effect of influences such as electoral cycle and the length of time the council has been hung on the propensity to introduce such changes. Following this, the forms such new conventions take are assessed. Most changes concern the composition of committees, and the reasons for such changes are discussed; for example, the phenomenon of 'one-party' committees, not uncommon in non-hung councils, is addressed. Finally, the changes discovered in the way committee chairmanships are awarded are assessed in detail, and some pointers for coalition bargaining when chairs assume a 'technical' role are drawn.

7.2.1. The Necessity for Change

The widespread introduction of proportional representation for committee membership is not the only 'deviation' from the standard practices of English local authorities that has been noted by previous research into hung councils. It appears unlikely that practices which work well when a council is controlled by a single majority party will be equally suited to life in a hung council, and most students of

hung local councils have commented on the likelihood of new conventions being introduced to cope with the changed circumstances. As Stewart (1985) argues, the renewed importance of committee and council votes means that "standing orders are likely to be re-drafted" and new officer-councillor conventions introduced (Stewart, 1985, p.9).³ Some changes may be minor, while others are more far-reaching in their implications. Mellors (1989) notes the introduction of new procedures is spreading:

"the most formalised example of such procedures are found in Cheshire where the chief executive introduced a document 'Conventions Regarding Relations between the Political Parties Represented on the Council' shortly after Cheshire first became hung in 1981. Several other councils now follow similar practices and local government officers themselves have often been instrumental in introducing such measures as a means of allowing them to manage the council effectively" (Mellors, 1989, p.103: see also Wendt, 1983, for a first hand account of the development of what are commonly known as the 'Cheshire Conventions')⁴.

Leach and Game (1989) also note the spread of such 'conventions documents', in the hung counties, although they report that there is little evidence of majority control councils adopting such convention documents (Leach & Game, 1989, pp.44-46). However, despite their wide adoption in hung councils, Leach & Game found "there has been surprisingly little reference to Conventions documents after they have been agreed" for the reason that:

"the *informal* norms of co-operation and equality of access, which made the agreement of conventions possible in the first place, are in most circumstances adequate in themselves to keep the procedural aspects of business in hung authorities running smoothly." (Leach & Game, 1989, p.45, emphasis in original)

³It must be noted that 'conventions' and standing orders' are not the same thing. Standing orders "are concerned with the formal operation of council and committee business, for example, referral procedures, [and] public question time" while 'conventions' cover the areas of council business "for which changes in standing orders are not seen as appropriate ... [such as] ... the pattern of access of members to information and advice" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.47). However, the difference is not clear cut; some procedures, for example, those concerned with emergency business, "may appear in either form" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.47) and the distinction is unimportant for the purposes of this research. The 'Cheshire Conventions', discussed here, include amendments to both 'conventions' and 'standing orders'. Accordingly the term 'conventions' is used except when specifically referring to 'standing orders'.

⁴ Indeed, the 'Cheshire Conventions' were singled out by the Widdicombe Report as the model for all councils to adopt, whether they were hung or not (Widdicombe, 1986, Report Appendix H, pp.292-297).

Of course, this implies that the authorities which might be most in need of conventions, those with a high degree of conflict, may be the least likely to introduce them, a paradox noted by Leach & Stewart (1988, pp.47-48). Whatever, it does appear likely that new practices will need to be introduced in some form when an authority becomes hung, and there is unanimous agreement from observers of hung councils on this. Accordingly, the general hypothesis is proposed that:

4.3: HUNG COUNCILS WILL TEND TO INTRODUCE NEW CONVENTIONS FOR THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS.

Two related hypotheses can be proposed. It may be that there is initial resistance, from both officers and members, to the introduction of new conventions. Blowers (1987) sees conventions as being gradually introduced "over time" (1987, p.47), and it would not be surprising if actors delayed making fundamental changes to council practices; if so, the passage of time will affect the introduction or otherwise of new conventions. Leach (1985) provides support for this, pointing out that "authorities in which hungness has become the norm tend to have developed a distinctive set of mechanisms" (Leach, 1985, p.16). Robin Wendt, from his experience as chief executive of Cheshire, points out that:

"it is clear ... that the dynamics of working life in a situation of no-majority do, to a large extent, determine the procedural arrangements, and that working styles themselves change as time progresses" (Wendt, 1986, p.387).

Wendt also notes that, while the new ways of working became "well established and understood" after about 18 months of hungness, "the learning process lasted well beyond that and still continues" (Wendt, 1986, p.376). This implies an increasing likelihood of new conventions being established the longer the council is hung. Therefore, it is also proposed that:

4.4: THE LONGER AN AUTHORITY IS HUNG, THE MORE LIKELY THAT NEW CONVENTIONS WILL BE INTRODUCED.

A further point can be made here. If it is the case that time is influencing the introduction of new conventions, it may also be that the anticipation of long-term hungness will affect the willingness of actors to introduce new practices. If hungness is seen as long-term, which may be more likely in councils holding quadrennial elections, then the actors in such councils may view the introduction of new working practices as more desirable than would actors in councils electing by thirds. Mellors agrees, and points out that with a four year pattern of elections:

"it seems reasonable to assume that the incentive for party groups to come to a working arrangement with other groups, if only to organise the proceedings of the authority, is greater than in an authority where the power-balance might only last for twelve months." (Mellors, 1989, p.76)

Therefore, it appears tenable to propose that:

4.5: COUNCILS HOLDING QUADRENNIAL ELECTIONS WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO INTRODUCE NEW CONVENTIONS THAN COUNCILS ELECTING BY THIRDS.

Table 7.3: Introduction of Rule Changes by Time Hung and By Electoral Cycle

| | Rule Change | No Rule Change |
|------------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| All Councils (n=58) | 41 (70.7%) | 17 (29.3%) |
| Long Term Hung (n=23) | 14 (60.9%) | 9 (39.1%) |
| Short Term Hung (n=35) | 27 (77.1%) | 8 (22.9%) |
| Quadrennial Elections (n=34) | 26 (76.5%) | 8 (23.5%) |
| Annual Elections (n=24) | 15 (62.5%) | 9 (37.5%) |

The results shown in Table 7.3 (above) quite clearly support the hypothesis that hung councils will introduce new conventions for the operation of council business. Only one chief executive in the control group of non-hung councils reported the existence of unusual committee arrangements in his authority, in that case a two year time limit for council chairmanships. In hung councils 'unusual' committee arrangements abound, and a clear majority (70.7 percent) of chief executives answered that the council had introduced changes in the organisation of business since becoming hung.

7.2.2 Factors Affecting the Introduction of New Conventions

As hypothesis 4.5 proposed, councils holding quadrennial elections are more likely to have introduced changes to their operating procedures. It appears logical, as Mellors proposes, that councils faced with a significant period before the possibility of a return to single party majority control will soon become aware that things need to be changed. The same pressures do not exist if an election only 12 months away could return the council to 'normality'.

It also appears 'logical' to assume, as hypothesis 4.4 does, that changes will be introduced over time, and that long term hung councils should therefore be more likely to have introduced new conventions. All the councils in the long term category (including those with a four yearly cycle) had experienced at least one election while they were hung, so all were aware that hungness might last longer than the next twelve months. Therefore, the findings shown in Table 7.3 are very surprising. Long term councils were less likely to have introduced new conventions; only three-fifths (60.9 percent) had, compared to nearly four-fifths (77.1 percent) of short term hung councils. This counter-intuitive phenomenon is difficult to explain, and goes against the expectations of previous research. An examination of the differences between the characteristics of councils which have introduced new conventions and councils which have not introduced new conventions reveals a number of other differences which may be significant.

The finding that short-term hung councils are more likely to have introduced rule changes than long-term councils is surprising. However, other differences are more understandable. Table 7.3 has already shown that councils holding quadrennial elections are more likely to have introduced rule changes than those holding annual elections, and the reasons for this expected occurrence have already been discussed. As would also be expected, nearly three-quarters of councils (71.1 percent) where formal administrative arrangements have been agreed have also introduced changes to the operation of the council, compared to exactly half of those councils with informal administrative arrangements. Those local authorities with political parties who can agree to bestow official 'formal' status on an administration would seem to be more aware of the need for stable arrangements, and probably also more likely to recognise the need to introduce new ways of working.

There also appears to be a political dimension at work. Only one of the 11 local authorities previously controlled by Labour had not introduced changes to their working practices, compared to 14 of the 42 former Conservative controlled local authorities. Again, quite what this indicates is uncertain. It may be that traditional Conservative rulers are more reluctant to agree to changes in working practices, but such reluctance cannot hold out against a majority of previous opposition parties who want new practices introduced. There was a wide variety of current administrations in these 14 councils, so these are not predominantly cases of ex-rulers clinging onto power and vetoing suggested changes. Certainly, the current political composition of an administration, and whether it was a majority coalition or a minority

administration, made no discernable difference to the introduction of new conventions.

It must also be noted that councils which have not introduced rule changes might not necessarily be councils which are opposed to change or characterised by low consensus and frequent conflict. Although Leach & Stewart posit that those councils most in need of new conventions may be the least likely to introduce them (1988, p.47), it could be that the reason some councils have not introduced new conventions is because they already have many of the innovations introduced by apparently more open councils. However, only 44.4 percent of the councils which said they had not introduced rule changes had proportionality for committees. As proportionality is commonly seen as an essential change to administrative practices in hung councils, this suggests that the majority of councils not introducing new conventions might be opposed to change.

The difficulty of providing general and convincing explanations for some of the differences in the characteristics of councils introducing new conventions and those not introducing such changes must be admitted. While there is a danger that all such differences could be 'explained away' in this manner, it must again be pointed out that local authorities in Britain are separate political systems with different histories, cultures and politics. Given this, it would be unwise to expect them necessarily to conform to an easily discernable pattern. This point will again be demonstrated when looking at the form such changes to previous conventions have taken. That is, there are a wide variety of solutions sought to the problems raised by hungness; the forms such new conventions take will now be analysed.

7.2.3. The Forms New Conventions Take

An examination of the changes introduced in hung councils (see Table 7.4 below) raises one point which needs to be addressed before examining the findings in depth. Despite Leach & Game (1989, p.44) noting the spread of conventions documents, the listing of the changes hung councils have introduced shows that comparatively few chief executives have reported the introduction of major revisions to standing orders or the 'formalisation' of new conventions. However, many of the councils had introduced a number of separate innovations which, taken together, could be seen as being very major overhauls of the way they conduct their business. Also, chief executives were not asked the specific question 'have you introduced a conventions document?'. If they had been asked this question, many more would have answered 'yes', as it is highly probable that the changes chief executives and party leaders did

make to council practices were promulgated in the form of a document. Leach & Game's findings indicate that most hung counties have introduced such documents. Therefore, the relatively small number of councils who actually report the introduction of formalised conventions or major revisions to standing orders (only 8 councils of the 41 introducing changes to their rules) is almost certainly not especially significant. What is clear from this research is that the majority of changes made concern the committee structures and the allocation of committee chairs.

Table 7.4: Changes to Council Practices

| Type of Change | Number of Councils |
|--|--------------------|
| P.R. for Committees | 22 |
| Formalised Conventions/Standing Orders | 8 |
| Changes to Committee Structures | 23 |
| Changes to System of Committee Chairs | 23 |
| Public Questions Introduced | 2 |
| All Party Briefings | 2 |
| Most Senior Councillor Becomes Mayor | 1 |
| 'Minor Alterations (unspecified) | 1 |

An assertion that English local authorities are individual political systems with a variety of political and institutional responses to becoming hung needs little further evidence than the great variety of responses reported by chief executives. Table 7.4 lists 23 changes to committee structure and 23 changes to the system of allocating or structuring committee chairs, and changes in both these categories were almost certainly instigated on the 8 councils who replied that conventions were formalised or new standing orders were instituted. These changes, together with the 22 cases where proportionality was introduced, conclusively demonstrate the importance of committees in local government, especially when the council becomes hung. The findings broadly listed in Table 7.4 will now be examined in more detail.

Changes to The Committee Structure

An examination of the 23 specific changes in the organisation of committees, reveals a number of approaches to the 'problems' of hungness. The most frequent changes reported were the abolition of *ex officio* membership (with 6 citations) and the introduction of a substitute members scheme (5 cases). Both of these changes

demonstrate the pressures on the ruling party or parties in hung councils. Much greater pressure is placed on members to attend committees when a council is hung, and the introduction of substitute member schemes enables the ruling group to replace a member who is absent by a 'reserve'. As Wendt observes, in a hung council, "a single absentee from a committee meeting can make all the difference to the outcome of a decision", although in Cheshire only a "few senior members are allowed to nominate substitutes at committee meetings" (Wendt, 1986, p.375). It can therefore make a great deal of sense to a ruling group or coalition to allow the substitution of members.

The abolition of *ex officio* membership also makes sense in a hung council. Indeed, Clay (1982) in an Association of Liberal Councillors handbook, pointed out to Liberal councillors that "to make proportionality effective, you may also need to abolish *ex officio* places on committees, or at least remove their voting rights" (Clay, 1982, p.6). In a non-hung council, the introduction of *ex officio* members, whether partisan or not, is largely irrelevant, especially when the ruling party has given itself a comfortable majority in committee. As section one of this chapter showed, the ruling party in a non-hung council almost invariably gave itself more committee seats than its due. In a hung council the committees are finely balanced, and *ex officio* membership of committees is more problematic. The committee composition has almost certainly been the result of intense negotiations, and *ex officio* membership can easily wreck the delicate political balance introduced by many administrations. That said, one hung district council (with a coalition administration) gave the leader of the council *ex officio* membership of all committees. This may indicate nothing more than a desire by the leader to keep a measure of control, although it is difficult to imagine any leader being able to maintain 100 percent attendance at so many committee meetings.

A number of other changes were made to the structure and operation of committees, including committee members being delegated by a vote of the full council, reductions in both the size and number of committees, and new emergency procedures. All these changes are unremarkable, and might be expected when a council becomes hung. For example, Wendt (1986) reported that the spread of party 'spokesmen' on committees, with the spokesman working alongside the committee chairman in dealing with urgent business between meetings, means "virtually every member of the council ... except those who choose otherwise ... is politically active and politically important in what they do" (Wendt, 1986, pp.374-375). In such circumstances, cuts in the size and number of committees conserves manpower.

One-Party Committees

Another change reported was the abolition of the 'chairman's committee', and this raises an important point. In majority control councils it is not unusual for one-party committees to exist, and these will often be seen as an unofficial 'cabinet'. In this way, formal recognition is given to the "reality of majority party control and to the collective party leadership" (Stewart, 1983, p.45). In some authorities this formal recognition is via a one-party policy and resources committee, often characterised as the nearest thing in local government to a cabinet. In other authorities, a sub-committee of the policy and resources committee or a 'chairmans committee' fulfils the role (Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987, p.4; see also the case study of Devon). Stewart maintains that these approaches "have developed to provide an official and recognised means of communication between the officer structure and the party leadership" (Stewart, 1983, p.45). It seems unlikely that such committees could exist in hung councils as, quite apart from the adverse reactions such a committee would generate in other party groups, any decisions or strategies decided therein would probably not stand up in a full council meeting. Therefore, one would expect to find that:

4.6: ONE-PARTY COMMITTEES WILL EITHER BE DISBANDED OR ADOPT PROPORTIONALITY WHEN A COUNCIL BECOMES HUNG.

As expected, this was indeed the case; in all cases, one-party committees had either disbanded, adopted proportionality, or had multi-party membership in line with other council committees. However, only 8 of 62 chief executives (12.9 percent) admitted the previous existence of one-party committees, which were the policy and resources committee (2 cases), finance sub-committee (2), chairmen and officers committee (1), staffing sub-committee (1), and a 'local issue' committee (1) (one chief executive gave no information on the nature of the committee). In addition, only a quarter of the 20 councils in the control group of non-hung councils replied that such a committee existed in their local authority. This appears to indicate that such one-party committees are not as widespread as observers have argued.

However, these replies do not necessarily mean that the remaining councils (whether hung or in the control group of non-hung councils) did not have such a committee, as the example of Devon shows. As discussed in more detail in the case study of Devon County Council, the other party leaders, despite their long experiences as councillors, were totally unaware of the existence of the 'unofficial cabinet' of Conservative committee chairmen and leading officers which existed prior

to Devon becoming hung in 1985. The chief executive of the time did not inform this survey of the previous existence of this committee, and it may be that the previous existence of such a committee is still a secret in other hung councils. Given the formal position of officers in local government as servants of the whole council, theoretically available to all councillors regardless of rank or party, the official existence of one-party committees may be difficult to acknowledge. If this is so, and Devon's case provides evidence that opposition councillors (even with long experience) may be unaware of their existence, such committees may be more widespread than the responses to this research would initially appear to indicate. That said, there appear to be no such committees currently in hung councils, which is as would be expected.

We have seen that there are a number of changes to the composition of committees and the award of committee places in hung councils. The abolition of the one-party committee, and in particular the disbanding of the 'unofficial cabinet' comprising committee chairmen, demonstrate that there will also be changes in the way committee chairmanships are awarded and in the function of the chair. The award of chairs in single party majority control councils is confined to the ruling party. Previous chapters have demonstrated that is no longer the case when a council becomes hung.

7.2.4. Changes to the Allocation of Committee Chairs

There were 23 reported changes to the process by which chairs are allocated. The most common change, reported by 6 councils, is that chairs are rotated between parties, usually from one committee meeting to the next. This might indicate a reluctance to assume control, if it were not that 'formal administrations' were just as likely to introduce such a measure as 'informal administrations' and that it was not necessarily just members of the stated administration who took part in the rotating chair arrangement. Five councils report that the chairman assumes a 'technical' role, merely concerned with the correct conduct of the meeting and presenting the committee decisions to the full council, rather than the more 'ministerial' and policy controlling role chairmen in non-hung councils are usually associated with (see Wendt, 1986, p.374; Byrne, 1986, p.152). In a further 5 cases, arrangements were introduced whereby all the parties on the council took permanent chairs. Other changes included a two year time limit on chairmanships, a limit of one chair per councillor only, the allocation of the deputy chair to a different political party than the party allocated the chair, and chairs being appointed by the whole council. The chief executive who responded that 'no party takes the chairs' gave

no idea how committee business was being run, although it may just have been that chairs were elected on a technical basis, meeting by meeting.

The changes in the role of the chair, particularly those concerned with rotation and the introduction of a 'technical' function, indicate that chairmanships and deputy chairmanships might be less valued in hung councils. However, the findings shown in previous chapters indicate that while many group leaders do value chairs less highly in hung councils, at least half of those participating in government saw real worth in holding committee chairs. Whatever, in those councils which have introduced a purely technical role for chairs or rotating chairs, it is highly unlikely that 'office' payoffs in the form of chairs would be sought by party groups. In such authorities, it would seem more rational for actors to pursue policy payoffs, another indication of the effect institutional factors might have on the process of coalition formation.

For example, the introduction of technical chair arrangements could well inhibit the formation of formal coalitions. However, it must be pointed out that there was no discernable connection between the type of changes made and the type of authority, its electoral cycle, or the type or formality of administrative arrangements. For example, formal coalitions were just as likely to have technical chairs as informal minority administrations. This might indicate that it is policy payoffs which is the driving force behind coalition formation in hung councils. However, the caveats made above must be repeated, and the title of 'chairman' still carries great weight in local government circles. It must also be pointed out, as Chapter Four details (see Table 4.7), that 40.7 percent of hung councils have administrations in which chairs are shared, and a majority of politicians actually participating in office value the chairs they hold (see Chapter Four, Table 4.8). Therefore, chairs can still be sought after rewards of office.

What these findings do demonstrate is that most changes to the operations of hung councils concern committee chairmanships and the committee structure, and the changes demonstrate the need of participants to adjust procedures in the light of changed circumstances. One 'procedure' which might also experience difficulty in surviving the loss of one party control is the tight relationship chief officers have with the leaders of the dominant party. It appears highly probable that institutional changes to increase the access of other party groups to chief officers will be instituted when a council becomes hung, and this point will now be examined.

Section Three: Institutional Changes Affecting the Access of Actors

This section opens with an examination of changes to institutional practices concerning access to chief officers, and assesses the responses of party leaders in hung and non-hung councils with regard to their contact with chief officers. Given the crucial importance of the local authority budget, access to chief officers during budget making is then detailed and analysed. Finally, there is a brief examination of possible changes to the public's participation in council and committee meetings.

7.3.1. Access To Chief Officers

As already noted a number of times, most studies of local government have commented on the close relationship between the ruling party leaders and chief officers, those actors Stoker has called "the joint elite" (Stoker, 1988, p.85; see also Saunders, 1980; Alexander, 1982). While this relationship is rarely without tensions, and Widdicombe noted that the tensions had increased as councillors became "clearer about their political goals and priorities and more determined to ensure that these are implemented" (Widdicombe, 1986, p.125), there is an inevitable closeness between chief officers and controlling party leaders in a majority controlled council. Equally inevitably, the onset of hungness must affect this hegemony. Chief officers and a single party elite can no longer operate as a "tightly-knit hierarchy" (Cockburn, 1977, p.6) controlling the operations of the council without regard to other party groups. The effects of hungness on the dynamics of the officer-councillor relationship are discussed in the following chapter, but hungness may well affect the institutional structure in which officers and councillors interact. Carter (1986, p.15) found that officers and members in all the hung county councils he examined were aware of the particular importance of communications.

There is considerable support for the belief that changes will be introduced to make access to chief officers easier for all party groups as decision making procedures become, of necessity, more open (Leach & Game, 1989, pp.38-39). For example, Leach & Stewart point out that:

"in a majority controlled authority, it is unusual for anyone other than a committee chair (and vice-chair) to be regularly briefed about committee agendas ... such exclusive briefing arrangements cannot survive in most hung authorities ... sooner or later, the right to confidential officer briefings for *all* party groups is likely to be established" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.49; emphasis in original).

Mellors (1989) supports this, and notes that "the introduction of briefing rights from officers for all parties and related procedural changes ... appear as frequent

outcomes in hung councils" (Mellors, 1989, p.103). Accordingly, it might be expected that:

4.7: EQUAL BRIEFING RIGHTS FOR ALL PARTY GROUPS WILL TEND TO BE ESTABLISHED IN HUNG COUNCILS.

However, as Table 7.4 (above) indicates, only 2 chief executives answered that they had introduced all-party briefings for council business. While 'all-party briefings' are not necessarily the same thing as 'equal briefing rights', the lack of a response in this general area appears to disprove hypothesis 4.7. According to chief executives, most hung councils do not introduce briefing rights for all the parties on the council.

However, the 'constitutional' position in British local government is that access is already available for all councillors, whether in government or not. Therefore, it may be that (theoretically at least) chief executives felt that equal briefing rights already existed in their councils prior to them becoming hung. This does not mean that chief executives are unaware of the problems facing opposition party leaders. As one chief executive put it, while prior to his council becoming hung any group could have asked for a briefing:

"only the controlling group would have asked for [a briefing], the others wouldn't have asked for it ... I think this perception that we were servants of the leading group [was] very widely held and therefore [other groups] probably expected to get a brush off. I suppose ... some of them may have been brushed off and I can't be sure about that."

Therefore, the question of access should really be addressed to politicians, who are more likely to note (or acknowledge) any improvements in access than chief officers. It appears logical to assume that given the increased likelihood of more parties being involved in decision-making in hung councils, there would be considerable differences in access to chief officers between hung and non-hung councils.

However, as Table 7.5 (below) shows, group leaders in hung and non-hung councils recorded very similar responses regarding access to officers. Very high figures of 94 percent of leaders on hung councils and 97.6 percent of leaders on non-hung councils reported that access was open or very open.

Table 7.5: Access of Group Spokesmen to Chief Officers

(n=117: n.b. table excludes 'no response')

| | Hung | Non-Hung |
|-----------|-------|----------|
| Very Open | 77.6% | 68.3% |
| Open | 16.4% | 29.3% |
| Limited | 4.3% | 2.4% |
| No Access | 1.7% | - |

Table 7.6: Difference in Access of Group Spokesmen to Chief Officers Since Becoming Hung

| Response | Total n=117 | Con n=37 | Lab n=30 | SLD n=40 | Ind n=8 |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Much Improved | 23.4% | 5.7% | 30.9% | 36.1% | 12.5% |
| Improved | 23.4% | 5.7% | 20.9% | 47.2% | - |
| No Difference | 47.8% | 74.3% | 48.1% | 16.7% | 87.5% |
| Deteriorated | 5.4% | 14.3% | - | - | - |
| Much Deteriorated | - | - | - | - | - |

(n.b. table excludes no response)

Despite this, as Table 7.6 records, nearly half (46.8 percent) of group leaders in hung councils reported an improvement in their access to senior officers since becoming hung. This suggests that there is a difference in the relative access of councillors in hung and non-hung authorities. Perhaps the most likely explanation for the large number of councillors who saw access as open in non-hung councils is that opposition leaders in non-hung councils are unaware of the degree of access the ruling party in their authority achieves. It is certainly the case that former opposition parties in hung councils overwhelmingly saw their access to chief officers as having improved since becoming hung, as Table 7.6 indicates. A large majority of Conservative leaders reported no difference in their access to chief officers, while all the politicians reporting a deterioration in access were Conservative former rulers. As might be expected, the overwhelming majority of SLD leaders (83.3 percent), none of whom had previously held office, saw their access to chief officers as having improved.

For some actors in hung councils, the increased access was of "limited value", with one Social and Liberal Democrat (SLD) leader reporting that the ruling group got "superior service". A number of party leaders replied that the openness of access depended very much on the attitudes of individual chief officers towards the particular group seeking information. One Labour leader, replying that access to officers was "limited", elaborated "we don't trust most of them as they see part of their role as being to defend the ruling administration". Another Labour leader, who saw no difference in access to officers since becoming hung, made a point echoed by some chief executives when he replied that, "it's the recognition and response of the officers that has changed...they now play the political game".

The 'political game' is played most fiercely on local authorities at budget making time. Despite the improved access reported by councillors in hung councils, equal briefing rights for all groups does not appear to be an established feature of officer-councillor relationships in the normal course of events. However, it may be that there is one time above all when equal access to officers is really important in hung councils, and that is when the annual budget is negotiated. The possibility of equal briefing rights concerning budgetary negotiations will now be examined.

7.3.2. Access in Budget Making

Given the importance of the annual budget in English local authorities, it appears likely that as many groups as possible will endeavour to make their influence felt. In order for this to happen, the expert advice of treasury officers is essential. Mellors (1983) notes that equal briefing facilities are an important "institutional pay-off" in hung councils, and that with the most crucial negotiations involving the annual budget, it would be expected that all parties would have access to chief officers concerning budgetary negotiations (Mellors, 1983, p.244). In single party majority control councils, the process of budget making is dominated by chief officers and the political elite of the dominant party (Rosenberg, 1989, pp.223-225). It appears unavoidable that this narrow decision making process will be opened out when no party has an overall majority.

Given that the "making of a budget and the fixing of the rate [is] the major moment of truth for hung authorities", a crucial time when an administration is perhaps most prone to collapse (Leach, 1985, p.22), it is vital that as many groups as possible feel involved in the decisions being taken. This need not be a recipe for protracted decision making. Leach & Game (1989) argue that it is a 'myth' that the budgetary process in hung councils is a time-consuming process. They maintain that the

increase in informal and formal consultation prior to the council debate lays the groundwork and narrows down the area of disagreement (Leach & Game, 1989, pp.48-49). In some authorities this consultation process may be highly formal; for example, Cheshire has introduced an all-party budget sub-committee. It appears likely that other hung councils will eventually decide, either from choice or necessity, that some sort of all-party or multi-party forum where a degree of consensus can be established, is necessary to improve the budgetary process.

At the very least, it would appear essential that wider consultation about the annual budget would need to be undertaken in hung councils. This may extend no further than offering officer advice to all the political groups while they attempt to make their own budget proposals. Whatever, it is clear that "negotiations over the budget are critical in hung authorities, both for the future of the current administration, and the policy priorities for the coming year" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.51). Given this, it appears likely that:

4.7: BUDGETARY PROPOSALS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE DISCUSSED WITH ALL PARTY GROUPS IN HUNG COUNCILS THAN IN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

There is no doubt that hypothesis 4.7 is correct. Party leaders were asked whether budgetary proposals were discussed with all groups on the council, and as Table 7.7 conclusively demonstrates, this was more likely to occur in hung councils than in single party majority control councils.

Table 7.7: Extent of Budgetary Discussions

(n.b. table excludes 'no response')

| With All Groups? | Hung (n=117) | Non-Hung (n=42) |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Yes | 54.5% | 25.0% |
| No | 45.5% | 75.0% |

While only a quarter of party leaders in non-hung counties replied that proposals were discussed with all groups compared to just over half (54.5 percent) in hung councils, there is still a considerable minority of leaders in hung councils whose reply to the question was negative. However, quite a few of those who replied that there were not discussions with all the party groups gave details of just which groups were consulted. Their replies (detailed in Table 7.8) demonstrate that the consultation process in hung councils was more varied than in non-hung councils. In addition, some groups had taken a positive decision not to be involved by refusing to participate in the process, an option not open to groups in non-hung councils.

**Table 7.8: Further Response of Party Leaders
Answering 'No' to the Question of Whether Budgetary
Proposals Were Discussed With All Groups**

| Response | numbers responding | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| | Hung | Non-Hung |
| With Administration Only | 12 | 16 |
| Informal Talks Only With Other Groups | 5 | 3 |
| With Other Groups in Budget Ctte Only | 8 | 5 |
| Prepared Separate Budgets | 7 | - |
| Offered - But Other Groups Refused | 5 | - |
| With Policy & Resources Chair Only | 3 | 1 |
| Only After Decision Taken | - | 1 |
| Miscellaneous | 3 | - |
| Totals | 43 | 26 |

There were comparatively few cases in hung councils where the budgetary consultations were exclusively with the administration; only 12 party leaders replied that this was the case. Even if all parties were not formally involved, there were a number of examples of the willingness of actors to widen out the process of discussion. In both hung and non-hung councils there were authorities where all parties were involved in informal discussions and where the discussion process extended to other groups in the budget or finance committees. That said, there are also a number of examples detailed in Table 7.8 which show the reluctance of some groups to negotiate in hung councils, although as already noted, opposition parties in non-hung councils do not have even this negative option. In 5 cases, the involvement of all groups in budget discussions was apparently offered, but refused by other (usually unspecified) groups. In 7 cases, the party groups produced separate budgets, which must presumably have then started a negotiating process; one respondent reported that the officers, rather than the party leaders, then negotiated a settlement. In another case, a Conservative leader answered 'no' to the question of whether the budget was discussed with all parties, and continued: "each of the parties prepared their own budgets but after an impasse, the Conservatives and SLD did agree a budget and carried it". These responses certainly suggest a 'dynamic' budget making process in hung councils, whatever the formal consultation process may be.

7.3.3. Greater Openness in County Councils

Generally, although there was little difference in the responses which could be attributed to either the political composition or the type of administration (that is, whether a coalition or minority administration), there was one surprising finding. While all parties were involved in budgetary discussions in the majority (72 percent) of Conservative and Labour minority administrations, those councils where the SLD or Alliance ruled alone were generally *less* open, with only 37.5 percent of actors responding that all parties were involved in budget negotiations. This goes against the 'popular image' of SLD councils as being more open in their decision making. It was also the case that actors in county councils were far more likely to report that negotiations were with all party groups. Nearly three quarters (71.8 percent) of party leaders in county councils reported this, while less than half the actors in district councils reported all party budget negotiations. Supporting this, an overwhelming majority of county councils have proportionality on committees (see Section One of this chapter), suggesting that actors in the county councils are more committed to 'all-party decision making'.

The reason previously offered for the greater number of county councils with proportionality was that the SLD is more powerful in counties and its commitment to proportionality and 'fairness' will thus be more likely to prevail. This is a less seductive explanation for the greater openness in counties when the 'poor record' of SLD minority administrations regarding equal access on budgetary negotiations is considered. However, it may be that 'resentment' at the SLD's prominent position, rather than SLD unwillingness to extend the negotiating process to all groups, offers a reason for the low number of SLD minority administrations where all parties are involved in budgetary negotiations.

It may also be that the higher public profile of county councils and the longer tradition of non-partisan politics of some of them (see for example, Wendt, 1986, p.373) offer better explanations for the apparently greater openness of the structures of decision making than factors connected with the SLD's position in counties. County councils have much bigger budgets and take more important decisions than district councils, and this, combined with a tradition of, as one county councillor said "judging the issues on their merits", may well persuade the actors that notions of 'fairness' should prevail. If so, they will need less persuasion to open up decision making procedures and introduce proportionality when their council becomes hung.

7.3.4. Public Access

Finally, some observers have pointed to the possibility of increased access for another group of actors, not often seen as important in the study of council practices, that is, the public. It has been suggested that certain types of policy connected with the principle of 'open government', for example, public access to information and the right to raise questions at council and committee meetings, are more likely to be introduced or strengthened in hung councils (Leach & Game, 1989, pp.55-56). Given the public commitment of the SLD to the principle of 'open government' (see 'Alliance Action in Local Government', 1986, p.24), it may well be that their influence in hung councils has succeeded in opening the doors to greater public participation. However, only a few local authorities reported allowing public questions during committee or council meetings. While those who commented on this agreed with the Conservative leader who felt that "in practice I don't honestly think it did achieve very much", one SLD leader also thought it was, "at the very least a good public relations exercise". However, it does not appear to have made much impact on the practices of hung local authorities, and in Devon the right for the public to ask questions, introduced in 1985 by the Alliance/Labour 'working arrangement', was dropped when the Conservatives returned to overall power in 1989.

Conclusions

A number of points can be made from this examination of the changes to organisational practices when single party majority government becomes impossible. It is clear that hung councils are more likely to have proportionality for committee membership than non-hung councils. However, the requirement for proportionality on all committees enshrined in the 1989 Local Government Act means that any future study will not be able to consider either the granting of proportionality or the manipulation of committee places as a possible sign of pay-offs to actors. Whatever, the higher percentage of hung councils with proportionality for committee membership suggests that notions of 'fairness' are more likely to predominate in hung councils (or perhaps more likely to be unavoidable politically). Over two-thirds of all hung councils, and all but one county council, had proportionality on committees, compared to the same proportion of non-hung councils which did *not* have proportionality for committee membership.

The one-third of hung councils which did not have proportionality for committee membership revealed some interesting findings. In most cases where a minority party took a majority of seats on the policy and resources committee, that party was close to an overall majority on the council. This, rather than the political

composition of the council or the type of local authority, appears to offer the best explanation for the phenomenon. There were also local authorities where, although no one party was given a majority, the distribution of committee seats differed significantly from the principle of proportional representation. In most cases where one party received more than its 'fair share' of committee places, this appears to be as a pay-off for participation in a winning coalition.

As expected, a majority of hung councils have introduced new conventions for the organisation of council business. However, there were some unexpected differences between such councils and those which had not introduced new conventions. Surprisingly, short-term hung councils were more likely to have introduced new conventions than long-term hung councils, and it is difficult to find any convincing reasons for this result, which goes against the findings of previous researchers. However, other differences were more understandable; for example, councils holding quadrennial elections, who might be expected to have at the very least 4 years of hungness in front of them, were more prone to introduce changes than those with annual elections, who might foresee an early return to 'normality'.

A scrutiny of the changes made shows that most new conventions concerned changes to the structure of committees and the process of distributing committee chairmanships. Most changes made to committee membership, for example the abolition of *ex officio* membership and the introduction of substitute members schemes, were easily understandable in terms of the increased pressures on councillors when a council becomes hung. For example, substitute member schemes allow a degree of flexibility concerning councillor attendance. In addition, the abolition of *ex officio* membership, as well as reducing the pressures on leading party members traditionally given committee places by virtue of their official position, removes the possibility of the balance of power on a committee being changed by non-council members whose political allegiance is undeclared. Other changes, for example the abolition of one-party committees, appear inevitable when a council becomes hung.

The committee chair also assumes a different role in many hung councils, and some changes could be crucial to the process of bargaining in hung councils. For example, 'rotating' chairs or those which have merely a 'technical' status are unlikely to be seen as adequate rewards for office seeking politicians, and in such councils it may be that policy payoffs and informal administrative arrangements are prevalent (a possibility examined in Chapter Nine). Formal coalition administrations were just

as likely as informal administrations to have such limitations concerning the role of the chair, which offers a further indication that office payoffs may not be the motivation behind coalition formation for the majority of parties in local councils. Indeed, the majority of changes to the status of the chair involve just such a change of emphasis, towards a less political role for the chairman. This is accompanied by wider access to chief officers, changes which may indicate a move to a more consensual form of decision making.

However, although a substantial minority of party leaders report improved access to chief officers when a council becomes hung, very few councils appear to have introduced formal improvements in access. This may be because the official constitutional position in local authorities is that all groups already have equal rights of access. Whatever, former opposition parties were more likely to see access as having improved, and former rulers were the only respondents who reported that access had deteriorated since becoming hung. This improved access extended to negotiations at budget making time. As might be expected, budgetary discussions are far more likely to involve all of the party groups in hung councils than non-hung councils. Even in hung local authorities without all party budget negotiations, discussion was still wider than in non-hung councils. Also, just as county councils were more likely to have proportionality for committee membership, so they were more likely to have greater access to chief officers and wider involvement in the process of budget making. This may be because of the higher profile of the SLD in county councils, although more convincing reasons may be the long history of non-partisan politics and the much higher public profile of decision making in the counties.

The findings of this chapter suggest actors in hung councils recognise the need for a greater fairness in the distribution of committee seats and display a willingness to come up with solutions to the administrative problems, particularly in the form of new committee arrangements and changes to the status of committee chairs. The increase in access to chief officers, especially in budgetary matters, indicates that there will be a wider involvement in the crucial decision making processes and suggests the possibility of a dissemination of 'power' when a council becomes hung. The nature of such changes in power relationships, however, is a matter of much conjecture, and the questions of where influence lies and the possibility of a re-distribution of power in hung councils form the core of the following chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EFFECTS OF HUNGNESS ON ACTORS

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Conclusions

Introduction

The preceding chapter has looked at a number of areas where hung councils have adjusted their procedures in order to take account of the new problems which arise with hungness. It has been shown that structures geared to handle a situation where one party controls the process of decision making will need to be changed to accommodate the new relationships between actors. It appears common sense to argue that if structures need to be changed when a council becomes hung, actors behaviour must also change to take account of this. Indeed, the mere fact that structures have been changed indicates that at least some actors have recognised the need for change. Accordingly, this chapter will examine some of the effects of such changes on the behaviour and capabilities of actors in hung councils.

This chapter begins with an examination of the most crucial factor actors in hung councils have to accept; there *must* be compromise between political parties, or there can be no decision making in hung councils. The process of decision making must change to accommodate this, and many observers have noted that hungness brings more lengthy and unpredictable decision making procedures (see Blowers, 1987, p.32). Accordingly, section one examines the views of the actors concerned on both the process of decision making, and on the policies that emerge from that process. A number of variables which may affect actors' perceptions of decision making (for example, their previous status in the council) will also be examined. If the process is perceived as having changed, and if (for example) the actors in hung councils perceive the decision making process as having improved when a council becomes hung, this might be an indication that political actors in hung councils see themselves as more influential than their counterparts in non-hung councils. Section two will examine the perceptions of political actors in both hung and non-hung councils concerning the level of influence they have over policy in a number of areas, in particular examining the influence over the annual budgetary process. If decision making structures do become more open, it may be that the leaders of 'opposition' parties, who might be expected to be relatively powerless whether in hung or non-hung councils, will also become more powerful, and this will be assessed. Finally, if there *is* more open decision making and if there *are* more politicians in hung councils who see themselves as influential, it should also be the case that power becomes more widely distributed when a council becomes hung. At the very least, there will be some changes in the relationship of the various groups in the council. In particular, the dominant roles of the 'joint elite' of leading councillors and chief officers may be challenged by hungness. For example, the full

council meeting may become more influential when single party elites no longer control the decision making process, and section three, after testing the power relationships in non-hung councils against the conventional picture, will explore the nature of the new power relationships in detail.

Section One: The Decision Making Process

Section one begins with a brief examination of the attitudes of British political actors towards coalition politics and tests the thesis that, at least initially, actors in hung councils will view both the quality of decision making and the quality of policies emerging from the new processes, in a negative manner. It is hypothesised that both group leaders and chief executives will see the process of policy making and the policies produced as having deteriorated. One group in particular, those who previously controlled the council, is more likely to see decision making as having deteriorated, and the views of former rulers are examined. A crucial factor influencing actors' perceptions of the process may be the passage of time. It is hypothesised that politicians and bureaucrats in long term hung councils will be more positive about the changes to decision making brought about by hungness, because their greater experience of coping with the problems hungness can undoubtedly bring. If this is the case, it may also be that former rulers will develop more favourable views towards decision making.

8.1.1. The Deterioration of Decision Making?

For politicians and bureaucrats in most European countries, operating in a hung environment is a relatively regular or even normal state of affairs. However, for many of the actors in British local government the change in the political environment from majority control by one party to hungness has been traumatic, and their response to such changes may well be different to the tactics continental actors pursue. The hostility and combativeness of British party politics is well established, and partisanship is exhibited at the local as well as national level (see Sharpe & Newton, 1984, pp.214-215).¹ It will be difficult for politicians raised in such an 'adversarial' system to adapt to the changes in style which a need for cooperation will bring. It appears that, at least initially, local politicians will react to hungness with a mixture of confusion and hostility, and early research into hung councils supports this view (see for example, Mellors, 1983, 1984; Rallings & Thrasher, 1986). Such reactions are understandable, as British local government

¹ The adversarial style of politics in Britain has been characterised as "more marked than in any other Western democracy" (Jordan & Richardson, 1979, p.43). Greenaway, Smith & Street (1992, pp.57-62) discuss the consequences of this for policy making in Britain at central and local level.

officers and politicians have been socialised in a political culture where any form of coalition politics is normally viewed with suspicion (see Bogdanor, 1983). As previous chapters have shown, some party leaders refuse to countenance discussions with other political groups, even when such a refusal effectively debars them from at least a share in decision making. Often, those groups who do co-operate with other party groups are anxious to disassociate themselves from involvement in decision making.²

Of course, it is not only politicians who have a poor opinion of 'coalition politics'; chief executives responding to this and earlier research (Rallings & Thrasher, 1986) often displayed a distaste for the tactics which negotiations between political groups entailed. Replies to Rallings & Thrasher's survey included several complaints of a lack of "clear political leadership" and a "lack of vision" in the council.

Given the frequency with which such views have been expressed, especially among those groups used to governing alone, it is unsurprising that the ability of hung councils to operate efficiently has been questioned by a number of observers. Blowers, as previously noted, argues that a "climate of uncertainty" permeates hung councils leading to political instability and policy making which is characterised by "drift and impasse" (1987, p.32). Mellors sees hung councils as a good illustration of Harold Wilson's famous remark that "a week is a long time in politics", with the policy focus becoming "inevitably ... short-term, since uncertainty over council votes precludes longer term perspectives" (Mellors, 1984, p.179). Given the shock that such a change in the political environment will entail and the acknowledgment among students of coalitions that experience of coalitional activities is itself a factor in the durability of coalitions (for example, see Browne & Dreijmanis, 1982), it is hardly surprising if, at least initially, the actions of actors tend to contribute to an atmosphere of uncertainty. Previous research suggests that short term priorities are seen as overriding long term considerations, and hung councils are drifting or stuttering along (Mellors, 1984; Blowers, 1987). If this is so, one would expect to find widespread dissatisfaction with the process of decision making and the direction of policy in hung councils, perhaps especially so in councils which had not been hung

² As previously detailed, one SLD group leader maintained that his council was effectively controlled by the Conservative minority group, and persisted with this claim even when his chief executive pointed out to him the recent occasions where the SLD had combined with the Conservatives in order to get major decisions on expenditure passed through the council. This response is perhaps untypical of SLD groups, who generally displayed a more positive attitude than Conservative and Labour groups to cooperation, but it illustrates the fear many respondents had of becoming too closely associated with other political groups.

for long. Respondents to Rallings & Thrasher's survey (1986) had mixed views, some feeling hungness had led to better and more consensual decision making, a similar number feeling the process had deteriorated and others noting no real difference before and after becoming hung. In general, however, respondents were less than enthusiastic about the changes hungness had brought. There are signs that this situation is changing. Some recent observers report a far more positive reaction from the participants in hung councils, citing as 'myth' the view that long term planning was impossible and decision making fragmented.(Leach & Game, 1989, pp.48-49). Wendt (1986) was also positive about the process, pointing out that in Cheshire, while outcomes were more uncertain and generally took longer to reach, "when they arrive [they] are credible and practicable" (Wendt, 1986, p.375).

While Leach & Game (1989) admit that there are still some hung authorities "in which an atmosphere of mistrust and frustration prevails", they argue that the majority of hung county councils they surveyed demonstrate the "fallacy" of viewing hungness in British local politics as an inevitable recipe for "confusion, delay, ad-hocery and inconsistency" (Leach & Game, 1989, p.59). Leach & Game's view of hung councils is largely positive, and their findings offer substantial evidence that hung governments can work extremely efficiently in Britain. However, their research was confined to a relatively small group of hung county councils, and other types of local authority may not demonstrate such a positive reaction to becoming hung. However, in general, if the findings of the majority of observers are correct we would expect to find that:

5.1: ACTORS IN HUNG COUNCILS WILL SEE THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING AS HAVING DETERIORATED SINCE BECOMING HUNG.

5.2: ACTORS IN HUNG COUNCILS WILL SEE THE QUALITY OF POLICIES EMERGING AS HAVING DETERIORATED.

Despite hypothesis 5.1 above, the responses of actors to this research offer support for the findings of Leach & Game, and indicate that the majority of actors in hung councils do not see the process of decision making as characterised by 'drift and impasse'. Table 8.1 records the responses of chief executives and political leaders to the question of whether the decision making process and the quality of policies produced has improved, deteriorated, or remained the same since their authority became hung.

Table 8.1: Quality of Decision Making and Policies Since Becoming Hung

| Respondent | Quality- Decision Making | | | Quality-Policies | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|
| | Deterior- ated | Impr- oved | Remained Same | Deterior- ated | Impr- oved | Remained Same |
| Chief executives (n=62) | 40.4% | 17.3% | 42.3% | 26.9% | 26.9% | 46.2% |
| Group Leaders (n=117) | 42.0% | 43.8% | 14.3% | 31.3% | 53.6% | 15.2% |
| Conservative (n=37) | 80.0% | 8.6% | 11.4% | 70.6% | 11.8% | 17.6% |
| Labour. (n=30) | 31.0% | 48.3% | 20.7% | 20.0% | 66.7% | 13.3% |
| SLD (n=40) | 15.8% | 76.3% | 7.9% | 7.9% | 84.2% | 7.9% |
| Independent (n=8) | 37.5% | 25.0% | 37.5% | 12.5% | 37.55 | 50.0% |

(n.b., Table excludes 'no response')

Plainly, the politicians (with the exception of the Conservatives) were more likely to believe that the quality of decision making and the policies that emerged had improved. Even among chief executives a majority (59.6 percent) thought decision making had either improved or remained the same and an even bigger majority (73.1 percent) thought the quality of policies emerging was the same or improved.³ One chief executive made the point that, although decision making had improved "in that information is more widely shared", the policies had deteriorated "in that coherence of policy decisions is reduced" and over a quarter (26.9 percent) of chief executives shared his view that policy coordination had suffered with the lack of firm political guidance. Despite this, most respondents gave a more positive rating to the quality of policies produced than they gave to the decision making process. In general, the findings of Leach & Game's survey of county councils are supported by the replies of all participants. Regardless of the type of local authority, the overall response of actors was that the policy process had either improved or remained the same.

³ It must be noted that that this evidence could equally be presented, for example, in terms of "56.3 percent of group leaders thought that decision making had remained the same or *worsened*", as opposed to the use above of "remained the same or *improved*". However, the hypothesis is that decisions/ policy making will deteriorate when a council becomes hung, and the combination of "remained the same" and "improved" is a rebuttal to this.

Without any previous input at all into the policy process for at least two-thirds of party leaders, perhaps it is not surprising that the overall response of councillors to the policies produced under this new situation was largely positive. Indeed, a substantial minority (43.8 percent) felt that the quality of decision making had improved, and a clear majority (53.6 percent) answered that the quality of policies being produced had improved. Former 'opposition' parties were largely enthusiastic about the changes, as might be expected. Despite the acknowledgment by many of them of the "drawbacks" of consultation and compromise, even a share of power after a number of powerless years will probably be eagerly embraced. It was acknowledged that decision making is more time consuming in a hung council, and one chief executive pointed out that a great disadvantage to speedy decision making was that it was "no longer possible" for him to obtain an "instant member reaction from a leader or chairman". Despite this, there was a general feeling that the policies finally decided upon were more likely to be representative of opinions within the council than when, as one Conservative leader put it, a "small cabal" had been effectively making policy. In a hung council it is possible, as a Labour leader remarked, for ideas to be put forward "which might have been stifled by a one party majority", and there was a general feeling among those who reacted positively to the question of whether the policy process had improved that "issues are now discussed in greater depth". However, one particular group of party leaders might be expected to remain unenthusiastic about the changes produced by a hung council - those who had previously enjoyed a dominant role in the authority.

8.1.2. Attitudes of 'Traditional Rulers' to the new Policy Process

In many of the local authorities surveyed (especially the traditionally Conservative controlled shire counties), one party had previously been in power for a long time. The traditional rulers were usually Conservatives; nearly two-thirds of the hung authorities in this survey had previously been Conservative controlled. Carter's examination of three shire counties previously controlled by the Conservatives for a considerable time highlights the feeling of other political groups towards the "elitist" and "arrogant" manner of traditional Conservative rulers (Carter, 1986, p.10) and it appears likely that Labour traditional rulers will be just as guilty of ruling in an arrogant way. Politicians with long experience of total control over the direction of policy in their council will almost certainly be unimpressed by the different forms of decision making which emerge in their former fiefdoms. Examining Table 8.1 (above), it certainly appears likely to be the case. The high number of Conservative leaders who reported a deterioration in the quality of

decision making (80 percent) and policies (70.6 percent) may well be explained by the number of former rulers among their ranks; 25 of the 37 Conservative leaders who responded headed parties which had formerly ruled their authority, compared to only 4 of the 30 Labour leaders responding. Therefore, it can also be proposed that:

5.3: FORMER RULERS WILL BE MORE INCLINED TO SEE THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING AS HAVING DETERIORATED THAN OTHER GROUP LEADERS.

There is very little doubt that hypothesis 5.3 is proven. Unsurprisingly, given that they had lost their domination over the policy process, previous 'rulers' were almost unanimously negative about the changes in the political environment of their authorities. Over four-fifths (80.6 percent) of former rulers thought decision making had deteriorated; 73.3 percent also thought that the quality of policies has deteriorated. The acid comment of one Conservative leader that "the deterioration of decision making is amply demonstrated by the creation of 21 new committees and sub-committees" summed up the viewpoint of many former Conservative rulers watching the previous well-oiled machinery of decision making being replaced by political 'wheeling and dealing'. As the only Green 'spokesperson' to reply to the questionnaire put it, "historically, the Tories have attempted to limit access [but] issues are now discussed in greater depth".

Perhaps the views of traditional rulers might mellow over time. The longer a council is hung, the more they will have to come to terms with losing power, and perhaps they will also become less critical of the new policy processes. Of course, it may not be only traditional rulers who become more willing to accept the new situation. It appears probable that, if hungness persists for more than one full electoral cycle (4 years), *all* actors will have to demonstrate a more positive attitude or risk remaining on the sidelines. Such a possibility will now be examined.

8.1.3. The Importance of Time in Attitudes to Decision Making

The importance of the passage of time, and the learning process which then takes place regarding the correct approach to coalition strategies, suggests that the more knowledgeable actors become about the politics of hungness, the more they will view the process of decision making favourably. As Mellors points out:

"when a council becomes hung for the first time . . . the parties may regard the situation as temporary and be unlikely to re-adjust either their attitudes or their procedures to this abnormal situation" (Mellors, 1989, p.87).

However, if the hung situation becomes the normal state of affairs, actors will have "come to terms with the consequences of their balance of power" (Mellors, 1989, p.83). This suggests that opinions on the process of decision making and the policies emerging from a hung council might become more favourable over time. However, it must be noted that a number of factors may affect the learning process, and there is no inevitability about a general improvement over time. As Leach & Stewart note:

"the capacity for speedy organisational adjustment depends on both political relationships and attitudes, and the experience and skills of the chief officers and in particular the chief executive. There are certain political attitudes and scenarios which make adjustment extremely difficult, particularly where inter-party conflict is paramount and at least two of the parties desire to show the impossibility of practical working in the hung situation. Equally, if the necessary officer skills are not present then potential opportunities for adjustment may pass unrecognised" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.54).

Despite this necessary caveat, one would expect to find that the views of actors towards the quality of decision making and policies would become more favourable over time, as they learn how to cope with the necessity for compromise and become more experienced in the new political environment. Therefore, it is proposed that:

5.4: THE ATTITUDES OF ACTORS IN HUNG COUNCILS TOWARDS THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING AND TOWARDS THE POLICIES EMERGING WILL BECOME MORE FAVOURABLE THE LONGER A COUNCIL IS HUNG.

The Attitudes of Officers to the Decision Making Process Over Time

As Table 8.2 demonstrates, in those authorities which have been hung for a long time the chief executives are more positive about both the process of decision making and the quality of policies emerging.⁴ That said, even in short-term hung councils the majority of chief executives saw no deterioration in either the process or the quality of policies the new decision making arrangements were producing. While only a very low figure of 6.3 percent of chief executives in short term hung councils thought the process of decision making had improved, compared to 43.8 percent claiming a deterioration of the process, exactly half of this sample saw no difference. Given the undoubted difficulties which hungness brings, this is some indication that the bargaining between parties which hungness inevitably produces is not seen by the majority of bureaucratic actors as a recipe for 'policy stagnation'.

⁴ Section Three of Section Four has categorised 'long term' councils as those hung for more than 3 years, while 'short term' are categorised as those hung for 3 years or less. All long term councils have had one full electoral cycle.

Table 8.2: Quality of Decision Making and Policies By Time Hung
(response of chief executives, n=62)

| | Decision Making | | | Policies | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------|
| | Deterior- ated | Improved | Remained Same | Deterior- ated | Improved | Remained Same |
| Short Term (n=36) | 43.8% | 6.3% | 50.0% | 28.1% | 18.8% | 53.1% |
| Long Term (n=26) | 35.0% | 35.0% | 30.0% | 25.0% | 40.0% | 35.0% |

(n.b. table excludes 'no response')

One problem of responding to this question in long term hung councils is that the actors may not have held their current high positions when their council originally became hung. As one chief executive of a district council which had been hung for 9 years replied in answer to the question of whether decision making had improved since becoming hung, when his council had become hung was "too long ago to make a valid judgement". This point must be kept in mind when considering these replies. Despite this caveat, chief executives displayed an undoubted increase in satisfaction with the decision making process and policies in those authorities classified as long term hung councils. However, the picture is a little more confused when the attitudes of politicians are examined.

The Attitudes of Group Leaders to the Decision Making Process Over Time

Of course, the satisfaction expressed by chief executives about the decision making process may be an indication that officers are enjoying greater freedom in a hung council, relishing their role as "policy-brokers". However, as Table 8.1 has already indicated, it is not just officers who express general satisfaction with the new structures of decision making. The responses of group leaders show that the majority either see no difference or see the process as improving after hungness. When the views of former rulers are removed, the response of the politicians is overwhelmingly favourable. Given that more groups will be involved in decision making, and that knowledge of how to obtain the maximum returns from policy concessions should increase over time, it might be expected that hypothesis 5.4 would be supported by the responses of group leaders. However, the replies of

politicians are less clear cut than those of officials.

Table 8.3: Quality of Decision Making and Policies By Time Hung
(response of group leaders; n=111)

| | Quality of Decision Making | | | Quality of Policies | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------|------------------|---------------------|----------|------------------|
| | Deterior- ated | Improved | Remained Same | Deterior- ated | Improved | Remained Same |
| Short Term (n=70) | 42.0% | 46.4% | 11.6% | 30.4% | 58.0 | 11.6% |
| Long Term (n=41) | 39.5% | 42.1% | 18.4% | 26.3% | 50.0% | 23.7 |

(n.b. 'no response' not included)

Table 8.3 shows the responses of the political elites by time hung, and reveals a more complicated picture than that presented by the replies of their chief executives. Contrary to the hypothesis, group leaders in short term hung councils were more likely to see both the decision making process and the policies emerging as having improved than group leaders in long term hung councils. This goes against expectations, and lends support to the point made by Leach & Stewart (1988, p.54); if the necessary skills are not present then there is no inevitability about a general improvement over time. If this is so, then in such authorities the responses of political actors, who may still be excluded from decision making despite the apparently more open nature of their authority, will tend to reflect a general disenchantment.

However, despite the lack of belief in an improvement over time, politicians in long term hung councils are also less likely to believe the process has *deteriorated*. than those in short term hung councils. This is explained by the fact that far more of them (23.7 percent) see *no difference* in the quality of policies than leaders in short term hung councils (11.6 percent). Again, this may support the idea of a general disenchantment with 'life in the balance'; that is, a belief that while the political composition may have changed, the old 'joint elite' has merely been replaced by one which is made up of the politicians of more than one party. The results shown in Table 8.3 may be a reflection of the feelings of an SLD leader who, while acknowledging the improvement in communication since becoming hung, qualified

this by saying that "the responses [of chief officers] are of limited value [as the majority 'group' get superior service".

The Attitudes of Traditional Rulers over Time

We have seen that the attitude of long term hung councillors is not necessarily more favourable to the policy process than those in relatively short term hung councils. However, one group of actors, former rulers, might have more need to become less critical of the changes with the passage of time. The responses to a testing of hypothesis 5.3 (see above) demonstrated that former rulers were overwhelmingly negative to the changes in decision making since their local authorities had become hung. Despite this, it was suggested that their views towards the new processes might become more favourable over time; if they wish to have a share of power they *must* come to terms with the new situation. While they may still dislike the more prolonged process of negotiations hungness brings, at least some of them may also appreciate the more consensual nature of the policies emerging.

There is some evidence that this may be the case. Only 2 leaders of traditional ruling parties thought the process of decision making had improved since becoming hung, and both were in long term hung councils. Also, those 2 respondents, plus another leader of a former ruling party who saw 'no difference' in the quality of decision making, also answered that the quality of policies had improved. Although only 8 former rulers in long term hung councils replied, compared to 25 former rulers in short term hung councils,⁵ this does indicate that the passing of time might make initially hostile actors see the changes more favourably, although half of these respondents still saw the quality of both decision making and policies as having deteriorated. Former rulers in short term hung councils were far more hostile to the changes. A total of 22 of 25 (88 percent) thought the quality of decision making had deteriorated, and 19 of 24 (79.2 percent) also thought the quality of policies had deteriorated. The remaining respondents saw no difference to either since becoming hung. These sort of responses appear to support the idea that even traditional rulers, who clearly are initially negative to hungness, may come to see benefits in a more consensual decision making process.

⁵There are fewer 'traditional rulers' in the 26 long term hung councils (compared to 36 short term hung councils), as 4 councils have been hung since local government re-organisation in 1974. In addition, 5 councils have been hung for 9 years or more, and the concept of a 'traditional ruler' is therefore suspect. The 2 councils where a 'traditional ruler' responded that the quality of decision making had improved had been hung for 5, and 7 years.

Generally, the responses of both bureaucratic and political actors to the changes in the policy process which hungness necessitates are not unfavourable. If the majority of chief executives did not see the process as having improved, the majority did not see the process as having deteriorated. "No change" may not indicate a more dynamic decision making process, but neither does it indicate a process characterised by a lack of direction. Indeed, on the political side of the council, many actors appeared positively to relish the changes, and there was often a recognition that politics had become more of a 'game'. One Labour leader suggested that "in a hung council the achievement of policy objectives comes down to the skills of the individuals in playing chess for real". Others felt issues were discussed in more depth and that policies were likelier to represent more shades of opinion within the council. Although one chief executive bemoaned the "lack of vision", he was also aware of "greater member involvement" in policy making.

Such 'greater member involvement' suggests that more political actors will see themselves as having some influence over the policies emerging than their counterparts in non-hung councils. While around 30 percent of political respondents (the former rulers) are overwhelmingly against the new structures, the remaining group leaders are overwhelmingly in favour of the changes; actors previously excluded from the policy process are responding favourably to more open decision making. If the decision making process does become more open, then more party leaders should see themselves as influential in hung councils than in non-hung councils. Section two will now explore this possibility.

Section Two: Party Influence In Hung and Non-Hung Councils

The need to compromise with another political party is an essential element of politics in hung councils. Given this, it is probable that more parties will feel influential in hung councils, and this is the first area which Section Two will explore. On the other hand, groups from outside of the administration, whose input is not needed to pass policy, should feel no more influential in hung than in non-hung councils. However, the findings of the previous chapter have suggested a more open and consensual approach to decision making might prevail in hung councils, and if this is so, then opposition leaders in hung councils might benefit to the extent of demonstrating more influence than their counterparts in non-hung councils. If it is the case that influence is more widely spread, whether such a spread of influence will survive the rigours of budget making is the next area this section will scrutinise. The making of the annual budget is perhaps the most crucial time in hung councils. It would be expected that, because of the need to compromise to enable any

proposal to go through, the process of making the budget would be far more conflictual in hung councils than in non-hung councils, where one party can be secure in the knowledge that its proposals will be ratified without the need to seek agreement with opposition groups. Given this, it would appear logical to assume that more groups in hung councils would see themselves as influential in the budget making process. Not only that, but more groups should also see themselves as influential over the final figure set for the authority's budget. All of these expectations will be examined. Again, the thesis that opposition groups will exhibit more influence (this time, on the budget) will be examined. Finally, the hypothesis that SLD groups will be more influential on the budget set than other political parties (because of their cited central position in budgetary matters), will be appraised.

8.2.1. The Importance of Bargaining

The need to accept compromise is the first essential which both politicians and chief officers need to accept. As Leach & Stewart point out, hung councils are more likely to run smoothly when the actors involved "accept the reality of the new situation and acknowledge that it will involve inter-party bargaining" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.42), however much the party leaders would prefer to be in sole charge of the council. On the other hand, in hung authorities where the main actors are slow to accept the 'reality' of the new situation, a situation may well arise where inter-party bargaining is all but impossible and the policy 'drift and impasse' identified by Blowers (1987, p.32) will predominate. In reality, most authorities will fall somewhere between the extremes of those where 'institutionalised bargaining' occurs and those where any form of inter-party cooperation is viewed with universal suspicion (see Leach & Stewart, 1988, pp.41-42).

Whatever, it appears inescapable that inter-party bargaining over policy must occur in hung councils. Agreement between two or more parties is essential for any policy to receive council approval. It therefore follows that more parties should feel influential in hung councils than in non-hung councils. Given that more parties will be involved directly in the process of decision making, such a proposal is hardly contentious. When those parties are part of the ruling administration they will inevitably feel more influential than when they were part of the 'opposition' before their council became hung. Even when there is a single party minority administration in place, at least some of the 'opposition' parties must be consulted and their views considered when forming policy; otherwise, the ruling party will lack a majority in the full council and be unable to enforce their policy preferences.

However, these are not the only reasons why more political actors will feel influential in hung councils. A vital point often made about hung councils is that the process of decision making moves away from the narrow confines of a ruling group's preferences, towards a more open and consensual method of decision making (see for example, Wendt, 1986). If this *is* the case, then not only should more parties feel influential, but parties *outside* of the administration should also feel more influential than their counterparts in non-hung councils. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

5.5: MORE PARTIES WILL SEE THEMSELVES AS INFLUENTIAL IN HUNG COUNCILS THAN IN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

5.6: OPPOSITION PARTIES IN HUNG COUNCILS WILL SEE THEMSELVES AS MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN 'OPPOSITION' PARTIES IN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

As expected, hypothesis 5.5 is supported by the responses of group leaders. However, as Table 8.4 shows, the expected differences between party leaders in hung and non-hung councils who see themselves as 'very influential' were generally extremely small, and in some policy areas (housing, highways, and transport) more leaders in non-hung councils saw themselves as 'very influential' than their counterparts in hung councils. On average, 30.2 percent of group leaders in hung councils saw themselves as 'very influential' in policy formation compared to 28.2 percent of leaders in non-hung councils. Such a slight difference, which shows that on average only one group leader sees him or herself as 'very influential' whether a council is hung or not, could lead one to conclude that influence is no wider dispersed in hung councils than it is in those controlled by a single party. However, such a conclusion may be erroneous, as an examination of the other responses made to this question suggest.

**Table 8.4: Party Influence in Policy Areas:
Hung and Non-Hung Councils**

| | Very Influential | Quite Influential | Not Very Influential | Not at All Influential |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| EDUCATION Hung | 39.6% | 37.5% | 10.4% | 12.5% |
| EDUCATION Non-Hung | 33.3% | 16.7% | 38.9% | 11.1% |
| SOC. SERVS Hung | 42.9% | 32.7% | 14.3% | 10.2% |
| SOC. SERVS Non-Hung | 26.3% | 21.1% | 42.1% | 10.5% |
| HOUSING Hung | 33.3% | 38.5% | 21.8% | 6.4% |
| HOUSING Non-Hung | 35.1% | 18.9% | 32.4% | 13.5% |
| PLANNING Hung | 26.8% | 50.9% | 17.9% | 4.5% |
| PLANNING Non-Hung | 26.2% | 39.0% | 24.4% | 9.8% |
| HIGHWAYS Hung | 18.4% | 57.5% | 17.2% | 6.9% |
| HIGHWAYS Non-Hung | 27.3% | 21.2% | 36.4% | 15.2% |
| TRANSPORT Hung | 20.0% | 48.6% | 22.9% | 8.6% |
| TRANSPORT Non-Hung | 20.7% | 20.7% | 37.9% | 20.7% |
| AVERAGE % Hung | 30.2% | 44.3% | 17.4% | 8.2% |
| AVERAGE % Non-Hung | 28.2% | 22.9% | 35.5% | 13.5% |

(Response of group leaders. Hung councils, n=117; non-hung councils, n=42. Table excludes 'no response'.)

While there is little difference between the proportion of leaders in hung and non-hung councils who saw their parties as 'very influential', the crucial area which demonstrates the difference between influence in hung and non-hung councils is the column in Table 8.4 which lists the group leaders who see their parties as 'quite influential'. On average, nearly twice as many leaders in hung councils saw themselves as "quite influential" (44.3 percent compared to 22.9 percent); Three-quarters of leaders (74.5 percent) in hung councils were 'very' or 'quite' influential, compared to half (51.1 percent) in non-hung councils who felt the same. In non-hung councils, nearly half of the group leaders (49 percent) saw themselves as 'not very' or 'not at all' influential, while only a quarter (25.6 percent) of leaders in hung councils felt this way. This strongly suggests that the hypothesis that more groups will see themselves as influential in hung councils than in non-hung councils is correct. As one Labour leader (who was otherwise unenthusiastic about the changes since becoming hung) replied: "at least in a hung council we have a chance of influencing decisions and getting some policies changed".

This Labour leader felt this way despite not being a part of the ruling administration. This supports hypothesis 5.6 (see above), which proposed that 'opposition' parties in hung councils would be more likely to see themselves as influential than opposition parties in non-hung councils. This hypothesis will now be tested against the available evidence.

8.2.2. Opposition Influence in Hung and Non-Hung Councils

Table 8.5 (below) lists the influence opposition parties in both hung and non-hung councils felt they had, and demonstrates quite conclusively that hypothesis 5.6 is supported by the evidence. Quite clearly, opposition leaders in hung councils perceive themselves as possessing more influence than their counterparts in non-hung councils.⁶ In only one area (transport policy)⁶ did more leaders in councils controlled by a single majority party feel influential. On average, opposition leaders in hung councils were almost twice as likely to answer that they were 'very influential' in a particular policy area, and also nearly twice as likely to answer that

⁶As Tables 7.5 and 7.6 in Chapter Seven indicate, opposition group leaders in hung councils may be in a better position to judge the degree of influence they have than those in non-hung councils. Opposition actors in non-hung councils thought that their access to chief officers was very open. However, leaders in hung councils were able to see that their access greatly improved when their council became hung. In other words, it may be that those 'opposition' leaders who saw themselves as 'very influential' in non-hung councils were fooling themselves as to the extent of their influence. Indeed, one Conservative opposition leader in a non-hung council answered that his party was 'very influential' in every area, but responded to a later question that with only 6 Conservatives councillors their influence on the majority group was "very minimal".

they were 'quite influential'. On average, a majority (66.1%) of opposition leaders in non-hung councils answered that they were 'not very' or 'not at all' influential. The average figures sum up the overwhelming impression, that parties outside of the administration in hung councils still feel they possess some influence.

**Table 8.5: Opposition Party Influence in Policy Areas:
Hung and Non-Hung Councils**

| | Very Influential | Quite Influential | Not Very Influential | Not at All Influential |
|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| EDUCATION Hung | 25.0% | 33.3% | 16.7% | 25.0% |
| EDUCATION Non-Hung | 18.2% | 18.2% | 45.5% | 18.2% |
| SOC. SERVS Hung | 30.8% | 30.8% | 19.2% | 19.2% |
| SOC. SERVS Non-Hung | 8.3% | 25.0% | 50.0% | 16.7% |
| HOUSING Hung | 15.2% | 42.4% | 27.3% | 15.2% |
| HOUSING Non-Hung | 4.3% | 26.1% | 47.8% | 21.7% |
| PLANNING Hung | 14.0% | 58.0% | 20.0% | 8.0% |
| PLANNING Non-Hung | 7.7% | 42.3% | 34.6% | 15.4% |
| HIGHWAYS Hung | 9.8% | 61.0% | 17.1% | 12.2% |
| HIGHWAYS Non-Hung | 4.8% | 19.0% | 42.9% | 33.3% |
| TRANSPORT Hung | 5.9% | 52.9% | 26.5% | 14.7% |
| TRANSPORT Non-Hung | 10.5% | 15.8% | 42.1% | 31.6% |
| AVERAGE % Hung | 15.4% | 49.0% | 21.2% | 14.4% |
| AVERAGE % Non-Hung | 8.0% | 25.9% | 42.9% | 23.2% |

(Opposition leaders in hung councils, n=51; non-hung n=26; Table excludes 'no response')

Of course, it could be argued that politicians are poor judges of their own power, and are likely to exaggerate their own importance. However, group leaders in non-hung councils are generally quite open about their lack of power. Many of those who answered that they were 'quite influential' in one area admitted their lack of influence in other areas. As one opposition Conservative leader in a non-hung council stated, "it [influence] is difficult to assess but the controlling group appears to heed, somewhat, any warnings by senior councillors". Another opposition leader (SLD) admitted his party's lack of influence, but pointed out that, despite this "we are able to raise questions/queries". Such diffident replies from councillors do not suggest local politicians in non-hung councils are generally unaware of their lack of power, and many of the replies from leaders in hung councils already quoted in this work suggest that local politicians are also well aware of the limits or otherwise of their group's power.

It is not only that more politicians feel influential in hung councils, which might be expected given that more parties *must* be involved in decision making.⁷ It appears that the more open nature of decision making in a hung council also increases the power of those *outside* the ruling administration. If nothing else, opposition groups in hung councils feel they have a measure of influence. However, such feelings may not transfer to the time when political influence is most clearly felt in hung councils, the making of the annual council budget. As Blowers points out:

"budget making is the central and most controversial activity of local authorities. It involves a clash of ideologies reflecting the central values of the political parties' (Blowers, 1987, p.33).

Consequently, budget making time is when political alliances in hung councils may come under their severest test (see Rosenberg, 1989, p.106), when even natural political alliances like those between the SDP and Liberals can break up in bitterness at "budget betrayal", as happened in Devon in February, 1988 (Western Evening News, February 20, 1988). The deals struck at this time are exposed to full public view, and actors may therefore be less willing to grant budget concessions. If so, the greater influence felt by actors in hung councils might not be felt at budget time, especially by groups from outside of the ruling administration. The influence of

⁷ Section Four of Chapter Nine looks at the possible differences in influence of 'opposition' parties in councils ruled by a single minority party, to assess the possibility that some groups will be receiving policy pay-offs in order to sustain the minority administration.

political groups concerning budgetary negotiations will now be examined.

8.2.3. Local Authority Budget Making: The End of Incrementalism?

Before examining the impact of hungness on political influence over the budget, we need to examine the nature of local authority budget making. Not only that, but it also has to be considered whether the budget making process is a suitable arena in which to examine political influence. It may appear 'obvious' that local authority budget making is a highly political activity, especially in hung councils. However, it may be that the majority of budgetary decisions have been taken by chief officers before political discussion even starts, or that central government restrictions on local authority spending have seriously reduced the role of local actors to one of merely seeking to fulfil their statutory requirements. Such considerations would have repercussions for political behaviour, and they need to be discussed before examining the distribution of budgetary influence in hung and non-hung councils.

A number of writers have characterised the budgetary process as one of *incremental* decision making⁸ and as Rosenberg notes, there is a "broad consensus [that] incrementalism describes the behaviour of budget agents in a variety of contexts" (Rosenberg, 1989, pp.50-51). Greenwood, Hinings & Ranson's study of local authority budgeting agreed that the process of local resource allocation is "highly incremental" (1977, p.27). An incremental process implies that the 'base' of a local government budget is unchallenged during negotiations and that discussion centres around the various actors pressures for increments to the budget.

It might be thought that the greater central pressure on local authority spending (for example, the introduction of 'rate-capping') means such a process no longer dominates, but Elcock & Jordan's (1987) study of local authority budgeting found that, although the *growth* in local authority spending had decreased since 1979, the same process of incremental adjustments continued in all the authorities examined (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.255). Clements notes that while central government's influence on the resource side of Avon's budget was "enormous", this did not mean that cuts had to be implemented, but that the rate rise was much smaller than it would otherwise have been (Clements, 1987, p.34). While it could be argued that a combination of shifts in government grant, rate-capping, and inflation has meant rate rises have merely enabled authorities to maintain their present level of

⁸ Perhaps most famously, Lindblom (1959), who memorably described incrementalism as "the science of muddling through" (1959, p.79), and Wildavsky in his classic study of central budget making in the United Kingdom (1964).

services (see for example, Blowers, 1987, p.35), the most far reaching study of individual local authorities budgeting has called the inability "to procure reductions in local authority spending" a central failure of the Thatcher governments from 1979-1987 (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.255).⁹

While not denying the very real financial pressures on local government during the 1980s, central government's ability to control local government spending may also have been overstated. There has always been conflict between central and local government over both the total and the distribution of the rate support grant (see Rosenberg, 1989, Chapter Three), although that conflict has certainly increased since 1979 (Rhodes, 1984, p. 261). However, as Rosenberg notes:

"the limits to the power of central government over local governments is mediated by resources and ideology even in the 1980s. Central governments do not in themselves have the staff or the operational knowledge to run local services even if they desired it. Indeed, central government does not still have enough staff to police the full range of controls they formally have over local governments" (Rosenberg, 1989, p.73).

Given this failure to police local spending at all adequately, it is no surprise that, according to Elcock & Jordan's authoritative study, incremental modes of decision continued to dominate in local authority budgeting. Even where more rigorous techniques such as 'zero-based budgeting' were adopted to cope with the new pressures on spending they were soon "abandoned", and the authors note that "none of [the local authorities] truly sought to scrutinise the entire 'base' anyway" (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.254). Such an incremental process has an effect on the ability of politicians to influence budgetary decisions.¹⁰

If incrementalism dominates, then most of the budget has already been decided. As the Alliance leader in Avon bluntly put it, "97 percent of the budget is made by officers"

⁹ Travers (1986, xii) sees the failure of central government effectively to reform local finance as dating from at least the 1960s. A Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS or more popularly "Think Tank") study of central-local relations provides support for this view, finding the most common type of case one where the Treasury or Department of Environment would be pressurising councils to reduce spending at the same time as local authorities were being urged, "by other departments to expand one or other local authority service" (CPRS, 1977, p.43).

¹⁰ Although not denying "the well documented tendencies within organisations and departments to perpetuate existing policies and resist innovation and change", Leach feels the changes in local government management introduced following Bains have meant a more corporate approach which may mean a "rational model" can act as "a countervailing force" to incrementalism (Leach, 1982, p.7). Chapter Two contains a resume of the changes the Bains Report recommended.

(in Clements, 1987, p.26). However, while Clements (1987) agrees that "the mass of figures and commentaries were produced by officials" he argues that the "political parties set the pace; their decisions directly affected budgetary quantities and priorities, and they laid down guidelines and policy strategy" (Clements, 1987, p.26). Even if it is the case that the great majority of the budget is pre-determined, there will still be areas where politics comes into play. As the former chief executive of Devon, David Macklin, notes:

"you have a budget of £500 million and you are talking about £5 million, and you wonder why you spend so much time sweating about the last bit, *but the last bit is the political bit*, the rest is about pay and 'rations', money you *have* to spend." (interview with author, my emphases)

It may well be the case that local government officers, whether in hung or non-hung councils, are the most influential actors concerning the final budgetary proposals. Such a proposal is almost impossible to verify (especially in a large-scale study such as this one), and as previous chapters have noted, the involvement of officers in the policy process is inevitable. Rosenberg calls it "a fact of organisational life" that local treasurers inhabit a role which is both shaped by politics and "in turn, shapes the politics in which it is located" (Rosenberg, 1989, p.160). Despite this, observers of local authority budget making argue that politicians still have a very significant input concerning budgetary decisions, and in hung councils such influence is "maximised" (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.243). The budgetary decisions that are made will therefore reflect the current balance of influence, and, moreover, the actors involved will have tangible evidence of their successes in influencing policy. The "balance of influence" between the politicians in both hung and non-hung councils will now be scrutinised.

8.2.4. Councillor Influence Over Budgetary Matters

In non-hung councils the process of budget making is fairly straightforward. The process is almost invariably controlled by "a small number of leading politicians and senior officers" who make the main decisions and:

"conduct most of the negotiations required in small, informal groups rather than through formal committee and council meetings, whose role is usually confined to legitimising decisions taken elsewhere" (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.255).

However, as Chapter Seven has already demonstrated, budgetary *discussions* are more open in hung councils (see Tables 7.7 & 7.8). This in itself might suggest that influence over the final outcome of the budget is more widespread in hung councils.

Although a more open decision making process does not automatically mean that influence is more widespread, it does appear logical to assume that when the 'joint elite' of majority group leaders and chief officers cannot control the process, more compromises will become essential. As Elcock & Jordan (1987) point out:

"in no-majority councils, member influence is likely to be considerable because policy decisions cannot be made except by seeking coalitions of councillors willing to support the policy. Also, officers cannot assume that decisions are final until they have been ratified by the full council" (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.247).

However, despite the greater influence of members in hung councils, this does not mean that *all* members will necessarily gain in influence. Councillors from outside of the small group of leading councillors at the head of every party are unlikely to suddenly acquire great power, especially in such a complicated and specialist area as local authority budgets. 'Backbench' councillors are not normally credited with very much political power, and the voting discipline of local parties will generally ensure that elite preferences dominate, even in hung councils. Their position in councils controlled by a single majority party is even more clearly powerless.

The Backbencher

In non-hung councils, both opposition group leaders and ordinary councillors are effectively impotent in the development of the budget, with no more than the "symbolic influence on policy" afforded by the legitimising function of the full council meeting (Rosenberg, 1989, p.106). Indeed, the ordinary councillor may not even understand the processes taking place. This applies not only to the accounting problems, where councillors would not be expected to grasp the techniques necessary to balance a budget, but also to the *political* rationale of proposals. (see Rosenberg, 1989, p.112). As Barlow (1987) comments, in the case of the hung Lancashire County Council, while the budget process was "policy driven", the assumptions which underpinned the budget were "not immediately obvious to the majority of councillors who are not centrally involved in the process" (Barlow, 1987, p.48). There is no doubt that, in general, the influence on budgetary policy of backbench councillors (of whatever party) is negligible in non-hung councils (see Widdicombe, Research Volume One). Even in hung councils. "the influence of the general body of members is usually marginal and exercised only in the closing stages of budget-making (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.255)¹¹

¹¹Despite this relative lack of influence by backbenchers in *budgetary* matters, in other areas of decision making many observers agree with Wendt (1986, p.375) that a hung council "enhances" the individual councillor's role in decision making (for example,

8.2.5. Budgetary Strategies In Hung Councils

In non-hung councils, there appears little doubt that budgetary decisions are made by the joint elite of majority group leaders and senior officers (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.255). However, it appears that this must change when a council becomes hung. While the ordinary councillor is unlikely to be influencing the shape of the budget (except marginally), the consensus is that more group leaders will become involved in the process. It must again be remembered that not all local authorities will display the same patterns, and what happens in the budgetary process will very much depend "upon the political climate of the hung authority" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.44).

A number of approaches to budget making are possible in a hung council, and the three described here appear to be the most common. Firstly, Leach & Game argue that an increasing number of hung councils are demonstrating that it is possible "to structure the whole budgeting process in a sensible way which actually facilitates genuine inter-party debate and leads to an outcome which reflects the kind of negotiation and compromise which is (almost) inevitable in a hung council" (Leach & Game, 1989, pp.53-54). In such authorities, a process of inter-party discussion will establish the "common ground"; with "agreement reached beforehand" a protracted and bitter budgetary process can be avoided (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.44). Secondly, in some authorities, especially those with an informal administration in place, each party produces its own budget proposals, and "the scene is then set for negotiation/bargaining and compromise, or stalemate." (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.44). This was the pattern Blowers noted in Bedfordshire, which may account for his generally negative view of minority rule; such a budgetary process appears a recipe for chaos and uncertainty (Blowers, 1987, pp.33-36). Thirdly, in single party minority administrations a slightly different pattern may be followed. Elcock & Jordan argue that in such cases, it seems:

"the party which assumes office will tend to determine the priorities and policies to be followed, in collaboration with the authority's officers and that other parties may alter the rate precept or the amount to be drawn from the balance, but not policies and priorities" (Elcock & Jordan, 1987, p.247).

The three approaches described appear to be the most common in hung councils, and at least the first and third suggest a more consensual manner of budget making. Even

Blowers, 1987, p.32).

in councils where parties adopt the second approach, which indicates that budget making will be a protracted affair, the discussions cannot last for ever.

8.2.6. Budgetary Influence in Hung and Non-Hung Councils

Whichever process is followed, one of the three above or some other method of discussions about the annual budget,¹² some form of compromise *must* be reached between at least two parties. A party whose co-operation in passing a budget is requested is unlikely to accede without some form of payoff, and while an office payoff is not impossible, previous research suggests it will be a policy payoff (for example, see Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987). This chapter has already noted the greater spread of influence in hung councils over a range of policy issues, and the introduction to this examination of budgetary matters has indicated a significant political input over budgetary decisions. Therefore it is proposed that:

5.7: GROUP LEADERS IN HUNG COUNCILS WILL FEEL MORE INFLUENTIAL IN BUDGETARY MATTERS THAN GROUP LEADERS IN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

As Table 8.6 indicates this was indeed the case. A high number of respondents in majority control councils (43.9 percent) saw themselves as 'not at all influential' on the rate precept set by their authority, while only 16.8 percent of group leaders in hung authorities made that response. In addition, a question on general budgetary influence produced similar responses to those in Table 8.6. Quite clearly, more group leaders feel influential in a hung council. The findings discussed in Section Three of the previous chapter, and detailed in Table 7.7, show that budgetary discussions are more widespread in hung councils, so such a conclusion is unsurprising.

Table 8.6: Party Influence On Rate Precept in Hung and Non-Hung Councils: Response of Group Leaders

| Response | Hung (n=117) | Non-Hung (n=42) |
|------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Very Influential | 46.0% | 29.3% |
| Quite Influential | 15.9% | 9.7% |
| Not Very Influential | 21.2% | 17.1% |
| Not At All Influential | 16.8% | 43.9% |

(n.b. Table excludes 'no response')

¹² Table 7.8 in the previous chapter details some of the discussion procedures followed by actors in hung councils.

As mentioned above, in a number of local authorities all of the party groups prepared their own budget with the help of officers, which could mean fierce negotiations to reconcile what were often four conflicting budgets. Even in hung councils where an apparently more consensual method of achieving a budget is practised, the process will probably be more conflictual than in non-hung councils, and Table 8.7 supports this proposition.

Table 8.7: Degree of Conflict in Budget Making Process
(response of group leaders)

| Degree of Conflict | Hung (n=117) | Non-Hung (n=42) |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| High | 35.9% | 12.1% |
| Fair | 30.8% | 42.7% |
| Small | 28.2% | 37.7% |
| None | 5.1% | 7.5% |

(n.b. Table excludes 'no response')

As Table 8.7 demonstrates, there was a higher degree of conflict over the budgetary process within hung councils, indicating a more dynamic budget making process. That said, a majority of group leaders in non-hung councils (54.8 percent) also saw the budget making process as having a 'high' or 'fair' degree of conflict. This demonstrates the problem of asking for actors perceptions; one person's "high degree of conflict" may be another's 'small degree of conflict'. The same problem also occurs when asking actors how influential they are. Without an in-depth study comparing policy preferences and policy outputs (impracticable in a large scale study) such a problem cannot be avoided. However, in budgetary matters there is a measure which apparently offers *some* degree of objective assessment as to where political influence rests. As well as being asked how influential their party was on the rate precept set in their authority (detailed in Table 8.6 above), each political leader in both hung and non-hung councils was asked 'how close was the final rate precept for your authority to your own party's preferences?'. Of course, this question also has methodological problems. A party's proposal can be identical to the final figure set, yet have had no influence on the policy preferences the final budget represents; indeed, quite a few respondents answered that the final rate precept was identical to their preferences and also answered that their party had been 'not at all influential'

on the precept set. In addition, as a Labour leader noted, the only reason the ruling Conservative group's budget rise was identical to his preference, was that the rate precept set was "the maximum permitted without incurring penalties". Despite this, it does appear likely that actors in hung councils will be more likely to reply that the final precept is close to, or identical with, their own preferences. If so, this would offer further support for hypothesis 5.7 (above), that more politicians are influential in hung councils.

Table 8.8: Closeness of Rate Precept To Own Party's Preferences

| Response | Hung (n=117) | Non-Hung (n=42) |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Identical | 25.4% | 34.1% |
| Very Close | 22.1% | 12.2% |
| Quite Close | 26.3% | 24.4% |
| Quite Distant | 16.0% | 22.0% |
| Very Distant | 8.3% | 7.3% |

(n.b., Table excludes 'no response')

Table 8.8 confounds these expectations. Fewer leaders in hung councils answered that the final rate precept was identical to their preferences than leaders in non-hung councils. That approximately a third of group leaders in the control group of majority control councils answered this is not surprising. Most of the non-hung councils had a maximum of three parties, and with one of them the ruling party, any other result would have been surprising. Ruling parties in non-hung councils will automatically have their preference passed. A reasonable explanation for the lower number of party leaders in hung councils achieving their exact preferences is that they will have to make compromises with other parties. Given this, the fact that only a quarter of actors achieve their exact preferences is unsurprising. The 'methodological problem' mentioned above also means that even fewer than this 25.4% are actually demonstrating any real influence; for some the 'identical' rate precept is not indicative of budgetary influence. Given this problem, a discussion of the remaining figures is probably pointless. What Table 8.8 *does* demonstrate, albeit in a roundabout way, is that compromise is a part of the budgetary process in hung councils, offering further support for the hypothesis that groups in hung councils are more influential than groups in non-hung councils.

Such findings are only to be expected. It would be very surprising to discover that there was less compromise in hung councils or that fewer groups felt influential. However, the thesis that even groups outside of the ruling administration will feel more influential, which the results listed in Table 8.5 (above) show is the case, is less obvious. Whether this general influence is also evidenced in budget making will now be assessed.

8.2.7. Opposition Party Budgetary Influence

As the previous chapter has indicated, officers in hung councils were also more likely to discuss the budgetary proposals with the opposition political parties (see Table 7.7) than officers in non-hung councils. Although group leaders often expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of these discussions, it appears logical to assume that such discussions may facilitate a greater degree of influence. Overall, there was a definite feeling of greater influence concerning budgetary negotiations reported by actors in hung councils, as Table 8.6 (above) demonstrates. The findings already shown in Table 8.5 prove that even parties outside of the ruling administration feel more influential over the range of policy areas in hung councils. It appears common sense to propose that they will also feel more influential when the budget discussions are taking place. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

5.8: OPPOSITION GROUP LEADERS IN HUNG COUNCILS WILL FEEL MORE INFLUENTIAL IN BUDGETARY MATTERS THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

Table 8.9: Opposition Party Budgetary Influence
(response of group leaders)

| | Very Influential | Quite Influential | Not Very Influential | Not At All Influential |
|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Hung (n.=51) | 30.6% | 16.3% | 16.3% | 36.7% |
| Non-Hung (n=26) | 8.3% | 4.2% | 37.5% | 50.0% |

As the results in Table 8.9 demonstrate, the hypothesis is supported by the opinions of opposition leaders in hung councils, when asked to rate their influence concerning

budgetary policy.¹³ While a substantial minority (36.7 percent) still feel that they are not at all influential concerning the budget, nearly half (46.9 percent) felt very or quite influential, compared to only 12.5 percent of opposition leaders in non-hung councils who felt the same. This supports the previous findings concerning opposition influence in hung councils. The comments of opposition group leaders in hung councils support the findings in Table 8.9. One Conservative leader replied that "on budget matters particularly, public policy dealing in committee has developed". For one SLD leader, while "the budget process is more complicated" there is "more real debate". Some respondents who did not consider themselves part of the administration reported real success in changing details of the budget, although in the most striking case this was due to factors outside of the negotiating process. In that example, an SLD leader replied that the SLD proposal for a lower precept was supported by Labour and due to absentees from the ruling Conservative/Independent coalition was successful.

However, while most opposition leaders in hung councils admit their lack of influence, as Table 8.9 shows a small minority still answer that they were very influential. These include the leader of one Conservative minority group, who argued that "the majority party [Labour] greatly reduced the intended rate rise when they discovered that a joint meeting of all the opposition members had agreed to oppose their proposals". This might have been seen as wishful thinking were it not for the Labour leader's acknowledgment that there was no conflict over the budget his group had set because "there was all party support for the rate fixed". The narrow majority the Labour group held in this authority may have been responsible for this rare example of cooperation in a non-hung council. Another Conservative minority leader found his group's influence difficult to assess, "but the controlling group [again, Labour] appear to heed, somewhat, any warnings by senior councillors". In general, however, the figures support the perception of writers that opposition groups in non-hung councils lack the influence of their counterparts in hung councils.

8.2.8. The SLD and Budgetary Influence

Some opposition parties may be in a better position than others to exercise a degree of influence. In general, one group in particular appears to be admirably suited to get

¹³ This is not the same as asking leaders how influential they were over the rate precept. Leaders were asked to rate their influence in a number of policy areas (see Chapter Nine), and 'the budget' was listed as one of those general policy areas. No distinction is made here between opposition leaders in councils where 'coalition' or 'minority' administrations rule (but see Chapter Nine, sections 9.4.2. and 9.4.3.).

its proposals closely adopted, whether from within the administration or from an oppositional position. The Alliance parties strategic position in the middle (generally) appears to give them a considerable advantage over the two main parties. While Blowers (1987, p.34) implies that local Conservative parties close alignment with the new legislation from central government may give them an advantage in the budgetary negotiating stakes, it does appear intuitively likely that the Alliance's central position (not to mention their relative commitment to making a hung situation work) would make it easier for them to reach agreement with either Labour and Conservative, who in many cases may be too far apart ideologically to reach agreement and are thus confined to obtaining Alliance support for their proposals. This is an argument supported by Leach & Stewart (1988), who find that "typically, though not invariably, the Alliance budget and proposed rate of precept falls between that of the Conservative and Labour proposals" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.44); in such cases the Alliance or SLD proposals can seem like a 'sensible' compromise. Mellors notes the "glaring" success of the Alliance in budgetary negotiations; in only one of the 20 county councils whose budgets he examined were they not involved, and "the increase proposed by the Alliance was the one accepted in no less than thirteen counties" (Mellors, 1989, p.107). Given the above, it appears probable that:

5.9: ALLIANCE PARTIES WILL SEE THEMSELVES AS MORE INFLUENTIAL IN THE BUDGETARY PROCESS THAN OTHER POLITICAL GROUPS.

Mellors (1986) also notes a general closeness between Labour and the Alliance over "budgetary objectives", observing that the "tactical compatibility" of Labour and the Conservatives in some counties when committee chairs were being allocated "did not reappear at budget time"(Mellors, 1986, pp.18-21). If this is so, it may also be that:

5.10: LABOUR GROUPS WILL SEE THEMSELVES AS MORE INFLUENTIAL IN THE BUDGETARY PROCESS THAN CONSERVATIVE GROUPS.

There is little doubt that both of the above hypotheses are supported by the evidence. Quite clearly, SLD groups feel more influential than other groups on the council, while the Labour party generally sees itself as more influential than the Conservatives. Independent groups also report that they have been influential on the rate set, which given that 5 of the 8 respondents have 'governmental status' is only to be expected.

Table 8.10: Influence On Rate Precept By Political Party

(responses of group leaders)

| Party | Very Influential | Quite Influential | Not Very Influential | Not At All Influential |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Conservative (n=37) | 29.4% | 8.8% | 29.4% | 32.4% |
| Labour (n=30) | 40.0% | 23.3% | 26.7% | 6.7% |
| SLD/Alliance (n=40) | 65.0% | 12.5% | 12.5% | 10.0% |
| Independent (n=8) | 50.0% | 37.5% | 12.5% | - |

(n.b. table excludes 'no response')

In further support of the proposal that the SLD will tend to exercise a greater degree of budgetary influence, 36.1 percent of SLD leaders reported that the rate set was identical to their preferences, a far higher percentage than the other two main parties. Although the very high degree of Alliance success in relation to the rate increase reported by Mellors was not repeated, these findings support the general impression throughout this study that the SLD takes good advantage of the factors favouring its success in hung English councils.

We have seen that political influence is felt by a greater number of political actors in hung councils. Even those parties which are not part of the administration have answered that they are more influential over a range of policy areas. That influence is also felt at budget making. However, the influence of a critical actor has yet to be fully addressed. On a number of occasions throughout this chapter, the role of chief officers in decision making has been discussed. Although the precise nature of the relationship between local politicians and bureaucrats is difficult to establish, it appears likely that the relationship will, like the structures of hung councils, undergo some significant changes when a council becomes hung. The final section of this chapter will explore the nature of the relationship, and attempt to discover the nature of such changes.

Section Three: The Distribution of Power in Hung and Non-Hung Councils

The previous section has strongly suggested that more group leaders feel influential

in hung councils. The increase in influence felt by many political leaders in hung councils, including those who head 'opposition' groups suggests that the power of those actors normally seen as dominant in decision making will be affected when a council becomes hung, a point undisputed by students of coalition politics. The nature of such changes in power relationships, however, is a matter of much conjecture. Before examining the nature of power relationships in hung councils, a critical examination of decision making in majority control councils is necessary. Chapter Three has already detailed the power relationships in non-hung councils in great detail, and the picture painted by local government experts will be compared with the perceptions the respondents in the control group of non-hung councils. Following this, the nature of power relations in hung councils will be surveyed. Previous observers of hung councils have made a number of judgements on the nature of power relationships, many of them contradictory. The relative power of officers, party elites, committees, full council, local party organisations and central government will be assessed, in an attempt to determine the new centres of influence in hung councils. Finally, the effects of the passage of time are briefly considered.

8.3.1. The Centres of Influence in Majority Control Councils

In the majority of cases, we would expect to find from the picture painted by previous observers that, while the influence of chief officers would be seen by the actors in majority control councils as considerable, that of elected political elites would be seen as paramount. In comparison, the committee structure and meetings of the full council would be seen as relatively unimportant, merely the mechanisms by which the 'joint elite' exercise their dominance.¹⁴ The replies of the control group of non-hung local authorities to the question of which groups are most influential over council policy support these arguments.

All respondents were asked: "which of the following, in your opinion, is most influential in dictating the course of council policy'. They were asked to rank them in order of descending importance, and there was space for them to list other factors they considered important. Table 8.11 demonstrates that chief executives and party leaders show a remarkable unanimity as to where they believe power lies in a council controlled by a single party. The only slight disagreement the two groups have is over just how unimportant the full council meeting and local party

¹⁴Alexander (1981) is more specific, arguing that it is the relationship between the leader of the dominant group and the chief executive which is "the most important interactive process" (Alexander, 1981, p.35). Whatever, as Chapter Two has detailed, the major studies into local government decision making recognise the elitist nature of decision making in the vast majority of councils (for an appraisal, see Temple, 1991).

organisations are in relation to the elites.

Table 8.11: The Distribution of Power in Non-Hung Councils

| Response of Chief Executives (n=20) | Response of Group Leaders (n=42) |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1.Elected Party Elites | 1.Elected Party Elites |
| 2.Chief Officers | 2.Chief Officers |
| 3.Central Government | 3.Central Government |
| 4.Committees | 4.Committees |
| 5.Full Council | 5.Local Party Organisations |
| 6.Local Party Organisations | 6.Full Council |

The actors surveyed believe that power lies quite clearly with the 'joint elite', but, just as democratic theory says they should be, elected party elites are supreme in the policy process. In one authority, the chief executive reported that the Labour controlling group had "political advisers" on "officer's working groups covering the main areas of council work", which must be a considerable means of control over the officers and, therefore, the direction of policy. The lack of power most studies attribute to individual councillors is partly demonstrated by the relative lack of influence of committee membership, the council meeting and local party organisations. Respondents generally saw these groups as less important than the activities of elected party elites and chief officers.

However, this does not mean that the *leaders* of opposition party groups necessarily saw themselves as lacking influence, if not power, over the decision making process. The previous section has demonstrated that a few opposition leaders in councils controlled by a single party did see themselves as very influential in a number of policy areas. Even in budgetary matters, as the previous section has discussed, some opposition leaders argued that they had achieved "some measure of success" in "moderating" the ruling group's proposals.

Despite this, the overall response of both political and bureaucratic actors supported one Conservative council leader's bold assertion that the influence in his council lay with a "small caucus of Chief Executive, party leader, some chairmen and chief officers", in other words, the 'joint elite' identified by Stoker (1988, p.85). The same leader minimised the importance of all other groups, with the exception of the rest of the Conservative group on the council. In general, the response of opposition

party groups was that their influence was "very minimal". One Labour opposition leader pointed out that the opposition's presence on the Policy Committee and the Finance Committee did not ensure any real input into the policy process, as he had "no doubt that the leader of the Council influenced the figures before they reached any committee".

Although one respondent said it was "unfair" to place 'central government' in the list of factors influencing council policy "because all councils must carry out government policy", the impact of central government was felt by a number of actors, in particular the Labour council leader who placed central government first in influence; his authority had been rate-capped. One Conservative leader, while admitting that his group had been "not at all influential" over the budget, replied "the Conservative government forced the issue as we would wish it" by rate-capping the Labour controlled authority. The high ranking central government achieved in the list of influential actors demonstrated that many actors saw themselves operating "subject to central government constraints", although (unsurprisingly given the hostility between local Labour groups and the Conservative government) Labour leaders generally rated central government more influential than Conservative leaders did. A few respondents mentioned other influences. For example, one SLD leader rated the National Union of Public Employees as the third most important actor in his Labour controlled metropolitan district council. The majority agreed that the six groups they were presented with, whatever the order they chose, were the most important.¹⁵

In general, the findings from the control group of majority control local authorities support the arguments put forward by many observers of British local government. The most influential groups on the council are perceived as party elites and chief officers, with the politicians holding the advantage. The influence of other groups is far less. Observers of hung councils, however, have portrayed a different picture of the spread of power, and it is to an examination of power in hung councils that we now turn.

8.3.2. Power in Hung Councils: The Dictatorship of the Official?

We have seen that the distribution of power in the single party majority control

¹⁵ A ruling Labour leader put the 'elected party elite' as number one, followed by his 'group meeting'. Another Labour leader also mentioned the Labour group meeting, as did a Conservative opposition leader. The only other response from actors in non-hung councils which was outside of the norm was the Labour ruler who placed "Grant regimes, EEC, etc" at number six in his 'most influential' list.

councils in our sample conforms to the picture painted by students of English local government. According to the actors, although officer power is significant, supreme power rests with the elected party elite. However, the arrival of hungness appears to challenge the hegemony of the 'joint elite'. Observers of hung councils appear in little doubt that the power of chief officers, and in particular that of the chief executive, can be increased by hungness, and that the response of chief officers is crucial to the political arrangements reached (see Leach, 1985 pp.17-20). Indeed, Mellors states that:

"one of the clearest lessons to be drawn from the recent experiences of British non-majority councils is that power balances can easily elevate the role of professional officers ... how officers react to the political stalemate can have an important effect upon relationships between the political parties and between individual party leaders" (Mellors, 1989, p.96).

While Blowers points out that hungness may well have the opposite effect, in that officers may become "unwilling to venture opinions or proposals that, if unheeded, will undermine their credibility", he is also aware that another possibility is that "officials will be able to fill the political vacuum created by political divisions and [the] resulting uncertainty" (Blowers, 1987, p.45). Moss notes that "hung councils provide an open invitation or temptation to chief officers to manipulate the political process and effectively exercise control" (Moss, 1983, p.9). Many respondents to a previous survey into hung councils expressed this belief, with one chief executive replying (with surprising candour) that the main advantage of his council becoming hung was that:

"From an officer's point of view, the knowledge that a particular policy you are pushing may win through even if opposed by the largest group, if the other two support it. In an authority with an overall majority, the majority group leader often acts as an effective veto in the early stages of policy formulation. This cannot happen in a hung council" (Rallings & Thrasher, 1986, previously unpublished reply to their questionnaire).

Other chief executives responding to Rallings & Thrasher's survey agreed with this. One noted that "committees are more ready to listen to officer advice", and a chief executive whose politicians had been unable to agree on committee chair arrangements replied that this meant "chief officers have been obliged to reach their own decisions on a range of less important matters". Councillors who responded to this earlier survey, while often positive about the changes since becoming hung, were also aware of the dangers of hungness increasing officer power. A small number of respondents from all parties expressed concern at the possibility. Although

generally they were much less forthright than the chief executives, one Conservative leader noted that hungness had introduced "the ability of officers to 'play off' one group against another".

While it might be argued that politicians repeatedly demonstrate a capacity for self-delusion about their own power, it appears highly unlikely that in the relatively well defined areas of local government responsibility they will fail to recognise shifts in influence. If the general impression is that officers have gained power, they must have gained it from somewhere. The evidence suggests that it is the political elites who lose power to officers when councils become hung.

It is not only chief officers who have been perceived as gaining power at the expense of the political elite. One thing that observers are agreed upon is that the power of individual councillors is, as Blowers (1987, p.32) puts it, 'enhanced' by hungness. This suggests that the power of their leaders over them, and thus over the flow of policy, decreases; the viewpoints of individual councillors need to be considered when the council meeting ceases to be a purely 'ritualistic' occasion. Leach & Game report that chief executives frequently told them that prior to becoming hung they were usually able to write the minutes of council meetings before they took place, and often made the same claim about committee meetings and minutes (Leach & Game, 1989, p.39). The possibility of writing minutes prior to meetings in most hung councils appears unlikely, to say the least. It must be noted that the suggestion that elected party elites surrender some control to individual councillors does not mean that 'backbenchers' suddenly become more powerful than their leaders. What it does mean is that their views may need to be considered more carefully when all parties become minority parties; the lack of predictability of committee and council meetings means that "majorities have to be fought for and won, rather than taken for granted" (Leach & Stewart, 1988, pp.41)¹⁶.

With the shifts in power to individual councillors, some observers (for example, Blowers, 1987; Mellors, 1983) argue that power shifts from the committees to the full council, as ruling elites are unable to control the committees in the way majority control parties and their chief executives can, as decisions taken in committee are often overturned in full council. If, as Blowers maintains, the full

¹⁶ As the investigation of power in non-hung councils (Chapter Three) has already noted, Widdicombe reported that the "spread and intensification" of politicisation has decreased the importance of committees and councils "as arenas where policies and decisions are actually made apart from in Independent-dominated or hung councils" (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume One, p.105).

council takes effective decisions "rather than simply endorsing proposals already agreed at the committee stage" (Blowers, 1987, p.32), then one would expect to find that the power of the full council increases while the power of committees decreases.

The results from the control group of majority councils, however, suggests that committees in those councils are relatively unimportant (see Table 8.11 above), another mechanism by which the 'joint elite' keeps control. Wendt maintains that it is undeniable from his experiences as Cheshire County Council's chief executive "that a no-majority council enhances the roles of individual council members in decision making" (Wendt, 1986, p.375). This might suggest that committees could actually increase in importance when the elite can no longer control their decisions. Notwithstanding this, Wendt argues there are still dominating political figures in hung councils, but that political dominance is "no longer a function of membership of the largest political group" (Wendt, 1986, p.376).

It is not only the power of internal council actors which is seen as being affected by hungness. Blowers argues that:

"as central government imposes more restriction on local authorities so it provokes a reaction among authorities determined to resist control and so assert their independence and autonomy. As local opposition to government policies and expenditure cuts is asserted so central government attempts to restrain local powers and resources. In many local authorities there is now the added dimension of minority government which may intensify the uncertainty and instability caused by greater central intervention in local affairs" (Blowers, 1987, p.47)

Therefore, with their power over the rate making process seen as potentially threatening to a hung council struggling for a degree of budgetary agreement, central government might be perceived as more influential by the actors in hung councils.

8.3.3. The Centres of Influence in Hung Councils

A number of potential changes in the distribution of power when a council becomes hung have been detailed above. If the findings of previous research into hung councils is confirmed, we would expect to find that the perception of our respondents is that the power of chief officers is enhanced and that of elected elites diminished. Also, the power of the council may be seen as increasing, perhaps at the expense of committees, when a council becomes hung. In addition, the pressures of hungness will exacerbate central-local tensions, causing actors in hung councils to see central government becoming more influential. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

5.11: THE POWER OF OFFICERS INCREASES IN HUNG COUNCILS.

5.12: THE POWER OF ELECTED PARTY ELITES DIMINISHES IN HUNG COUNCILS.

5.13: THE POWER OF THE FULL COUNCIL INCREASES AT THE EXPENSE OF COMMITTEES WHEN A COUNCIL BECOMES HUNG.

5.14: CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IS SEEN AS MORE INFLUENTIAL IN HUNG COUNCILS THAN NON-HUNG COUNCILS.

This survey asked party leaders and chief executives in both hung and non-hung councils to assess the relative influence of six groups of actors; the full council, committees, chief officers, elected party elites, local party organisations, and central government, and to rank them in order of descending importance. There was also an opportunity for them to mention and rate other influences they considered important. Table 8.12 details the responses from the actors in hung councils; the responses of actors in non-hung councils, detailed in Table 8.11 (above) are shown in brackets.

Table 8.12: The Distribution of Power in Hung Councils

| Response of Chief Executives (n=62) | Response of Group Leaders (n=117) |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1.(4) Committees | =1.(4) Committees |
| 2.(2) Chief Officers | =1.(3) Central Government |
| 3.(5) Full Council | 3.(2) Chief Officers |
| 4.(1) Elected Party Elites | 4.(6) Full Council |
| 5.(3) Central Government | 5.(1) Elected Party Elites |
| 6.(6) Local Party Organisations | 6.(5) Local Party Organisations |

Figures in brackets = ratings given by actors in non-hung councils (see Table 8.11)

n.b. table excludes 'no response'.

Controlling for party identification, there was only one significant change to the rankings in Table 8.12. Both Labour and SLD/Alliance leaders rated central government as the biggest influence on policy, with 60 percent of Labour leaders and 57.5 percent of SLD/Alliance leaders citing central government as the main influence on council policy compared to only 5.4 percent of Conservative leaders. Hypothesis 5.14 posited that central government influence would be seen as having increased in hung councils, and despite the lower rating it receives from chief

executives, the majority of "non-Conservative" political actors were quite certain that this was so. Despite this judgement, perhaps natural given a Conservative central government and the current climate in central-local relations, the assessment by all party leaders and chief executives in hung councils clearly places the committees as the major internal factor in the direction of council policy.

The contrast in opinion of both group leaders and chief executives in hung councils with their counterparts in non-hung councils is striking. Whereas elected party elites and chief officers are perceived to be controlling policy in majority control councils, the perception of where power lies in hung councils focuses more on the role of committees and the continuing influence of chief officers. Hungness is not seen to have affected the power of chief officers, but political power is perceived as fragmented. Quite clearly, in full support of hypothesis 5.12, elected political elites are thought to suffer a considerable loss in influence when a council became hung, and the rise in importance of committee and council meetings indicates that the power of other party groups and individual councillors is seen to be increased as the ruling party elites can no longer force an issue through 'on the nod'. This supports the findings of the Section Two of this chapter, in that more parties feel influential when a council becomes hung.

8.3.4. The Increased Importance of Council and Committee Meetings

Hypothesis 5.13 proposes that the power of the full council increases at the expense of committees when a council becomes hung. The response of one chief executive supports this, arguing that a major disadvantage of hungness for the officers is:

"the impossibility of delegating anything to committees. The council meeting itself is the effective decision making body and will frequently overturn committee decisions, even with the same members attending".

A Labour leader supports this, complaining of the constant need to "refer decisions to full council". Despite these responses, hypothesis 5.13 is not proven by the majority of responses to this question. On the contrary, it appears that the importance of both committee meetings *and* full council meetings is increased when a council becomes hung. One group leader replied that hungness had led to "real debate" and "real decision making in public" rather than by a "small party caucus" as previously occurred, a feeling evident in a number of replies. While not all respondents were enthusiastic about the changes, those who were claimed a real improvement in the openness of decision making when the old 'joint elite' could no

longer railroad policy through the council. The expected increase in the power of chief officers (proposed by hypothesis 5.11) is not immediately apparent. Although the power of chief officers (as seen in the responses to the questionnaires) is still seen as considerable, it does not appear to have been enhanced at the expense of politicians as a whole. It appears that elected party elites lose power to the body of councillors while officer power remains relatively constant when a council becomes hung.

However, while the committees are recognised as the most important arenas in hung councils, some actors clearly attached consequence to them for the power they believed the committee structure gave to officers. One Labour group leader described his strategy for coping with the new importance of committees, indicating that a clever politician could still, at least with the cooperation of his officers, manipulate the decision making process to his party's advantage even without a voting majority:

"The key appears to be to get the officers to include the points you want in their reports. This generally gets accepted by the other two groups then as they do not recognise the political connection. Officers reports are rarely changed by committee and committee decisions are rarely changed by full council".

For this respondent, both committee meetings and the full council appeared to function in essentially the same manner as when a single party controlled the council. Committee decisions appear to be less set in concrete in many authorities, with Blowers maintaining that one of the enduring characteristics of minority rule is that the full council "takes effective decisions rather than simply endorsing proposals already agreed at the committee stage" (Blowers, 1987, p.32).

However, as the findings above indicate, many respondents to this survey, saw committee debates assuming new significance in the policy process. The large number of changes to committee structures noted in Chapter Seven indicate that, for most local authorities, committees seem to assume new importance as forums of decision making. Committee debates become more important in a hung council, a place where policies are "initiated" and hammered out rather than just superficially discussed. However, in such circumstances resolution is not easy, and there appear to be more occasions when the full council meeting has to attempt to resolve the conflict over policies (see Blowers, pp.44-45).

Other influences were also seen as important by a few actors. One chief executive and one group leader mentioned "working groups" as having a small degree of influence,

and two politicians mentioned 'political groups', although neither was more specific. Blowers has suggested that when a council is hung "organised interest groups . . . recognise that lobbying can be effective" and are therefore more likely to attempt to mobilise support for their "policy preferences" (Blowers, 1987, p.46). While it was the case that the other influence most commonly cited by actors in hung councils were local pressure groups, only two actors (one political, one bureaucratic) actually mentioned them, so Blowers contention must remain interesting but unproven.¹⁷ In general, most actors, despite being given the opportunity to list other factors they considered important, chose to rank the factors given (as did actors in non-hung councils).

The responses of actors in hung councils appear to indicate quite clearly that very significant changes in power relationships occur when a council becomes hung. However, the responses of chief executives in hung councils where one party rules alone appear to contradict this.

8.3.5. Minority Governments and Power Distribution

The replies from chief executives in authorities where one party attempts to rule alone without a formal or informal arrangement with another party group are shown in Table 8.13, and they appear to indicate that it may not necessarily be hungness which is the significant variable affecting the distribution of power in the council. Chief executives in hung councils under a minority administration assign the same importance to the various groups as their counterparts in majority control councils, which implies that it is the nature of *political control* which is the important factor as to who governs, rather than the composition of the council.¹⁸ The political elite in minority control councils are clearly, like their counterparts in non-hung councils, in control of the policy process according to their chief executives.

¹⁷ One chief executive did mention that 'public opinion' was important, but ranked it last of 7 factors. Pride of place must go to the Independent leader who ranked 'common sense' fourth in his assessment of where power resided in a hung council.

¹⁸ Despite this finding, the type of administration (whether coalition or single party minority) made no discernable difference to political responses concerning openness and access to officers (see Chapter Seven, section 7.3.3.).

Table 8.13: The Distribution of Power in Hung Councils With Minority Administrations

(response of chief executives)

- 1.(1) Elected Party Elites
- 2.(2) Chief Officers
- 3.(4) Committees
- 4.(5) Full Council
- 5.(3) Central Government
- 6.(6) Local Party Organisations

Figure in brackets is the rating given by chief executives in non-hung councils.(n.b Table excludes 'no response')

However, it must be noted that there was no divergence of opinion among *group leaders* in hung councils. They had much the same opinion as to where influence lay whatever the administrative arrangements in their local authority. Therefore, it may well be that Table 8.13 demonstrates that in hung councils with a minority administration, officers are still largely dealing with the political elite of that party and are less likely to note any changes in the balance of influence between political actors.¹⁹

One factor which does not seem to affect the relative power of actors in hung councils is the length of time a council has been hung. While there was a slight indication that politicians in long term hung councils saw the power of officers as having slightly decreased over time and, conversely, officers were more pessimistic about their own influence in the early stages of hungness, the responses from both officers and group leaders showed no clear pattern of differences in influence over time. It appears that the length of time a council has been hung is not a crucial factor in the balance of influence between political and bureaucratic actors. Given that chief officers and group leaders are *both* gradually learning and adapting to the changed circumstances, such a finding is to be expected.²⁰

¹⁹ It must also be pointed out that not all the party leaders in those councils which chief executives described as under 'minority control' agreed with that assessment; 5 of the 36 party leaders responding in the 24 councils detailed in Table 8.13 maintained there was a coalition administration in place.

²⁰ Although Widdicombe (1986) found that compared to the Robinson Report (1976) leaders were getting younger, it is still the case that high office is associated with age and experience (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume Two, pp.36-37). Therefore, some of the advantages the national 'Mandarin' has over a minister (short time in office, comparative

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the findings presented in this chapter. Overall, neither officers nor councillors see the decision making process as characterised by policy drift and impasse. While a considerable minority of both political and bureaucratic actors do feel that the policy process has deteriorated, a majority answer that both the quality of decision making and the quality of policies has either improved or remained the same since their council became hung. When the largely negative responses of the former ruling parties are removed from the analysis, a different view of the decision making process emerges. The majority of political actors then reply that the process has improved since hungness.

Despite the hostility expressed by traditional rulers to the new decision making processes which emerge, there is some evidence that they will look more favourably upon the process with the passing of time. Chief executives, who are initially less enthusiastic than group leaders, will also display more enthusiasm for working in a hung council over time. Conversely, other political groups in long term hung councils are less likely to view decision making favourably, which may indicate growing feelings of disenchantment;. Over a period of years, it may become apparent that opposition groups in hung councils are still only on the fringes of the policy making process.

There appears to be a more open decision making process in hung councils. Many political respondents to this survey were enthusiastic about the increased importance of debate, and this is reflected in the greater influence that political groups in hung councils feel they possess. This is hardly surprising, as compromise is an essential fact of life for all actors in hung councils, and the necessity of coalition building automatically means more party groups will exercise influence. However, it does seem as if decision making is genuinely more consensual in many hung councils. On average, a substantial majority (nearly 65 percent) of 'opposition' groups report that they are very or quite influential in several key policy areas. These are groups who are not part of the ruling administration, the sort of groups who from the responses of the control group certainly do not possess a great deal of influence in non-hung councils.

lack of knowledge of subject area) do not apply in local government, and there is no reason to suppose that officers and councillors are not equally advantaged or disadvantaged by the passage of time.

The same spread of influence was also reported by both administration and opposition groups during the crucial budget making process. The need for compromise was indicated by the more conflictual nature of budget making in hung councils. It was also shown not only by the fewer number of group leaders who achieved 100 percent success with their budgetary aims, but also by the greater number who reported a degree of closeness to their own preferences when the final budget figure was set. As the findings of previous chapters have indicated, the SLD was more likely to achieve its budgetary aims than either of the two main parties, although the often perceived closeness of the SLD and Labour was also demonstrated by the good performance of Labour groups.

In general, this survey supports the observations of students of majority control councils as to where power lies. The 'joint elite' quite clearly control policy in those councils. Equally clearly, the influence of elected party elites is dramatically decreased by hungness, and the greater influence given to the full council meeting and the committees suggests that the power of the individual councillor increases. The increased influence often attributed to officers when a council becomes hung is not so apparent. That said, committees are seen by both politicians and officers as the most important factors in hung councils. Officers will largely control the flow of information into the committee, and it may well be that the paramount importance of committees and chief officers in hung councils indicates an increase in the power of chief officers. However, as noted earlier, the tendency for committees to accept officer recommendations may be subject to manipulation by astute politicians.

In addition, officer power over information might be offset by the increase in openness reported by group leaders and detailed in Chapter Seven. The greater number of political actors who feel influential in hung councils may also be an indication that officer influence does not increase when a council becomes hung. It may be harder for officers to hide their input into the policy process when more of the political actors are determined to have a say in the direction of policy, although this is obviously difficult to establish. Most hung councils have introduced improvements to the access politicians get to chief officers, which also suggests that the loss of power by the former political elite is at least partly offset by the greater access of the majority of political actors.

Overall, it is clear that decision making processes become more open and that consensus becomes a guiding principle of most hung councils. The general enthusiasm displayed by local politicians does not indicate that hung councils become moribund,

nor does it indicate a policy process dominated by officers. Decision making becomes closer to the 'official' description of local democracy, with the full council assuming new importance and officers moving closer to their formal roles as servants of the whole council.

CHAPTER NINE

THE TESTING OF COALITION THEORIES AND AN EXAMINATION OF PAY-OFFS

Introduction

Section One: The Primacy of Office

9.1.1. The Inadequacies of 'Testing'

9.1.2. Minimal and Minimum Winning Theories of Coalition Formation

Section Two: Constructing a Unidimensional (and Universal) Policy Scale

9.2.1. The Policy Positions of British National Parties

9.2.2. The Placing of Local Parties on the Policy Scale

Section Three: Ideologically Connected Theories

9.3.1. Government Formation and Minimal and Minimum Winning Connected Coalitions

9.3.2. The Continuing Importance of Size?: Office Pay-Offs in Minimum Winning Connected Coalitions

9.3.3. Ideologically Connected Coalitions and Government Duration

Section Four: Policy Closeness and Coalition Formation and Duration

9.4.1. Further Specifying the Policy Position of Local Parties

9.4.2. Policy Pay-Offs in Connected Coalitions

9.4.3. Policy Pay-Offs in Minority Administrations

9.4.4. The Power of the Centre Party in Hung Three-Party Systems: Policy Pay-Offs Abound

9.4.5. The Effect of Policy Closeness on Coalition Duration

Conclusions

Introduction

We have already seen that theories of coalition behaviour which stress the primacy of office are inadequate explanations for the behaviour of actors in hung councils. While when current administrations are examined minority governments are no longer the most common form of arrangement, nearly half (48.8 percent) of all the 121 outcomes in our main sample of 62 councils are minority administrations. Even in the coalition administrations which form, many actors do not take office in the form of committee chairs.¹ Therefore, it would be surprising if the theories of early theorists, which concentrate on office-seeking explanations for coalitional behaviour, supply a reasonable explanation for local coalition building. However, given their importance to the more sophisticated models which followed, the models need to be assessed. This chapter, the final one utilising the questionnaire data, will broadly adopt the temporal framework of Chapter One to test the predictive capabilities of some of the theories offered by observers of coalition behaviour. Some theories cannot be effectively tested with this data; for example, theories of proto-coalition formation such as Grofman's require a close analysis of the process of coalition formation and a model of the policy space which a study such as this cannot achieve. Recent game theory solutions demand more than sophisticated models of policy spaces; the competitive solution requires a knowledge of payoffs beyond the capacity of this work (see Chapter One, 1.4.1).

However, there are a number of theories associated with coalition formation which can be tested with the data at our disposal. The early theories, with their simplistic numerical assumptions, can easily be tested, and provided we can construct an acceptable unidimensional ideological scale, so can other office-seeking models such as Axelrod's idea of minimum winning connected coalitions. If we can place parties at a particular point along that scale, rather than a simple ordinal scale such as Axelrod utilised, we can also test de Swaan's idea that parties seek alliances with other parties as close as possible to them in policy terms, although de Swaan's thesis that coalitions are created 'incrementally' cannot be tested here. We can certainly test the predictive performance of the classic early propositions of coalition formation in a local context.

No apologies are offered for this concentration on models which tests such as Taylor & Laver's (1973) have proved deficient in explaining the formation of national

¹ Full details of all these findings are given in Chapter Four, and discussed throughout this thesis.

coalitions. Again, it must be reiterated that the purpose of this study is primarily to gather information. Chapter Six's findings that minority administrations are the most durable in hung English councils is a counter-intuitive finding, and contradicts both the propositions of formal theories and the results of most research into national coalitions; the findings of this chapter may also reveal some surprises. We have 121 administrations forming in our 62 local authorities, and with such a large number of governments to test in political systems which share common characteristics, the results of this testing will surely not be without interest.

We begin by scrutinising the usefulness of early theories of coalition formation, which stressed the single notion of winning office as the sole concern of political actors. After addressing some of the problems of attempting to 'test' coalition theories, section one briefly considers the frequency of minimal and minimum winning coalitions in our universe of administrations. Minimal and minimum winning theories are based on simple mathematical criteria, and all we need to assess their predictive adequacy is the council composition at the time they formed.² However, a scrutiny of other approaches requires rather more information about the actors involved. In order to address some of the inadequacies of the early approaches, coalition theorists attempted to specify the majority criterion more tightly by the inclusion of a notion of 'connectedness' along a simple ideological scale. Section two addresses the problems of constructing such a scale for an English local government system which might justifiably claim to be 403 different political systems.³ Using recent studies of policy positions in the British national political system, a unidimensional ideological/ policy scale is constructed. Section three utilises the scale to test theories of ideological connectedness relating to coalition formation. Chapter Six has already assessed the effect of minimal and minimum winning status to duration, but those findings are briefly assessed here along with the impact of connected status on administrative duration. Finally, section four explores the thesis that closeness of policy preferences will be more important than

² As an examination of the questionnaires will reveal (see Appendix) the council composition given by the chief executives was that of Summer, 1988. However, it was not necessarily the composition at the time when either the current or a past administration formed. Therefore, in 35 of the 62 local authorities some further research had to be carried out to check the council composition in the year when an administration formed. In one case 8 different compositions were utilised for one metropolitan council which had had 9 different administrations since becoming hung. It must be noted that these figures are used throughout this research (when necessary) in order to ensure that the correct composition at the time a coalition formed was used.

³ There are 39 county councils, 296 district or borough councils, 32 London borough councils, and 36 metropolitan district councils, a total of 403 local authorities in England, all with different political cultures.

simple connectedness to the coalitions which form. The unidimensional local scale we have constructed also takes some account of the 'policy distance' between the parties, and by comparing the ideological position of a local party with its national party we can further modify the position of local parties on the policy scale. Therefore, not only can we examine office based theories to assess the relevance of a further modifier in the form of "minimum winning connected policy-distance minimising coalitions", but also, we can examine minority governments and assess whether policy concessions made to other parties, particularly those closest on the policy scale, offer a reasonable explanation for both their formation and greater longevity. Given the possibility of testing for policy concessions, we do not need to regard minority governments as irrational; the existence of policy pay-offs can explain their formation quite easily.

Section One: The Primacy of Office

Section one commences with an admission of the inadequacies of attempting to 'test' coalition theories. It is not only the inevitable caveat that models based on laboratory games can never explain the intricacies of coalition politics in the 'real world', it is also that testing the predictive performance of coalition theories is not the same thing as testing the rationale underlining the theories. They may be successful at predicting which coalitions form, but that does not mean that the *reasons* they advance for coalitions forming in a particular way are the right ones; as is pointed out below, they may be right for the wrong reasons. "Really testing" the theories may be beyond the capacity of this research, but that does not mean its findings concerning the predictive capabilities of various theories are without interest. For example, the examination of the frequency of minimal and minimum winning coalitions reveals that minimising coalitions may be important despite the apparent lack of office at local level.

9.1.1. The Inadequacies of 'Testing'

Before commencing this examination of some theories of coalition formation and duration an important point needs to be made. The word 'test' implies that we can subject certain theories to a rigorous analysis, an implication which the claims of much coalition theory encourages. After all, coalition theorists usually make a specific prediction that the coalition which forms will belong to a 'solution set' which, typically, comprises a small number of the arithmetically possible permutations. Testing the predictive success of such a theory appears straightforward. However, Laver & Schofield (1990) sound a note of considerable caution:

"we should not get too bowled over by the possibility of 'testing' coalition theories on data from European coalition governments...coalition bargaining in Europe is often constrained by a wide range of institutional and behavioural factors. As a consequence, it is simply not the case that all arithmetically possible coalition cabinets may form. Some are likely to be ruled out quite categorically by these internal constraints on bargaining ... Coalition bargaining in Europe, in short, does not take place in the sterile conditions of a laboratory; it takes place in the dirt of a real political world in which all things are never equal. This means that we should not expect too much from the confrontation between theories that deal with coalition formation and the formation of real government coalitions in Western Europe. Such a confrontation is far more productive if it is seen as a heuristic exercise rather than as a scientific test ... Thus, while we do not attempt to 'test' theories of coalition formation...we do set out to juxtapose the theory and the reality of coalition bargaining in an attempt to expand our appreciation of both." (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.90).

If we substitute 'English local government' for "European governments' in the extract above, and add the further qualification that the lack of a cabinet and equivalents to ministerial portfolios probably means that local government is even further removed from laboratory coalition games, then Laver & Schofield's qualification of their testing as a 'heuristic exercise' sums up the aim not only of this chapter, but of the whole of this research.

Another vital caveat is also made by Laver & Schofield who, reporting Browne, Gleiber & Mashoba's (1986) finding that there is little connection between minimal connected winning coalitions and lower levels of 'conflict of interest',⁴ specify the danger of confusing predictive success with high scientific status. They point out that such findings indicate minimal winning connected theory (commonly found to be the most successful predictive theory) may be predicting the right coalitions for the wrong reasons:

"that is why we do not present the empirical findings that we review...as 'tests' of coalition theories. Really testing these theories, as the Browne *et al* treatment of minimal connected winning theory shows, is a much more demanding task than most authors have hitherto attempted" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.102).

Laver & Schofield's criticism of most tests is accepted, and therefore, while the word 'test' is used, it is acknowledged that all that is being tested is the predictive ability of the theories examined below, and that even that is constrained by certain

⁴ Minimising 'conflict of interest' was the reason given by Axelrod (1970) for minimal winning connected coalitions forming (Axelrod, 1970, p.,167).

limitations (which are addressed below).⁵ We begin by examining the earliest explanations offered for coalition formation.

9.1.2. Minimum and Minimal Winning Theories of Coalition Formation

Both Chapter One (1.2.1.) and Chapter Six (6.2.1.) have already gone into the 'minimal' and 'minimum' distinction in some depth, but a brief recap may still be useful. *Minimal winning coalitions* are coalitions which will be rendered 'losing' if they lose one of their members. However, in most cases, there are a large number of outcomes which could be described as 'minimal winning'. Any two-party coalition in a hung three-party system is 'minimal winning', so it is hardly surprising if minimal winning solutions, which in large party systems usually generate a large number of possible solutions, are relatively successful, despite their inability to predict minority governments. *Minimum winning coalitions* are a far more specific proposal; they are a 'subset' of minimal winning coalitions, and can be considered as 'bare majority coalitions' which comprise the smallest total *weight* of members in the legislature (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.92-94). For example, in a 100 seat legislature, with competing winning coalitions of a total weight of 51 legislators and 58 legislators, both of which will be losing if one party group leaves, although both of them are minimal the former will be predicted to form by minimum winning theory.

Minimal and minimum theories of coalition formation assume that 'winning' is the only consideration of actors, and winning is generally seen as holding governmental office. The absence of ideological considerations means that parties will construct a coalition which contains no unnecessary partners. It must be noted that because minimum winning coalitions are a subset of minimal winning coalitions, they will be included in the total of minimal winning coalitions; obviously, there will be at least as many minimal connected winning as there are minimum connected winning coalitions.⁶ Tables 9.1 and 9.2 detail the status of all governments and current governments, respectively.⁷

⁵ Given the limitations of this exercise, this chapter will dispense with the construction of the formal hypotheses the previous five chapters have utilised; as the following analysis will demonstrate, such hypotheses would generally be straw men.

⁶ In order that the differences in duration between minimal and minimum winning connected coalitions can be easily seen, this aggregation does not occur in Table 9.6 (below) examining coalition durability.

⁷ The findings shown in Tables 9.1 and 9.2 are subject to one significant caveat. Again, it must be noted that without a 'cabinet' to indicate clearly the administration in place, the answers chief executives gave to the question, "which parties comprise the administration in your authority" will often depend on the subjective assessment of the chief executive. It may be that one person's 'no administration' is another's 'coalition'. another reason not to

Table 9.1: Administrative Status of All Governments

(number of councils=62; number of administrations=121)

| Status of Government | number of admins (%) |
|--|-------------------------|
| Minimal Winning Coalitions | 32 (26.4%) |
| Minimum Winning Coalitions | 21 (17.4%) |
| Minority Administrations | 59 (48.8%) |
| Minority (Largest Party) Administrations | 40 (33.1%) |
| Minority (Not Largest Party) Administrations | 19 (15.7%) |
| Minority Coalitions | 6 (5.0%) |
| Surplus Majority Coalitions | 12 (9.9%) |
| No Administration Formed | 12 (9.9%) |

[n.b. Sums to more than 121 (and more than 100%) because administrations can belong to more than one category: response of chief executives]

Table 9.2: Administrative Status of Current Governments

(number of councils and administrations=62)

| | |
|--|------------|
| Minimal Winning Coalitions | 17 (27.4%) |
| Minimum Winning Coalitions | 12 (19.4%) |
| Minority Administrations | 24 (38.7%) |
| Minority (Largest Party) Administrations | 19 (30.6%) |
| Minority (Not Largest Party) Administrations | 5 (8.1%) |
| Minority Coalitions | 3 (4.8%) |
| Surplus Majority Coalitions | 9 (14.5%) |
| No Administration Formed | 9 (14.5%) |

[n.b. Sums to more than 62 (and more than 100%) because administrations can belong to more than one category: response of chief executives]

The findings of previous chapters have already told us that minority administrations are the most common form of administrative formation in the history of our 62 local

be over-critical of the performance of any theory. Some chief executives almost certainly do not include informal support as meriting inclusion in an 'administration' (although verification of this is not possible), while others showed in their answers that they quite clearly did.

authorities. However, while Tables 9.1 and 9.2 confirm other findings that minority administrations are becoming less common, they also show that this is not because minimal or minimum coalitions are becoming more popular as politicians acquire greater knowledge of working in hung councils and learn the value of minimising benefits. The main differences in the status of past and previous administrations is that more surplus majority coalitions are formed and that there are more instances where there is 'no administration' in place.

Quite clearly, Tables 9.1 and 9.2 show that neither minimal nor minimum theories appear to be particularly successful in predicting which administration will form; minority administrations comprise nearly half (48.8 percent) of the whole sample. In fact, a case could be made for formulating a new hypothesis of administrative formation for English local government; *when an English council becomes hung, the largest party will form a single party minority administration*. Just over a third of all administrations forming would meet this extremely specific prediction. Although there are a few cases where there are two joint leading parties, in most cases a single party would be predicted to form a government. A slightly less specific proposition, that one of the two largest parties will form a minority government, would produce a very high success rate, as this applies to all but 2 of the minority administrations forming. Although Table 9.2 shows fewer current examples of either minority administrations or the largest party forming a minority government, it is a remarkably successful prediction rate when a specific prediction, that the largest party will form a minority government, is right one in three times, given all the possible outcomes.⁸

As has previously been suggested, what this may indicate is that when one party is close to an overall majority, it is more likely to attempt to rule alone because there is more likely to be a by-election in local government when it could then regain sole control. The party may also feel that as the largest single party it has a 'right to rule'. It is almost certainly not a conscious coalitional tactic by rational actors aware that legislative coalitions are a different ball-game to executive coalitions, although this possibility cannot be overlooked.

An attempt to specify the minimal winning criterion further was made by Leiserson's (1968) 'bargaining proposition', which suggests that the fewer parties

⁸ Laver & Schofield point out that, albeit in a "very complicated bargaining situation" of coalition formation in the *Tweede Kamer* in the Netherlands, for a less specific theory like minimal winning to succeed in selecting the right coalition "once in three trials is by no means a poor achievement" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, pp.92-93).

there are in a proposed coalition, the easier it is to reach agreement. Leiserson therefore proposes that two-party coalitions are likelier to form than three-party coalitions, and so on (Leiserson, 1968, pp.70-87). This prediction is no more successful than any other, as the large number of minority and oversized administrations demonstrates. There are 26 current winning coalitions, of which 9 are surplus majority coalitions (see Table 9.2), which indicates that limiting the number of parties in a coalition is not an especially important consideration for local politicians. As many of the coalitions which form are in what are effectively 'three-party systems', where two party coalitions more naturally form, there are also very few cases where the proposition can be adequately tested. However, the slightly longer duration of coalitions with few partners (see Table 6.6, Chapter Six, Section 6.2.5.) does suggest that minimising the number of parties in a coalition will be beneficial in terms of durability.

The failure of minimal and winning theories at predicting administrative formation is expected; both previous research and the previous chapters in this thesis have already shown their inadequacies.⁹ Despite this, two-thirds of minimal winning coalitions are also minimum winning, which tentatively suggests there may be some pressure on local actors to minimise the weight of a winning coalition (a thesis examined below, in Section 9.3.1.).

However, the failure of an extremely non-specific proposal such as minimal winning implies that introducing a further modifier to an office based theory in the form of an ideologically connected criterion may improve the explanatory value of such a theory only marginally. If this is the case, then constructing an ideological scale upon which the parties can be placed might appear to be a waste of effort. However, constructing such a scale may have benefits beyond testing the predictive shortcomings of minimum winning connected theories.

It may be that the formation of so many minority governments (59) in the 121 administrations reflects the absence of a cabinet, and that informal coalitions based on policy concessions rather than formal office-sharing coalitions better reflects the reality of hung English councils. Therefore, if we can construct a reasonable representation of the policy positions of parties, perhaps it will be possible to

⁹ Previous research has generally suggested that, of these simple office-based theories, the minimal winning criterion is the best predictor of which coalition will form, the bargaining proposition is next best, and the minimum winning criterion is the least successful (see Franklin & Mackie, 1984, for an analysis of previous tests).

search for policy payoffs¹⁰ in councils ruled by minority governments and assess whether payoffs between ideologically connected parties offer a good explanation for both the formation and greater longevity of minority administrations. The task of constructing such a scale, and whether a single national scale can cope with what are effectively 62 different local political systems, will now be addressed.

Section Two: Constructing a Unidimensional (and Universal) Policy Scale for English Local Government

Since the seminal study of Axelrod (1970), the ideological diversity of a coalition has been frequently cited as an influence on administrative formation and duration.¹¹ Before we can assess the significance of this thesis we are faced with a problem; how does one construct an accurate representation of the policy positions of the parties in a political system? All such judgements are subjective and liable to a substantial amount of disagreement. However, we are fortunate in that two recent studies utilising expert judgements have attempted this task for Britain. The more recent (Laver & Hunt, 1992, forthcoming) has sought a number of judgements from political scientists on a wide range of policy scales, and promises to present students of 25 countries with an authoritative study of the policy positions of political actors and voters in those political systems. However, the British political system during the 1980s poses some difficult problems for an exercise of this kind.

9.2.1. The Policy Positions of British National Parties

In a study which attempts to construct left-right policy scales for a number of political systems, Castles & Mair (1984)¹² highlight one recurring problem for assessments of the position of parties in the British political system:

"the present confusion in the British party system has perhaps been mirrored here in the very wide-ranging scores for each of the parties. This was particularly evident for the newly emerged Social Democratic Party, which some ten respondents saw as being to the Left of the Liberals, three as being to the Right, and three as the same position as the Liberals" (Castles & Mair, 1984, p.83).

¹⁰ Group leaders were asked to make a number of declarations of granting or receiving minor or major policy payoffs, and asked to assess their influence in a number of key policy areas.

¹¹ It is not proposed to re-discuss the factors leading to the introduction of an ideological dimension in theories of formation and duration (see Chapter One, 1.2.3. and 1.2.4.).

¹² In the Castles & Mair (1984) study, political scientists who were knowledgeable about particular political systems were required to place the parties in that system on a left-right scale, which was graded; ultra left (0), moderate left (2.5), centre (5), moderate right (7.5), ultra right (10).

The confusion in the British party system to which Castles & Mair allude had not abated by 1988, when this survey of hung councils took place. If anything, the situation was even more confusing as the middle ground disintegrated during the movement towards merger of the former 'Alliance' parties throughout 1987 and 1988.¹³

However, it may not be only the undoubted confusion within the party system during the 1980s which is responsible for the wide-ranging differences in the scores for each party in Britain. Largely because of the electoral system, which tends to work against smaller parties achieving representation, the two major parties in Britain have to embrace a wide constituency. In a proportional representation (p.r.) system, parties can target a particular constituency and direct a fairly specific electoral message; consequently, classification on a simple left right scale may well be easier in countries with a p.r. system. Despite the undoubtedly more 'serene' nature of British national politics by the end of the decade,¹⁴ Laver & Hunt's survey (discussed below), carried out in 1989, still revealed quite wide differences of perception concerning the correct place of the major parties. This, together with Castle & Mair's observations, suggests that British political parties occupy large policy spaces and precise placement may be more difficult than for continental parties. Conversely, it must be acknowledged that the specific message of small continental parties may make it very difficult to place them on the *socio-economic* policy scale usually employed.

Indeed, critics of theories which utilise unidimensional scales have often noted (for example, Norpoth, 1982) that representing parties on a left-right policy scale fails to take into account that parties will have different positions depending on the policy dimension being measured. However, no serious student of the British political system would argue with a simple left-right ideological scale which put Labour on

¹³ Particularly at local level, committed groups of Liberals and Social Democrats opposed to merger were not uncommon, as Devon illustrates. As Chapter Three has already detailed, one chief executive responding to this survey had no idea how to identify the "fragments" of the Alliance in his authority.

¹⁴ With the Labour ideological struggles of the early 1980s, the battle for the central ground between the Liberals and the SDP, and the radical policies of the Conservative government, the early to mid 1980s were undoubtedly a time when politics was characterised by greater uncertainty over the precise ideological positions of the parties. Labour has moved during the 1980s to present a more 'moderate' and cohesive face to the electorate (on the whole successfully), the 'Alliance' parties have merged remarkably painlessly, and the Conservatives, with the aid of an almost universally Conservative press, have been able to present a 'united' front even during a leadership battle between the two wings of the party.

the left, the Conservatives on the right, and the SLD in the middle. There is evidence that such a scale would be equally applicable in local government, as three-quarters of political respondents to this survey saw their local party as "roughly similar" to the national party (see Table 9.6 below). The problem is *where* on that scale to place the parties.

This study proposes to use the findings of Laver & Hunt (1992, forthcoming) and Castles & Mair (1984) as a basis for a unidimensional policy scale for English local government. Laver & Hunt have carried out a detailed study of the role of policy in party competition in 25 countries, using the judgements of political scientists in those systems. Amongst other judgements they were asked to make, the experts were asked to place the political parties on a left-right scale of 1 to 20, in 8 different policy areas. Those areas were (1) Taxes Versus Public Services, (2) Foreign Policy, (3) Public Ownership (4) Social Policy, (5) The Religious Dimension, (6) Urban Versus Rural Interests, (7) Centralisation of Decision Making, and (8) Environmental Policy. There are considerable problems in attempting to combine all of the variables into a single scale, especially given the lack of relevance of many of them to specific local political issues; the appropriate weighting of dimensions is also problematic.¹⁵ The "taxes versus public services" policy area was "assessed as the most salient in most countries by the expert observers, and also loads at the head of the main factor in the British principal components analysis".¹⁶ It is proposed that the placing of the parties on this scale will be utilised. This places the three major parties, from left to right, at: **Labour 5.4; SLD 8.2; Conservative 17.2**. On Castles & Mair's rating, also using the judgement of political scientists, Labour were further to the left than this. In fact;

"the average score of the Labour party make it, astonishingly in light of its history and origins, the most left wing Social Democratic party in our sample" (Castles & Mair, 1984, p.83).

¹⁵ It is recognised that local actors have views in the areas not included in the aggregate which will probably affect their overall ideology, and that a local party's ideological position is not only determined by specific local factors. It is also appreciated that the uniqueness of Laver & Hunt's multi-policy dimensions offers a far fuller picture than Castle & Mair's less sophisticated policy scale, and that a full utilisation of all the policy dimensions would be essential to any authoritative analysis of national politics.

¹⁶ Michael Laver, in communication with the author. Professor Laver offered some solutions to the best use of his and Hunt's raw data in a study of this sort, and suggested that he would adopt "one of the scales as an indicator variable for the left-right dimension". Accordingly, that is the approach this research will take.

Such a perception reflects the common view of a Labour party which was dominated by its left wing during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as the 'Limehouse Declaration' and the creation of the SDP indicates.¹⁷

When Castles & Mair's judgements are converted from a ten point scale to a twenty point scale, they show a slightly more 'balanced' political system than that presented by Laver & Hunt (1992). The figures from Castles & Mair are; Labour 4.6; SLD 10.0; Conservative 15.6. However, the difference in the later placings of Laver & Hunt, where Labour and the SLD are much closer, can be explained by Labour's movement towards the ideological centre and the merger of the Liberals and the marginally more left wing SDP.¹⁸ The Conservatives' more right wing positioning in the later survey may reflect a further 5 years of Thatcherite policies. There is no reason to suppose that either survey is substantially incorrect in its assessment given the political situation at both times.¹⁹ However, quite apart from the difficulty of adapting a national scale to describe local politics, our examination cannot identify completely with either of these surveys. We will now try to resolve these problems, and attempt to utilise these scales for our purposes.

9.2.2. The Placing of Local Parties on a Policy Scale

This examination of hung local councils took place at a different time from either Castle & Mair's or Laver & Hunt's surveys, and selecting one of these national scales for the basis of our local study is difficult. Neither of these surveys can be seen as adequately reflecting British national politics, let alone English *local* politics during that time. Castles & Mair's assessment occurred, as they acknowledge, at a time of "confusion", while Laver & Hunt's took place when the centre party struggle was effectively resolved. However, this study's initial collection of data was carried out in June 1988, which could be seen as in the centre of these two surveys, not chronologically but in terms of the regrouping of the centre and the left. Therefore,

¹⁷ Whether such a perception reflects a realistic analysis of the Labour party at that time is debatable, but some analysts clearly believe that "the degree of the ideological shift in 1979 had made it virtually impossible for many on the right of the party...to remain within the Labour fold" (Peele, 1990, pp.77-78).

¹⁸ In Castles & Mair's survey, the Liberals were precisely at the midpoint of 5, with the SDP slightly to the left on 4.6.

¹⁹ Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how a more accurate representation than that of Laver & Hunt could be reached. Given the scope of its questioning and the relatively objective expertise of the political scientists responding, it must be seen as the most authoritative analysis ever of the policy positions of parties in the British political system. Despite this, Laver & Schofield argue that expert judgements are likely to be "conditioned by historical experience" and that "the analysis of electoral policy documents...seems likely to provide the most genuinely independent 'fix' that we are likely to get on the policy positions of political parties" (1990, Appendix B, p.245).

and while accepting this is not the ideal solution, perhaps the best approach is to combine the results of the two policy scale surveys. For ease of representation, we will also convert them back to the ten point scale used by Castles & Mair. If we do that, then the final ideological position of the main parties is, again from left to right on a scale of 1-10:

Labour 2.5; SLD 4.6; Conservative 8.2.

This does not appear to be an unreasonable assessment of the placing of the three major parties in English politics. The places of local parties on the scale can be further modified by the answers political actors give to the final question on the questionnaires they filled in:

Question:"Where would you place your local party, ideologically, in relation to your national party?" (please tick one box): **Answer:** To the 'Right', To the 'Left', Roughly Similar.

In order to accommodate the answer to this question, if we give each party three spaces within the ten point scale Labour will be able to move between 1.5 and 3.5, the SLD from 3.6 to 5.6, and the Conservatives from 7.2 to 9.2. Therefore, a right wing Labour party and a left wing SLD party will be in almost exactly the same position on the ideological scale, which both observation and the detailed findings of Laver & Hunt would suggest was not improbable.²⁰ The Conservatives would always be the party furthest to the right.

It is recognised that there must be considerable methodological reservations in combining the results of two different surveys separated by a number of years, and which ask different questions about what is after all a different political system. Taking measurements designed to represent the national party system and applying it *en bloc* to a far from uniform local government party system is admittedly far from ideal.²¹ However, this exercise is designed only to carry out general tests

²⁰ As recent history (the Lib/Lab pact) and the pronouncements of Liberal/ SLD/ Alliance/ Liberal Democrat leaders indicates (for example, see "LibDems put faith in deal with Labour" by Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian*, 29/7/91), Labour and the SLD are closer nationally than the SLD and the Conservatives. Bogdanor (1992, p.19) argues that "the main policy differences between the two parties now lie in the area of constitutional reform...from the electoral point of view, [they] are perfectly compatible".

²¹ Denters (1985) confronting similar problems in an examination of coalition formation in Dutch local government, makes a number of assumptions (such as unitary actor status for local parties) but notes that the most "heroic additional assumptions" are those concerning the placement of the Dutch local parties on "an ideological (policy) continuum". Denters makes no allowance for local deviance from national policy positions, and assumes that

related to the ideas that parties connected on an ideological scale will be more likely to form coalitions than those not connected on that scale, and that policy closeness might have some relevance to the payoffs made. No special claims will be made for this exercise, and given the likelihood that there will be some cases where the policy positions will be inaccurate, it would be of doubtful value to test for statistical significance. It is realised that an analysis of every separate local authority system would be necessary for these findings to be compared seriously with the testing of national systems carried out by, for example, Taylor & Laver (1973).

However, if (allowing for the inevitable reservations) we can place the three major parties on a unidimensional scale, the placing of minor parties is potentially more problematic. Some local groups can be easily dealt with for our purposes. The SDP is only listed as a separate party group in a handful of local authorities, and the judgement of the respondents to Castles & Mair, which placed it slightly to the left of the Liberals, is as good as any other assessment.²² The Greens are a factor in only one council, and other small groups (such as Ratepayers) are rare enough that councils with such groups can be excluded from any analysis of ideological connectedness. The Independent groups, which as previous chapters have indicated are significant forces in quite a number of councils, pose more complications. The majority of councils have Independent members, and the involvement of an Independent group in 15 current administrations (Table 5.2; see 5.1.2.) demonstrates their importance to local administrative formation.

The rise of politicisation and the movements towards uniformity mean that, while there will still be reservations about using national data to place the local Labour, SLD, and Conservative parties, we are reasonably sure of their place on an ordinal left-right scale. Decisions about where to place Independent groups have a greater need to be informed by a close examination of (for example) manifestos and voting records, but that is not an option. Placing them somewhere close to Conservatives would also be ascribing a degree of homogeneity to Independent politics which would

"the socio-economic left-right [dimension] will adequately account for local coalition behaviour". He admits the "plausibility of these assumptions is hard to evaluate" (Denters, 1985, p.301), and accepts that "actual assessments' of all municipalities would have been preferable. The requirement of "extensive and costly research in about 150 municipalities" (Denters, 1985, p.302) means such a preference was beyond the scope of his research, as much as assessing policy positions in 62 hung councils is (unfortunately) beyond the scope of this study.

²² Castles & Mair placed the SDP on 4.6 to the Liberals on 5.0. Our aggregate puts the SLD on 4.6, so an admittedly arbitrary rating of 4.3 for the SDP groups in our sample seems a not unreasonable assumption. The SDP was 'a dead party' when Laver & Hunt carried out their survey, so they do not have a rating for it.

not reflect reality.²³ Denters (1985) faced with the same problem when analysing Dutch local governments, removed all municipalities with an Independent group of more than 5 percent from his study, therefore excluding some 30 percent of his sample (Denters, 1985, pp.301-302). If we exclude Independents from analyses concerning ideological connectedness a considerable number of interesting cases will be lost, but unfortunately, as Denters also concluded, that loss seems unavoidable. Councils with significant Independent groups will therefore be excluded from an analysis of theories related to connectedness on a ideological scale or minimising policy differences.

We will have to be stricter than Denters with our exclusion rule, as in some cases one Independent member is a significant coalition actor. For example, in one small district council a Conservative group with 16 members allied with a single Independent to leave a Labour group of 2 and an SLD group of 14 outside of the administration, and there are cases where a very small group of 2 or 3 Independent councillors is part of a winning two-party coalition. Some multiparty coalitions also have a small Independent presence. Accordingly, we will exclude all councils with Independent groups, except where the Independent group is irrelevant to *any* strategy other parties may pursue and can be excluded from the policy scale without undue concern.²⁴ Excluding councils with all but an 'irrelevant' Independent group leaves 31 local authorities with which to test ideology or policy based theories of formation and duration.

The removal of most 'multiparty' systems from the sample testing ideologically connected theories means that such theories have an easier task in predicting which coalition will form, as in most cases only 3 party groups will be left. For example, any coalition of the SLD and one of the main parties will automatically be winning and connected (unless there is an SDP group which is excluded), although of course it may not necessarily be of minimum weight. Such factors must be kept in mind

²³ Despite the findings of Widdicombe that 26 percent of Independents were also members of the Conservative party, they also found Independents who were members of Liberal, Labour and Nationalist parties. Furthermore, Widdicombe also found that "almost two-thirds of Independents were not members of any political party" (Widdicombe, 1986, Research Volume Two, p.37). The example of Cornwall demonstrates that not all Independents are Tories, with the strong Independent Liberal tradition apparent from the large numbers of previously Independent members who are now, with the arrival of politicisation to the Duchy, Liberal Democrats.

²⁴ That does *not* mean that such Independent groups are not important actors, as the discussion below reveals.

when assessing the predictive performance of the minimum winning connected theory which will now be appraised in section three.

Section Three: Ideologically Connected Theories

We begin by examining the frequency of minimal and minimum connected coalitions in hung councils. While this chapter has already demonstrated that less specific office-seeking theories are not especially good predictors of which administration will form, and therefore not a great deal should be expected in predictive terms, ideologically connected theories are a significant theoretical advance on the simplistic assumptions of early theories of coalition formation. The main purpose of the first part of this section is to examine whether the coalitions which do form are both minimum winning and ideologically connected. Section One has indicated that the majority of coalitions which form minimise the weight of the coalition, and the same finding emerges here; possible reasons for the emphasis on minimum rather than minimal coalitions will be assessed. Finally, ideologically connected coalitions have often been seen as more durable, and this possibility is also investigated.

9.3.1. Government Formation and Minimal and Minimum Winning Connected Coalitions

We know that nearly half of the local governments that form are minority governments, and we are already aware that minimal and minimum winning theories are unsatisfactory explanations of government formation. Therefore, this section will be looking more to see if connectedness is a feature of the coalitions which form rather than 'testing' its greater predictive capability. However, before we examine whether the coalitions which form tend to be ideologically connected, a problem of definition must be addressed; again, it concerns the use of the terms 'minimal' and 'minimum'. These terms are often incorrectly used interchangeably, especially when looking at the connected criterion (for example, see Laver & Schofield, 1990, p.97). However, a *minimal* winning connected coalition is winning in that it holds a majority of seats in a legislature, minimal in the sense that it cannot lose a member and remain winning, and all its members are connected ideologically. A *minimum* winning connected coalition is all of these things but also it is the smallest such coalition in terms of legislative seats. For example, in a local authority of 100 seats where Labour has 30 seats, SLD 34, and Conservative 36, there are two minimal winning connected coalitions (Labour/SLD and Conservative/SLD) but only one (Labour/SLD) is minimum, winning and connected. Therefore, minimum winning

Table 9.3: Council Composition, Current Administration and Status

(number of councils=31)

| I.a. | LAB | SDP | SLD | CON | IND | Administration | Status |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------------------|---------------------|
| 0100 | 35 | - | 9 | 31 | - | Conservative/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 1501 | 20 | - | 9 | 13 | - | No Administration | - |
| 5302 | 26 | - | 10 | 18 | - | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 0500 | 21 | - | 24 | 31 | 1 | Labour/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 0600 | 32 | - | 11 | 27 | 1 | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 1506 | 9 | - | 23 | 24 | 4 | SLD | min'y-not largest |
| 0602 | 5 | 2 | 22 | 16 | - | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 1100 | 10 | 8 | 26 | 39 | 2 | No Administration | - |
| 1500 | 29 | - | 24 | 44 | 1 | Conservative | min'y-largest party |
| 1600 | 13 | - | 23 | 24 | 3 | Labour/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 2603 | 24 | - | 1 | 23 | - | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 1900 | 27 | - | 14 | 36 | - | Labour | min'y-not largest |
| 2000 | 35 | - | 4 | 35 | - | Labour/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 5303 | 33 | - | 15 | 23 | 1 | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 2300 | 48 | - | 9 | 42 | - | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 0702 | 27 | - | 7 | 26 | - | Conservative/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 2207 | 8 | - | 23 | 22 | 2 | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 0403 | 18 | - | 13 | 13 | 2 | Conservative/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 0203 | 13 | - | 14 | 25 | 1 | Labour/SLD | minimum w.c. |
| 3100 | 20 | - | 18 | 31 | 1 | No Administration | - |
| 0505 | 23 | 1 | 4 | 20 | - | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 4904 | 24 | 3 | 15 | 27 | - | Labour | min'y-not largest |
| 1906 | 7 | - | 25 | 24 | - | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 3204 | 17 | - | 9 | 19 | 2 | Labour | min'y-largest party |
| 3300 | 6 | - | 27 | 24 | - | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 1511 | 5 | - | 18 | 16 | - | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 4807 | 14 | - | 24 | 22 | 3 | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 3507 | 21 | - | 4 | 22 | 1 | Labour/SLD/Ind | surplus majority |
| 4905 | 27 | - | 10 | 29 | - | Conservative/SLD | minimal w.c. |
| 1809 | 10 | - | 16 | 13 | 3 | SLD | min'y-largest party |
| 0200 | 29 | - | 11 | 30 | - | Labour/SLD | minimum w.c. |

The number in the column I.a. (local authority) is the distinguishing code given by this research; it is used here for ease of referral, rather than naming the council, in order that the requests of confidentiality made by the great majority of respondents can be respected. (n.b. "w.c."=winning connected, "min'y"=minority)

connected coalitions are a very specific proposition, with in most cases in our sample of 31 councils only one coalition fitting that precise description.

Table 9.3 shows the party political composition when the current administration formed of the 31 councils without a 'significant' Independent group. As an examination of Table 9.3 indicates (and Table 9.4 which aggregates the status of past and previous administrations in those 31 councils confirms) minimal and minimum winning connected coalitions, while not unusual, are not the likeliest outcome. Minority administrations are the most common outcome of hungness, as Tables 9.1 and 9.2 have already shown for the whole sample of 62 local authorities and 121 administrations. However, we have already noted that it is the composition of the coalition administrations forming which is of most interest here, and it is clear that connectedness is an important consideration in which coalition will form.

As Table 9.4 (below) shows more clearly than Table 9.3, all but one of the coalitions listed in Table 9.3 is a minimal winning connected coalition, and 8 of the 9 minimal winning connected coalitions have minimum status. This indicates that both minimum status and connected status appear to be an influence on local coalition formation. The relationship is not only applicable to current administrative formations. Including previous administrations in the 31 councils listed in Table 9.3, there are 21 coalitions. Given the effective three party system in most cases, the fact that 17 of the 21 coalitions forming are minimal winning is unsurprising; of the other 4, one is a minority knife-edge coalition and 3 are surplus majority coalitions. However, in an effective three party system any two party coalition which forms will be minimal winning, and given the absence of a cabinet one might expect that the relative weights of the parties would be unimportant. It is therefore quite surprising that 14 of the 17 minimal winning connected coalitions are *minimum*. As the previous section tentatively proposed, this suggests that minimising the total number of councillors in a coalition has some significance at local level despite the apparent lack of a need to conserve office benefits. It may even be that a greater knowledge of some of the administrations not classified as minimum or connected would increase the already high percentage of coalitions which are minimal/ minimum winning and connected. Section 9.3.3., examining ideologically connected coalitions and duration, examines this point further.

Table 9.4: Status (Aggregated) of Past and Current Administrations

(response of chief executives)

| Status of Administration | Current (n=31) | Previous (n=35) | Total (n=66) |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| minority-largest party | 16 | 12 | 28 (42.4%) |
| minority- not largest party | 2 | 9 | 11 (16.7%) |
| minimum winning coalition | 8 | 6 | 14 (21.2%) |
| minimal winning coalition | 9 | 8 | 17 (25.8%) |
| surplus majority coalition | 1 | 2 | 3 (4.5%) |
| minority coalition | - | 1 | 1 (1.5%) |
| no administration | 3 | 3 | 6 (9.1%) |

(n.b. totals exceed 31 and 35 because minimum winning coalitions are also included in minimal winning totals)

The surplus majority coalition administration in Table 9.3 demonstrates quite clearly that even when an Independent group is not 'significant' numerically, it may still be significant administratively. The solitary Independent councillor is apparently 'irrelevant' to any successful strategy. A minimal winning connected theory would predict a Labour/SLD or Conservative/SLD coalition, but the actual administrations that had formed during the lifetime of hungness were an initial Conservative/ SLD/ Independent coalition, followed by a Conservative minority administration, with the current administration comprising Labour/ SLD/ Independent, a surplus majority coalition. Despite his or her theoretical irrelevance, this Independent councillor was obviously an important actor in this council. It may well be that his or her ideological position is the key factor here. If the Independent's policy position was actually between the SLD and the Conservatives, the coalition of these two groups and the Independent would be a minimum winning connected coalition, and the current Labour/ SLD/ Independent administration, while still surplus would be ideologically connected. Such speculation demonstrates the danger of reading too much into the administrative formations when a major group is not able to be ideologically 'generalised'. However, despite this caveat it is apparent that both size and ideology are important when coalition agreements are entered into.

9.3.2. The Continuing Importance of Size?: Office Pay-Offs In Minimum Winning Connected Coalitions

The connectedness of coalition partners along the ideological scale is understandable. We know that parties will find it easier to make deals with parties close to themselves politically. Because of the limitations of the sample of councils whose parties we can place on the policy scale, in most cases there are only the three major parties as significant actors. The knowledgeable observer of the British political scene would not need coalition theory to tell her that both Labour and Conservative will be more likely to seek a compromise with the SLD than with each other.²⁵ Indeed, previous chapters have already commented widely on this, and Table 9.3 shows quite graphically the power that the SLD possesses as the middle party in most of these systems. There are 9 minimal and minimum winning connected coalitions, and the SLD, with either Labour or the Conservatives as a partner, is a member of all of them. In fact, there is no winning connected coalition in any of these 31 local authorities that can exclude them. This gives the SLD extraordinary bargaining power if connectedness is important, as it seems to be.²⁶ However, the emphasis on minimum winning strategies might suggest that the SLD is selective in its choice of partner.

The large percentage of minimal winning connected coalitions which are the *minimum* weight (14 of 17 cases, or 82.4 percent) indicates the importance of keeping the coalition as small as possible in hung councils. However, when there is no cabinet why should actors be minimising the size of the coalition? When in most cases there are only three relevant actors in the political system any two party arrangement will win. With no central decision making posts to allocate, it does not appear to make sense that actors work to keep a two-party winning coalition as small a weight as possible. The answer might lie in the finding that, despite previous research which indicates that pay-offs in the form of committee chairs are not sought by the actors in hung councils (Laver, Rallings & Thrasher, 1987), Chapter Four has demonstrated that two-thirds of the actors in coalitions will take chairs. Even more importantly, those chairs appear to be valued by government actors (see 4.2.3.). Therefore, we would expect to find that the parties in minimum winning connected coalitions will be more likely to share committee chairs.

²⁵ Although it is a not infrequent complaint that Labour and Conservative groups work tacitly together to freeze out small groups (see Leach & Stewart, 1988, p.41), Chapter Five's investigation (see section 5.2.6.) found little substantive evidence to support this.

²⁶ If resentment of the SLD's undeniably powerful position is a factor in hung councils, as has often been suggested, this may explain the large number of minority administrations which form.

We have full information on the allocation of chairs and deputy chairs in 5 of the 8 current minimum winning connected coalitions.²⁷ Unfortunately for the explanation offered above, only 2 of the 5 coalitions share chairs. In the other 3 cases, although there are policy pay-offs to coalition actors, one party takes all the chairs and deputy chairs. Therefore, it appears highly unlikely that the minimising of coalition weight is being achieved in order to conserve benefits in the form of committee chairs.

The significant variable may be unconnected with minimising size. It may be that party politics is the answer. In 6 of the 8 cases the coalition partners were formerly in opposition together, so it may be nothing more than former opposition parties working together against the traditional rulers. Given the small number of administrations we have detailed information for, it may also be that it is merely coincidence that 8 of the 9 connected coalitions forming are minimum winning. However, in the whole sample of 32 minimal winning coalitions (which includes these 8 connected coalitions) 21 are also minimum winning, slightly less than two-thirds. Of those 21 minimum winning coalitions, 14 are formed by 'ex-opposition' parties, which suggests that political reasons may be a more important reason for the minimum winning coalitions which have formed than a desire to preserve benefits.

Like most theories of coalition formation, minimal winning connected status has also been used to explain cabinet durability, and has frequently been associated with greater administrative longevity (see Schofield, 1985). The following sub-section examines its value in explaining greater duration in local government coalitions.

9.3.3. Ideologically Connected Coalitions and Government Duration

For a number of reasons which are explained there, Chapter Six has already examined the most common explanations for administrative durability offered by theorists. Tables 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, and 6.7 in Section Two of Chapter Six list the detailed findings. The results have suggested that what often appear to be powerful predictors of durability for cabinet coalitions in parliamentary democracies may be less relevant when applied to the largely legislative coalitions which dominate hung English local government. Minority administrations are the most durable of all local governments, which contradicts most research into durability.

²⁷ Details of the parties holding chairs and deputy chairs are only available for current administrations.

To repeat some of those conclusions, very briefly, this research offers a modicum of support for the thesis that as coalitions depart from minimum winning status their duration decreases. While it must again be stressed that *current* minority administrations are the most durable of all administrations, an examination of all completed administrations demonstrates *minimum* winning coalitions are the most durable of all coalition administrations. *Minimal* winning coalitions do not last as long, while surplus majority coalitions are the least durable of all administrations. There is a connection here, in that as the nature of the coalition becomes closer to minimum winning, so the duration increases. Given this, although research into the stability of European cabinets has found no clear relationship between ideologically connected coalitions and cabinet stability (Warwick, 1979),²⁸ we might expect to find that hypotheses of greater durability for minimal or minimum connected winning coalitions are supported. However, as Table 9.5 shows, this is not the case. The findings of Table 6.7 (from Chapter Six) are included in Table 9.5 (below) and demonstrate that, contrary to expectations, minimum winning connected coalitions do not appear to last as long as 'ordinary' minimum winning coalitions.

However, an important point must be made about the figures in Table 9.5.²⁹ All but 5 of the 19 minimum winning coalitions with an average duration of 23.8 months are included in the smaller sample of 14 connected coalitions. It is perfectly feasible that the 5 remaining minimum winning coalitions are also connected, because they are 3 Conservative/ Independent coalitions, a Conservative/ SLD coalition, and a very durable (72 months) Labour/ Independent administration. They were excluded from the sample of 31 councils used to examine the relationship between formation, duration and ideological connectedness because the Independent group in each council was a possibly significant actor in winning strategies. All of them may be connected ideologically, and it may therefore be that minimum winning connected coalitions are the longest lasting of all administrative types.

²⁸ Although no study has found "any sustained evidence of a systematic relationship between the ideological diversity of a coalition and its life expectancy" (Laver & Schofield, 1990, 155), it is difficult to compare different findings, largely because definitions of government termination often differ and "the change of definition affects results" (see Budge & Keman, 1990, pp.165-166).

²⁹ The caveat against reading too much into these figures, especially extant administrations, has already been gone into in depth at numerous places in Chapter Six examining administrative durability. Chapter Three (see 3.2.1.) also deals with these problems.

Table 9.5: Administrative Duration By Administrative Status

| Type Status of | Average Duration in Months | | |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| | Current Administrations | Completed Administrations | Aggregate |
| Administration Single Party | 27.6 (n=24) | 19.6 (n=35) | 23.0 (n=59) |
| Minority Minority | 1.0 (n=3*) | 21.0 (n=2) | 9.0 (n=5) |
| Coalition Minimum Winning | 23.2 (n=12) | 24.9 (n=7) | 23.8 (n=19) |
| Coalition Minimal Winning | 22.8 (n=5) | 17.4 (n=8) | 19.5 (n=13) |
| Coalition Minimum Winning | 22.6 (n=8) | 17.2 (n=6) | 20.3 (n=14) |
| Connected Coalitions Minimal Winning | 13.0 (n=1) | 12.0 (n=2) | 12.3 (n=3) |
| Connected Coalitions Surplus Majority | 16.4 (n=9) | 12.0 (n=4) | 15.0 (n=13) |
| Coalition | | | |

*all 3 current minority coalitions had been in place for just one month

(n.b. see also Table 6.7)

We have scrutinised a number of theories which assume that the primary motivation of political parties is office. The goal of actors in minimum winning connected coalitions, despite the inclusion of ideological considerations, is still assumed to be office. Policy or ideological considerations exist only to specify further the 'winning' coalition which will take office and distribute the rewards of office (usually ministerial portfolios) between the office-motivated members of the coalition. The existence of so many minority governments warns us against accepting such theories as adequate representations of coalition behaviour. The final section of this chapter examines a perspective which is potentially capable of explaining minority governments, as well as giving us a possibly more accurate guide to the parties who be most likely to form majority coalitions.

Section Four: Policy Closeness and Coalition Formation and Duration

This section initially attempts to place local parties more accurately along the policy scale constructed in Section Two. We then examine coalition administrations for evidence of policy pay-offs between coalition partners. Earlier chapters have already demonstrated that single party minority governments in hung councils do not share committee chairs, but there must be some pay-off to allow them to remain in power. The evidence of policy pay-offs is examined, to assess the nature of any such pay-offs. For example, are the pay-offs made to parties which are close to the ruling party on the policy scale we have constructed for local government? This assessment notes the extraordinary amount of power that one particular party seems to possess, and the reasons for the SLD achieving such success in gaining policy pay-offs are examined. Finally, the durability of both coalition and minority administrations is assessed, to check whether the existence of policy pay-offs is a contributory factor in administrative duration.

9.4.1. Further Specifying the Policy Position of Local Parties

Section Three of this chapter has noted that the majority of minimal winning coalitions which form, indeed the majority of coalitions which form, are minimum, winning, and connected. However, while they may be connected, this does not mean that parties are making deals with a party that is close to them. For example, using the unidimensional policy scale adopted above, a right wing Conservative party and a left wing SLD group will be 5.6 points apart, almost at opposite ends of a 10 point scale. This would actually classify these two supposedly ideologically connected parties as extreme right and extreme left on the ideological scale of many countries (see Laver & Schofield, 1990, Appendix B). So, although two local parties situated thus *may* form an ideologically connected coalition, such an outcome would perhaps be unexpected. In order to enable local policy positions to be more closely specified, local leaders were asked where their local party stood ideologically in relation to the national party.

Table 9.6: Local Party Ideological Position

| Local Party | Comparison With National Party | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| | To The Right | To The Left | Roughly Similar |
| Conservative | 1 | 1 | 34 |
| Labour | 0 | 7 | 23 |
| SLD | 2 | 12 | 25 |

Table 9.6 shows the ideological position of local parties compared to their national party, and demonstrates that Conservative local groups are remarkably consistent; only two Conservative leaders perceived their local party as significantly different ideologically from the national party. On the other hand, while no local Labour group saw itself to the right of the parliamentary party's position, 7 of them thought they were to the left of that position. The SLD were the least uniform ideologically, as might be expected given the tradition of non-conformism within the Liberal party. While 2 leaders saw their local party as more right wing, by far the largest total of "ideological dissidents" were the dozen SLD local parties to the left of the national leadership.

The significance of such a 'deviance' from the national position, as noted above, is that this may mean that in some of the ideologically connected coalitions, parties may be so far apart on the scale that the notion of connectedness loses relevance. For example, on an ideological connectedness criterion, the SLD can form a coalition or exchange policy pay-offs with either of the major parties. Indeed, Chapter Five has already detailed that the SLD is just as likely to do a deal with either party, and the previous section of this chapter shows the universal involvement of the SLD in ideologically connected coalitions. However, we would expect that a 'left wing' SLD party is more likely to do a deal with Labour than the Conservatives. In addition, despite the fact that the SLD is closer to Labour on the policy scale, it does not follow that it cannot do a deal with Conservatives. If local parties are searching for a party with similar policy preferences we would not always have Labour/ SLD coalitions because a 'right wing' SLD could go to 5.6, and a 'left wing' Conservative to 7.2 on our policy scale; in such cases we would expect Conservative/ SLD coalitions to form.

We do not need to rely on the small number of *coalitions* in our sample of 31 councils.³⁰ Policy pay-offs allow us to see if 'coalitions' are forming even when there is ostensibly a minority administration ruling. We will examine pay-offs in both coalition and minority administrations in order to assess the relevance of the co-operating parties position on the policy scale. We begin with an examination of the 9 minimal winning connected coalitions in our sample.

³⁰ It must be remembered that the limited number of councils we can test ideologically connected and policy minimising proposals on is because it is not possible to place significant Independent groups on the policy scale.

9.4.2. Policy Pay-Offs in Connected Coalitions

It must be noted that opposition actors in non-hung councils are nearly as likely to claim they have obtained policy concessions as those in hung councils, which the discussion of decision making in non-hung councils in Chapters Two and Eight would indicate was unlikely. All the evidence suggests that opposition parties in non-hung councils are effectively powerless.³¹ Therefore, it is stressed that considerable caution must be exercised in assessing a result which appears to indicate policy payoffs are occurring. The 'policy pay-offs' which are utilised are derived from a request to groups leaders to detail the concessions they made or received in 6 policy areas.³² While this does not tell us that specific deals were made between various groups, it does give some indication of greater influence which may reveal patterns of support.

Table 9.7 (below) examines the arrangements in the one minimal and 8 minimum winning connected coalitions, and reveals a number of interesting findings. However, there is little evidence for the proposition that local parties will attempt to minimise policy distance when forming coalitions. In only 5 of the 9 councils is the coalition between the closest parties on the policy scale. However, in 2 of the remaining 4 local authorities there had previously been a coalition of the parties apparently closest on the ideological scale, which would mean that 7 of the 9 local authorities had experienced a coalition government which minimised the policy distance between the partners.³³ However, it must be noted that the fact that an SLD group was to the left of its national party, placing it very close to Labour on our policy scale, did not deter a Conservative/SLD coalition from forming in one case, which suggests that minimising policy distance is not always uppermost in the plans of local coalition actors. Certainly, minimum winning status is a more 'accurate' predictor of which coalitions will form in hung local authorities, although it is also less specific than predictions based on minimising policy positions. Given that 4 of

³¹ This is certainly the opinion of all the former opposition party leaders in Devon.

³² See Questions 6 and 15 in Questionnaire Two (Appendix) to group leaders in hung councils. Unfortunately, the general nature of these questions means that it is not possible to decide definitively that pay-offs are occurring between specific actors. Because the questions were asked of leaders in current administrations about their current arrangements, it is not possible to test the closeness or otherwise of previous administrations and this examination is confined to assessing payoffs in the current administrations for which we can place the major actors on the policy scale, that is, the 31 councils listed in Table 9.3.

³³ Again, it must be pointed out that these apparent divergences from the principle of minimising policy differences may be cases where the local SLD and Conservative groups are closer than the SLD and Labour group. Equally, the use of a national scale means that some cases where 'policy minimising' appears to occur may not be what they seem.

the 9 current coalitions have not formed between the closest parties, it does not appear to be the case that minimising policy distance is a significant influence on coalition formation strategies.

Table 9.7: The Relevance of Policy Closeness to Pay-Offs In Minimal/Minimum Connected Coalitions
(n=9)

| I.a. | Administration (lw=left wing) | Closest Party? | Policy Payoff? | Office Payoff? | Comments (w.c.=winning connected) |
|------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| 0100 | CON/lwSLD | no | yes | no info | agreement despite 'left wing' SLD. |
| 0500 | lwLAB/SLD | yes | yes | yes | - |
| 1600 | LAB/SLD | yes | yes | no | Conservatives and Independents act as united group |
| 2000 | lwLAB/lwSLD | yes | yes | no | previous Con/SLD coalition |
| 0702 | CON/SLD | no | yes | no | left wing Labour group and previous Lab/SLD coalition |
| 0403 | CON/SLD | no | yes | yes | - |
| 0203 | LAB/lwSLD | yes | yes | no info | - |
| 4905 | CON/SLD (minimal w.c.) | no | no | no info | also previous Lab/SLD <i>minimum</i> w.c. coalition. |
| 0200 | LAB/lwSLD | yes | yes | no info | - |

n.b.: all but I.a. 4905 are minimum winning connected coalitions

An examination of the parties receiving policy pay-offs reveals some interesting findings. Table 9.7 shows that, with the exception of the solitary minimal winning connected coalition, policy pay-offs are made or received by the coalition parties in all these councils. This might prove nothing, as we have already seen (Chapter Eight, Table 8.5) that the majority of parties in hung councils report feeling more influential. However, it is important to note (as Table 9.7 shows) that in no case does a group outside of the ruling coalition answer that it has received either policy or office pay-offs. This strongly suggests that the responses of coalition partners are fairly conclusive evidence of policy deals being made which exclude actors not in the coalition.

As section three's examination has already shown (see 9.3.2.) and Table 9.7 confirms, in only 2 of the 5 cases for which we have the relevant information do the coalition partners also share chairs. This supports most of the findings of this research that office pay-offs, while not considered unimportant by all actors, are relatively unvalued by many, especially by opposition groups in minority control councils. Office pay-offs do not explain the formation and longevity of minority control administrations; we now examine whether policy considerations can provide the answer for this phenomenon.

9.4.3. Policy pay-Offs in Minority Administrations

It appears likely that an examination of minority administrations will reveal that parties close on the policy scale are co-operating on a policy rather than an office basis. As has already been detailed,³⁴ there is no evidence of office pay-offs outside of coalition administrations, so any pay-offs to 'support' parties by minority administrations must be sought in policy concessions. Minority administrations may be possible because crucial 'opposition' actors are receiving benefits in the form of policy pay-offs. Indeed, it seems highly probable that this must be the case. While minority administrations may be viable in the short term because they are preferred by enough actors to another administration that would otherwise form, this does not seem a basis for a long term arrangement. Minority administrations in hung councils are so durable that it appears likely to be the case that policy pay-offs are being made.

It has been noted that office pay-offs in the form of committee chairs are not a significant factor in the 9 connected coalitions examined above. We already know that office pay-offs are not a factor in the deals finally made in minority administrations. However, to reiterate, policy pay-offs of some sort *must* figure in any long term minority administration. Table 9.8 looks at the policy profile of the 18 current minority administrations for which we can place the significant parties on an ideological scale.

³⁴ See Chapter Four (4.2.3.), Table 4.7, which details office pay-offs in hung councils.

Table 9.8: Policy Pay-offs in Minority Administrations

(n=18)

| I.a. | Admin Party | Nearest Party | Policy Payoff to Nearest Party? | Comments |
|------|-------------|---------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 5302 | Lab | SLD | no information | 8 previous minority admins in 9 years |
| 0600 | Lab | rw SLD | yes | Conservatives also receive pay-offs |
| 1506 | SLD | Lab | no | SLD rulers say 'no deals', but Cons say they have received pay-offs |
| 0602 | SLD | SDP | no information | Cons say Con/SLD coalition rules (with SDP excluded)-chairs support this |
| 1500 | Con | SLD | yes | Labour do not receive pay-offs |
| 2603 | Lab | SLD | no information | Labour 'knife-edge' minority admin |
| 1900 | Lab | SLD | yes | - |
| 5303 | Lab | lw SLD | yes | - |
| 2300 | Lab | SLD | no information | Cons do not receive pay-offs |
| 2207 | SLD | lw Lab | no | All 4 parties say 'no deals' |
| 0505 | Lab | SDP | no information | SLD receives pay-offs |
| 4904 | Lab | SDP | no information | Cons and SLD receive pay-offs |
| 1906 | SLD | Lab | no information | - |
| 3204 | Lab | SLD | yes | - |
| 3300 | lw SLD | Lab | yes | - |
| 1511 | lw SLD | Lab | yes | Cons do not receive pay-offs |
| 4807 | SLD | Lab | no | 3 party system-Labour and Cons both say 'no pay-offs', but SLD says it has made concessions. |
| 1809 | SLD | Lab | no | Independents receive pay-offs |

Table 9.8 contradicts the notion that policy deals are being made between a minority government and the party closest to them on the policy scale. The table shows that while in 7 councils the party closest on the policy scale is receiving policy pay-offs, in 4 councils the closest party is *not*. However, there is reason to believe that the questions about policy concessions are not producing a true picture of the deals made in hung councils. As the 'comments' column in Table 9.8 details, there are some

differences of opinion concerning the deals made between political parties in 3 of the 4 councils run by a minority administration. Differences of opinion are of course inevitable; what are major policy concessions for some may be not worth mentioning for others. It is also recognised that it may be difficult for leaders to admit to making deals which may have been secret, even when confidentiality is assured.

This may be the case in I.a. 2207, when all four group leaders say that there have been no concessions, and yet the same minority administration has lasted for 49 months. There are 4 occasions when at least 2 of the groups in the above authority must have reached some sort of compromise; the process of making a budget.³⁵ In non-hung councils, opposition group leaders have no more influence on budgetary decisions than the "symbolic influence on policy" which the full council budget meeting gives all councillors (Rosenberg, 1989, p.106). However, in hung councils the annual budget cannot be passed unless there is some degree of consensus. A party whose co-operation in passing a budget is requested is unlikely to accede without some form of payoff, and while an office payoff is not impossible, the minority administrations in our survey do not share chairs. The budget making process had taken place in the six months or so before the leaders in this survey filled in the questionnaires. Provided that the minority administration had been in place for six months, at least one group in each of these minority administrations must have made a deal with it, and the deal must have concerned policy.³⁶

Table 9.9 catalogues the answers to more specific questions about influence by party in each of the minority administrations. As well as being asked a number of questions about influence in a range of policy areas, group leaders were also asked both to assess their influence on the budget and the specific question of the degree of influence they had on the rate set.³⁷ The same 18 minority councils form the basis for Table 9.9, which examines the possibility of budgetary pay-offs. We have no information on these questions from 3 of the 18 minority administrations, so Table

³⁵ It is just conceivable that the last four budgets in this council have got through on the principle of 'Hobson's Choice'. However, it appears unlikely that politicians with policy objectives will miss the opportunity to get at least some of their preferences adopted, and 196 weeks (49 months) "is a long time in politics".

³⁶ There are of course other pay-offs beside office and policy. Money and sex are two that have occasionally been associated with political decision making, but it is assumed that local leaders, however charismatic, will be unable to carry their members without more 'respectable' pay-offs.

³⁷ It was also hoped that group leaders' answers to a very specific question concerning the closeness of the rate precept set to their own preference would provide a clear indication of their group's influence. Unfortunately, for reasons discussed in Chapter Eight, this expectation was flawed (see Chapter Eight, Section Two, Table 8.8).

9.9 has replies from the opposition party groups who answered these questions in 15 minority administrations. Where a party which is not the closest in policy terms is omitted from the table, this is because no questionnaire was returned by that group; the party closest on the policy scale is included even when no questionnaire was received, in order that other replies from that council can be more clearly assessed. Parties were asked to rate their influence in six different policy areas (education, social services, housing, planning, highways, transport), on the budget, and on the rate precept, as either "very influential", "quite influential", "not very influential", or "not at all influential". The rates for the policy areas were averaged to produce a single rating, listed in the column heading 'level of influence on policy'.

Table 9.9: Opposition Party Influence in Minority Administrations (n=15)

| I.a. | admin | opp'n | level of influence on | | | | Comments |
|------|-------|-------|-----------------------|----------|------------|------------|---|
| | | | payoffs | policy | budget | precept | |
| 0600 | Lab | SLD* | yes | very | very | very | Lab-rate set 'quite close' |
| | | Con | yes | quite | not at all | not at all | to their preferences; rate set 'identical' to SLD's wishes. |
| 1506 | SLD | Lab* | n/i | n/i | n/i | n/i | Cons answered that they |
| | | Con | yes | quite | not at all | not very | were 'not influential' in the council. |
| 0602 | SLD | SDP* | n/i | n/i | n/i | n/i | Cons say Con/SLD coalition |
| | | Con | yes | quite | not very | not very | rules (with SDP excluded) |
| 1500 | Con | SLD* | yes | quite | very | very | - |
| | | Lab | no | quite | not very | not very | |
| 1900 | Lab | SLD* | yes | n/i | n/i | n/i | - |
| | | Con | no | quite | not at all | not at all | |
| 5303 | Lab | SLD* | yes | not very | very | very | - |
| 2300 | Lab | SLD* | n/i | n/i | n/i | n/i | - |
| | | Con | no | quite | quite | not at all | |
| 2207 | SLD | Lab* | no | quite | n/i | n/i | Despite all 4 groups saying |
| | | Ind | no | not very | very | very | there were "no pay-offs", their answers on the budget |
| | | Con | no | n/i | n/i | very | suggest otherwise. |
| 0505 | Lab | SDP* | n/i | n/i | n/i | n/i | SLD may be closest party to |
| | | SLD | yes | quite | quite | very | Lab: SDP (one member) may have allied with SLD |
| 4904 | Lab | SDP* | n/i | n/i | n/i | n/i | Again-SLD may be closest to |
| | | SLD | yes | quite | very | very | Lab: SDP has only 3 members, |
| | | Con | yes | quite | not at all | not very | and may be allied with SLD |
| 3204 | Lab | SLD* | yes | quite | very | quite | - |
| 3300 | SLD | Lab* | yes | very | very | very | - |
| 1511 | SLD | Lab* | yes | quite | not at all | not at all | Both Con & Lab have little influence, |
| | | Con | no | quite | not very | not very | but Lab gets some concessions |
| 4807 | SLD | Lab* | no | very | quite | quite | Confused answers from Lab & |
| | | Con | no | very | very | not very | Con-difficult to decipher. |
| 1809 | SLD | Lab* | no | n/i | n/i | n/i | - |
| | | Ind | yes | quite | very | quite | |

(n/i = no information; * signifies closest opposition party on the policy scale)

A close examination of Table 9.9 reveals some very interesting findings. Quite plainly, the questions of budgetary influence and influence on the rate precept produce, in general, much greater perceptions of influence from the parties closest on the policy scale to the ruling party than the general questions about concessions. A slight adjustment in two cases, will produce an even clearer indication of the importance of policy closeness to the ruling party in terms of opposition party influence. There are two councils where the SDP is the closest party on the scale to the ruling group. We have no replies from those two SDP groups (of just 1 and 3 members) and the only reason they appear in Table 9.9 is because of their supposed status as "closest in policy terms" to the ruling Labour group. However, in both cases the SLD party leader has answered, and in both cases he/she assesses SLD influence in these crucial budgetary matters as very high. In most councils with an SDP group, the SDP members are included by the chief executive in the total of SLD/Alliance councillors. It appears not improbable that these very small SDP groups may also be 'subsumed' within the SLD group on the council. If this is the case, then the SLD would be the closest party on the council to the ruling Labour group in both cases, which would support the general findings of Table 9.9 that the most influential opposition parties appear to be those closest on the policy scale. Including these two SLD groups,³⁸ we have information on budgetary/rate precept influence from 9 of the 15 parties closest on the scale.

Table 9.10: Opposition Party Influence in Minority Administrations By Policy Position to Ruling Party

| Response | Closest Opposition Party | | | Other Opposition Parties | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------|----------|--------------------------|--------|----------|
| | Policy | Budget | Rate Set | Policy | Budget | Rate Set |
| Very Influential | 3 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Quite Influential | 6 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 1 |
| Not Very Influential | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| Not At All Influential | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 4 |

(n.b. numbers in columns sum differently because some respondents did not answer all questions regarding influence)

³⁸ It is important to note that re-classifying the two SLD groups as "closest" in policy terms does not alter the general findings of Tables 9.9 and 9.10. It reinforces the impression given by other respondents who are the closest in policy terms to the ruling party.

Table 9.10 aggregates some of the findings of Table 9.9, and shows the major points very clearly. The specific questions of budgetary influence produces much clearer responses than the general questions about policy concessions which had been granted or received. Quite clearly, closeness in policy terms is connected with greater influence during the key budgetary negotiations. With just one exception (local authority 1511, where neither opposition group feels influential, although Labour receives policy concessions) all the leaders of parties close to the party heading the minority administration report that they are 'very' or 'quite' influential over the budget and rate precept set; most of them reply that they are *very* influential. This contrasts with other opposition parties, the great majority of whom reply that they are 'not very' or 'not at all' influential concerning the budget.

Budget making time is the key time in hung local authorities; the business of the council can proceed fairly smoothly for most of the year, but budget making is when alliances come under most threat (see Leach, 1985). Therefore, parties which have not been influential for most of the year might be able to exert more pressure during this period. Supporting this, it is apparent that in some councils parties do not feel very influential in a number of policy areas but feel that they exercise considerable influence over the setting of the annual budget. The answers about influence in a number of policy areas (shown in the column in Table 9.9 labelled 'level of influence on policy') often differ from the more specific question on how influential the party is in setting the budget rate.

It is also clear that, in the council where all 4 party groups reply that there is no 'logrolling' in the form of policy concessions, at least two groups are very influential over the rate precept set. If this is the case then some form of concessions would have to have been made. As Table 9.9 indicates, in some councils the answers are difficult to understand. The Conservative who replied that his/her group is very influential concerning budget negotiations but not very influential over the rate set contrasts with the Labour leader in the same authority (4807) who, despite being closest in policy terms, is less influential in influencing the budget but more influential in influencing the precept. It is difficult to know how to interpret these answers. However, in most cases the pattern of influence is straightforward, and it reveals that one party in particular, the SLD, exercises great influence. The reasons for this will now be examined.

9.4.4. The Power of the Centre Party in a Three-Party System: Policy Pay-Offs Abound

Labour's dependence on the SLD as a coalition partner has already been noted (see Chapter Five, sections 5.2.4. and 5.2.5). An examination of Tables 9.3 and 9.7 shows that in the councils where we can place the parties on an ideological scale, that is, those without a significant Independent group, the SLD is a member of *all* the current coalitions. Of course, this is hardly surprising, as the absence of a 'significant' Independent presence means that 'alternatives' such as a Conservative/Independent arrangement are unable to form either a coalition or allow a Conservative minority administration to form with Independent support (or vice versa). Given the problems of Conservative/ Labour coalitions being able to form (although two previous coalitions in our sample of 121 administrations were Conservative/ Labour agreements) this suggests that the SLD will be very powerful in three-party systems, whether a minority administration or majority coalition forms.

As previous chapters have related, the power of central parties in the coalition formation process is recognised by the majority of writers. Some acknowledge the ability this gives centre parties to influence the direction of policy in hung legislatures. For example, Laver (1981) argues that parties at the centre are more likely to join coalitions, and that therefore the adoption of more central policies is a likely outcome. Laver termed this process "the centripetal ideological tendencies of coalition policy" (Laver, 1981, pp.148-149).³⁹ Whether this is the case is difficult to establish, but it appears to be the case that the SLD, the central party in most English local authorities, wields enormous influence in hung councils. We have already seen that in our 31 'policy testing' councils, there is no winning connected coalition that can form without the participation of the SLD, and that the SLD is a member of all the coalitions which form. However, Table 9.9 reveals that the SLD's influence extends into all the minority administrations for which we have the information on policy position.

³⁹ However, while in any unidimensional policy continuum the median party might appear "unbeatable", Budge & Laver (1987) say there is evidence of both the multi-dimensionality and differential salience of issues (Manifesto Research Group, 1986), and posit that coalition policy bargaining "may well take the form of logrolling across bundles of issues rather than compromise, issue by issue" (Budge & Laver, 1987, p.29). In opposition to Laver's earlier position, they argue that logrolling generates "centrifugal" rather than "centripetal" pressures on policy outputs, and that if parties feel most strongly about their most extreme policies [which is not proven] then "logrolling should produce policy packages located well away from the centre, with no pivotal role for the median legislator" (Budge & Laver, 1987, pp.29-30). The clear importance of the SLD suggests this thesis does not apply in English local government.

There are 15 minority administrations in Table 9.9; the SLD is the minority ruler in 7 of them, and the most influential (and closest) actor in 6. In the remaining 2 authorities we have no information about the SLD's success in influencing the budget and the rate precept, but we do know that the other opposition party (in both cases, Conservative) considers itself 'not very' and 'not at all' influential. Given this, it would not be surprising if the SLD was also influential in these two councils and gaining budgetary concessions from the minority 'rulers' as it does in the rest of the councils listed in Table 9.9. In all the minority administrations for which we can place the significant parties on our policy scale, the SLD is either the ruling minority party or the most influential opposition party.⁴⁰

We have examined 9 minimal connected coalitions and 18 minority administrations. In the remaining 4 of our 31 authorities there is one surplus majority coalition and 3 cases of 'no administration'. The SLD is one of the partners in the oversize coalition (and reports that it is 'very influential'), and is also very influential in one of the cases of 'no administration'. It is only in the 2 other 'no administrations' that an SLD group sees itself as lacking influence; both SLD group leaders report that they are 'not at all influential' concerning the rate set. So, in 25 of the 31 administrations, we have information concerning the level of influence felt by the SLD, and in 23 of those 25 the party is either in government it is the most influential actor in opposition. An examination of the answers of other groups in these administrations provides significant support for the feelings of SLD leaders. This does not appear to be a case of party leaders exaggerating their own importance. On the specific question of how much influence their party had over the rate set in their authority, we do not see the pattern of claims made for policy concessions and general policy influence, that is, all groups claiming they were influential. Other parties report far less influence than the SLD, and their level of influence accords with their administrative status.⁴¹ Whatever, the replies in Table 9.9 indicate that the power of the SLD is quite considerable when there are only 3 significant groups in the council. However, we need to see if this is a departure from its influence in other councils with more than 3 significant groups.

⁴⁰ Mellors (1989, Table 4.5, pp.103-107) has also noted the power of the Alliance parties in budgetary matters; in 19 of 20 counties the Alliance was a member of the budgetary coalition.

⁴¹ The importance of policy closeness might also suggest that when the SLD forms a minority administration, it may be that Labour is the party most likely to benefit in the form of policy pay-offs, although the evidence in Table 9.9 is ambiguous on this.

Unfortunately, we only have information on SLD budgetary influence in 11 of the other 31 councils where we cannot place the parties on the policy scale, but they do indicate that its influence is not as great when there are more than 3 significant groups on the council. Of the 24 current minority administrations, 18 are in our 'policy scale' sample. We only have information from one SLD group in the remaining 6 minority administrations, and it answered that it was 'quite influential' on the rate set in its authority. In the remaining 10 councils for which we have information on the influence of the SLD, which comprise 2 SLD coalitions, 4 non-SLD coalitions, and 4 'no administrations', the pattern of response was mixed, with answers evenly distributed in the four categories of influence ranging from 'very' to 'not at all' influential. Unfortunately, we lack sufficient information to test the responses of Independent leaders in those councils, to check if their influence is greater when the SLD is not very influential. However, SLD involvement, and influence, is less in the councils with more than 3 significant groups, strongly supporting the idea that the results listed in Table 9.9 do indicate the powerful position it holds in smaller party systems.

9.4.5. The Effect of Policy Closeness and Pay-Offs on Coalition Duration

This section has already shown that policy positions affect coalition formation in a number of ways. It may also be logical to suppose that administrations where parties are both close on the ideological scale and co-operating in policy terms will be more durable than administrations where such pay-offs are not evident. Unfortunately, we do not have a large universe of cases with which to test such an hypothesis. There are 5 coalitions in Table 9.7 which are between the closest (rather than 'connected') parties on the policy/ ideological scale and 8 minority administrations in Table 9.9 where we can detect that the opposition party closest to the ruling party is the most influential over the rate set. In the other 7 minority administrations in Table 9.9 such parties may also be the most influential but we lack the necessary information. In one of the current minority administrations we do not know how long it has lasted. Therefore, we have only 12 *current* administrations with which to tentatively examine the thesis that policy pay-offs to policy close parties may lead to more stable administrations. The lack of completed administrations is unavoidable here, as we have no information on policy pay-offs other than for current administrative arrangements.

There is some theoretical support for the belief that policy closeness will contribute to government longevity. Budge & Keman's (1990) general theory of party

government makes the assumption that parties seek to form a government "capable of surviving" and enabling them to "carry through their declared policy preferences" (Table 2.1, Assumption 2, p.34). One implication of this is that "the less governments agree over policy, the more likely they are to terminate for involuntary internal reasons" (Budge & Keman, 1990, Table 2.4, Implication 5 (i), pp. 50-52). They report that their:

"findings here broadly confirm our reasonings about the effects of ideological homogeneity (and, by inference, policy agreement) in producing more stable and long-lived governments" (Budge & Keman, 1990, p.172).

Budge & Keman's notion of policy agreement is defined by the ideological homogeneity of a coalition in systems characterised by a bourgeois-socialist cleavage, a division which may not be applicable in British politics (see Budge & Keman, 1990, Table 6.5, p.173). The inference that, for example, "bourgeois hegemony" is necessarily the same thing as policy agreement might also be debated. However, what clearly emerges from the sheer scope of their research is that minimising policy differences, however characterised, is an important contributor to administrative duration. Therefore, we would expect to find that our 12 administrations will last a long time, although comparing them favourably against other current administrations which have not lasted a long time would of course be meaningless.⁴²

Table 9.11: Average Duration of Current Administrations of Parties Closest on Policy Scale

| status | deals by closest parties | all current admins with same status |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| minimum winning connected | 25.4 (n=5) | 22.6 (n=8)* |
| minority administrations | 31.6 (n=7) | 27.6 (n=24)* |

*See Table 9.5

Table 9.11 shows that the average duration of the 5 coalitions between the parties closest on the policy scale is 25.4 months, compared to the average of 22.6 months for all minimum winning connected coalitions we have information for. Similarly, the average duration of minority administrations with evidence of deals between

⁴² The same caveats about extant administrations must be made again, and any findings emerging from this examination must therefore be treated with caution; current administrations may go on to last a considerable period.

parties closest on the policy scale is longer than the general average of minority administrations (31.6 months to 27.6 months). While neither of these figures is proof of the thesis, it does tentatively support that idea that when parties with close policy preferences are co-operating administrations will be more durable. The pressures which policy compromise brings are less, and agreement should be easier. If agreement is easier, then the process of maintaining the administration in power should also be less traumatic. However, further exploration of a greater sophistication is necessary before more definite conclusions of a relationship between policy closeness, policy pay-offs, and administrative duration can be drawn.

Conclusions

Chapter Nine has examined a number of theories about the factors impinging on coalition formation and duration. Despite the admitted limitations of attempting to test merely the predictive capacities of the theories, a number of interesting findings have emerged. For example, the powerful position of the SLD in three-party systems emerged from an examination of policy pay-offs after constructing the unidimensional policy scale.

As expected given the large number of minority administrations in hung councils, office-based theories of coalition formation do not perform well in predictive terms. Neither minimal nor minimum winning theories are successful in predicting which administration will form. In fact, it appears that by far the most successful hypothesis would be that "when councils become hung, the largest single party will form a minority administration".⁴³ A third of all administrations forming fit this extremely specific prediction.

In order that theories positing the importance of a lack of ideological diversity in formation and duration can be tested, it is essential that the relative position of the political parties, ideologically speaking, is assessed. The construction of a unidimensional policy/ ideological scale for English local authorities is not without considerable difficulties and a number of compromises need to be made. Existing models of the position of national parties have been adapted to suit local politics, and while there are reservations about many of the adaptations, the resulting scale has enabled us to test ideologically connected theories and policy closeness proposals with a certain degree of accuracy.

⁴³ A finding not dissimilar to Taylor & Laver's (1973) discovery of so many minority administrations in European parliaments.

Although the difficulty of placing Independents on a 'universal' local policy scale means the exclusion of local councils with a significant Independent group from the examination of the importance of ideological connectedness, we are still left with a total of 31 councils in which such theories can be scrutinised. Despite the large number of minority administrations, it appears that both minimum and connected status have a significance when coalitions are being formed. All but two of the 10 current coalitions in this sample of 31 administrations are minimum winning and connected ideologically, which suggests that both are important to coalition formation.

However, it may be that the importance of ideological connectedness is exaggerated in the 31 administrations where we can place the local parties on the policy scale that has been constructed. Because of the exclusion of councils with significant Independent groups, most of the councils are effectively three-party systems. In such systems, any two-party coalition apart from Conservative/ Labour is connected (and all are minimal), so perhaps the high incidence of connected coalitions is only to be expected. The apparent importance of minimising the total weight of the coalition may also not be what it seems. 6 of the 8 minimum winning connected coalitions are also examples of former opposition parties uniting against the traditional ruler, and two-thirds of all minimum winning coalitions were between ex-opposition parties; such political considerations may be more important than a concern with minimising the weight of the coalition that forms.

While the importance of connectedness *may* be exaggerated in this selection of administrations, the importance of closeness in policy terms is demonstrated by the distribution of policy pay-offs in minority administrations. Quite clearly, the closest party on the policy scale to the single ruling party displays greater influence on the key budgetary decisions that have to be made than other opposition parties. The differences are very apparent. While, when coalition administrations are formed, it is ideological connectedness rather than the closest party in policy terms that matters, an examination of single party minority administrations reveals that it is the party closest in policy terms which is most influential when crucial decisions have to be made. Given its position in the middle of the two major parties, the SLD is in the ideal position to exploit that, and all the evidence indicates that SLD groups take full advantage of their opportunities.

One of the clearest things to emerge from the examination of policy pay-offs is the powerful position of the SLD; the party appears to have a quite extraordinary degree of influence in the 31 councils for we have been able to assess policy closeness. In the overwhelming majority of these councils, which are mostly three-party systems, the SLD is either the ruling minority party, a member of a winning coalition, or the most influential opposition party in a minority administration. Again, a general hypothesis of greater SLD influence in three-party systems could be proposed; the supporting evidence is overwhelming.

Finally, policy closeness also seems to be one of the important factors affecting the duration of administrations in hung councils. Although the evidence is by no means conclusive, when parties with close policy preferences are co-operating, administrations appear to be more durable. Policy closeness appears to be a greater influence on duration than ideological connectedness or coalition size. Minimum winning connected coalitions, while more durable than the overall average for coalition administrations, are apparently no more durable than minimum winning coalitions, but it is difficult to advance more than the most tentative proposals for the factors affecting administrative duration

The major points that emerge from this chapter are the dominance of the SLD when there are only three major parties, and the apparent relationship between policy closeness and budgetary influence in minority administrations. Throughout this thesis, the role of the SLD has often appeared crucial in hung local government, and a number of possible reasons have been advanced for this. It may be that their dominant role in three party administrations offers the most potent explanation of their greater involvement. In such cases, it is not only Labour groups who have little choice, as Chapter Five suggested. Conservative groups, unless they can bridge a large ideological divide and come to an arrangement with Labour, also have no alternative if they wish to have some influence.

The significance of all of these findings for coalition theory is not only that policy pay-offs need to be integrated into any successful theory. Theories which concentrate on policy closeness, rather than ideological connectedness or a minimising criterion, may be more accurate reflections of the coalition process. Not only does policy closeness appear to explain the vast majority of local administrations which form (whether coalition or minority governments), it may also be offered (more tentatively) as an explanation for greater administrative duration. Although this evidence only holds for three-party local systems, the

numbers of Conservative/ Independent coalitions which form in four-party systems may indicate that, given a more accurate assessment of each local authority's political system, notions of policy closeness may be a powerful explanatory tool at local level.

CHAPTER TEN

DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL: A CASE STUDY OF A HUNG COUNCIL

Introduction

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Conclusions

Introduction

In May 1985, to the surprise of all knowledgeable opinion, the Conservatives lost overall control of Devon County Council. In the run-up to the election, the prevailing opinion had been that "there is no doubt whatsoever that they will remain in control" (Western Morning News [WMN], 8/2/85). Accordingly, the shock for the long-term rulers was great. For the next 4 years, Devon became a place where, according to some of the participants, "debate mattered" and politics became "more interesting, and more exciting", before the almost inevitable return of Conservative rule in 1989 restored the "total predictability" to decision making that single party majority government usually ensures.

This case study scrutinises the events of the 4 years when Devon was hung using the insights of the participants. The leaders of all of the 4 main party groups were interviewed. David Morrish (Liberal), Arnold Sayers (Conservative), Saxon Spence (Labour) and Harold Luscombe (Social Democrats) all gave long interviews in which they talked very freely about the problems and opportunities afforded by a situation where one party can no longer rule alone without regard to the views of other party groups. As well as the political leaders of the council, the chief executive for most of the period from 1985-1989, David Macklin, was also interviewed at length. The co-operation and openness of the 'actors' during what was perhaps the most fascinating period in Devon County Council's history is much appreciated, and their recollections of the period and their opinions of the relationships between themselves and the other actors provide a unique insight into life in a hung council.

Previous chapters have looked in detail at a number of hypotheses concerning coalition behaviour. Some have been taken from formal coalition theory, some from descriptive accounts of coalition politics, and others from earlier studies of 'life in the balance' in English local authorities. A number of general findings for coalition behaviour in English local government have been generated by this study. While this case study of Devon politics will illustrate a number of points which the various approaches to the study of coalition have indicated are important in coalition politics (and note their occurrence), a different approach to that of previous chapters will be taken here. It is not the intention of this study to attempt to illustrate the truths or otherwise of the earlier findings of this thesis, by setting up some crucial hypotheses and examining their fit with Devon's experience. It will soon become apparent to the reader that, as would be expected, the responses of the actors involved are a complex

mixture of factors. The intention of this study is to try and understand what made the actors in Devon respond in the way that they did.

We will concentrate on the interaction of the actors involved and garner their impressions of a few crucial events of the 4 years when Devon was hung. It is not proposed to provide a blow-by-blow account of all the 'battles' of the period. It would be impossible to cover all the events between 1985-1989 in a short study such as this, even if this was what one desired to do. It is the process of coalition formation and maintenance that is of most interest to this study. Therefore, section one will concentrate on the initial process of coalition formation between Labour and the Alliance. Section two will detail the maintenance of the "working arrangement", and section three the breakdown of that arrangement. Finally, section four will briefly examine the aftermath, a long period of no administration in place, and assess the views of the actors involved concerning those four years of hungness.

Section One: The Formation Process

This section begins with a brief examination of the experiences of Devon County Council prior to the crucial election of 1985. Following this, the 'pre-coalition' phase is examined, before evaluating the forces leading to the construction of a majority coalition.

10.1.1. The Years Before Hungness

For most of the period since its formation in 1889, Devon County Council has known little of party conflict. Although there has always been both a Conservative and a Liberal presence in Devon politics, the county council has historically been run in a 'non-partisan' manner. Apart from a brief spell after the Second World War when the Labour party held 8 seats, the apparatus of modern party politics in the form of whipping and standing orders was unknown. Members were usually unopposed, and could continue in post, if they so wished, for life. Party politics was not a feature of Devon.

However, the increased politicisation nationwide following local government reorganisation in 1973 brought party politics into the county council, and perhaps revealed the true nature of Devon's previous 'independence' and 'non-partisanship'. The Conservatives dominated the first three terms of government (1973-77, 1977-81, 1981-85). The insistence of the major parties in contesting as many seats in local elections as possible (whether there was a chance of winning or not) has been one factor in ensuring that the full panoply of party machinery dominated in Devon as

elsewhere. After 1973, the possibility (if it ever existed) of anyone from outside the ruling caucus influencing a debate became negligible, and the Conservative domination of Devon (with 66 of 88 seats before the 1985 election) appeared inevitable.

In the year leading up to the 1985 council election, there was no sign that the Conservatives would lose control. However, just a few weeks before the election, Michael Heseltine announced the Conservative government's plans to privatise Devonport Dockyard, which was by far the biggest employer in Plymouth. There was considerable opposition to this from Plymouth and the surrounding district, as it was made clear that there would inevitably be a significant number of jobs lost, and a spate of mass public meetings made the scale of local opposition to privatisation apparent.¹

Despite this, local Conservatives were still buoyant about their chances in the county council elections. Conservative leader Arnold Sayers confidently dismissed the national polls showing a rise in Liberal/Alliance support, later conceding that he had not taken the privatisation issue into account as a factor in the local election. After all, most local Conservatives, whether in or out of office, had attacked the decision, and apparently did not expect to be punished by the electorate for a decision they neither made nor agreed with. Accordingly, the trauma of losing was considerable, Sayers admitting he had "never dreamed we would lose control" (WMN, 4/5/85). The shock for the opposition parties was probably just as great, as many of the newly-elected Liberal and SDP councillors had never expected to be victorious. Not only that, Harold Luscombe admits that some SDP councillors, "had only agreed to stand on a commitment from me that they *wouldn't* get elected".

Prior to the election, the composition of the council had been: Conservatives 66 seats, Labour 16, Liberals 11, and Independents 5 seats. Following the election the standings were: Conservatives 37, Labour 10, Liberals 23, SDP 13, Independents 2. The immediate question became, 'who will run Devon County Council?' The Labour leader Saxon Spence sounded more like the 'traditional Liberal' when she remarked, "we clearly hold the balance of power and our objectives will be to achieve as much of our programme as possible" (WMN, 4/5/85). The chairman of Torbay Liberals, who remarked (before any discussions had taken place) "a pact with Labour now seems inevitable" (WMN, 4/5/85), was jumping the gun. Although it may have seemed a

¹ Other local issues may also have weakened Conservative support, in particular, reductions in milk quotas, which caused widespread opposition in mid and north Devon.

formality, the two parties of the Alliance had still to agree to work together in the new council. That process of agreement will now be examined.

10.1.2. The Liberals and SDP: Proto-Coalition Formation

Unsurprisingly, given that neither had remotely considered the possibility that they would have any influence at all after the election, while they had a "campaigning consensus" (Morrish), there was no prior agreement between the Liberals and the SDP that they would work together in government. Not only that but, as David Morrish admits, they "had not in any way worked through how [they] were going to work together on the county council" as two small groups of councillors, let alone in the situation of vying with the Conservatives as the largest 'group' on the council. The SDP leader Harold Luscombe "didn't even know the names" of some of his newly elected councillors.

However, the campaign as 'The Alliance' did mean that they had already made considerable compromises over two conflicting programmes. As Luscombe notes, the process of "dovetailing" the two manifestoes produced "no real acrimony". This is unsurprising, as the two leaders thought that it was effectively a "meaningless exercise". They were convinced there was no possibility of power, and even fundamental disagreements over nuclear issues were easily papered over. When they did arrive at County Hall, Exeter, to find that students from Exeter College of Art had hung a banner over the entrance proclaiming "UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT", the first decision the two parties had to come to "was whether in fact we were actually going to work together" (Morrish).

The two leaders have a slightly different perspective on the process. Morrish says it took very little time for them to come to an agreement, "within about half an hour or so", but Luscombe remembers differently. He feels that the Liberals seemed to take it for granted that the SDP would fall into line behind them, but Luscombe reveals some doubts about working with the Liberals, doubts that would become more concrete over the following 18 months. He briefly took his SDP group out of the joint meeting, and upon returning:

"we tried to create the impression we were struggling...to get agreement on this alliance ... because when we looked around some of the Liberals that were there and when we talked to various people we realised that a lot of the Liberals were mavericks...so we wanted to be satisfied in our minds that if we were going into this partnership that David [Morrish] was going to deliver the goods because he had several people, what I call the beard and sandal brigade...Liberals are all independent minded people [who] wanted to do their own thing" (Luscombe).

Luscombe was clearly concerned about the unity of the Liberal group. He could "deliver" his members, and he was determined to make sure that Morrish had a similar mandate from his group. Eventually, as both men knew they had to, they agreed to work together, with Morrish as leader of the Alliance and Luscombe as his deputy. However, given the hostility of some Labour members to the SDP, it was not at all certain they could build a majority coalition. Any hope of building a majority relied on a pact with Labour, because the Conservatives were effectively excluded from the process.²

What all the opposition parties agreed upon was that whatever happened the Conservatives should not be allowed to continue in power. Despite being aware of the feeling against them, the Conservatives still made contact with other groups in an attempt to remain in control. Labour leader Saxon Spence clearly shows the feelings of all the other groups on the council to the thought of the Conservatives remaining in power:

"Whatever the problems of being hung for four years there was no way we would have done a deal with the Conservatives, and I had the very interesting and entertaining experience of having Ted Pinney³ and Arnold Sayers in my office to plead with me that it would be much better to let them stay and this was never even considered" (Spence).

Arnold Sayers says that, "I don't remember us ever offering to take control", although the discussions did take place about whether the two groups could have worked together; chief executive David Macklin is "certain that the Conservatives approached the Labour party" to see if they could agree an arrangement. David Morrish remembers that it was "perfectly apparent that the Conservatives expected to carry on" and that there were even "vague" talks about grand coalitions. However, Alliance agreement was essential to any Conservative minority administration, and as Morrish maintains that "I can't foresee the situation that I'd do a deal with the Conservatives for a variety of reasons", such Conservative hopes were futile. It is apparent from talking to the long term opposition leaders that they were determined the Conservatives would have no role in running the council.⁴

² This process of coalition building conforms in many respects to Grofman's thesis of a "dynamic model of proto-coalition formation". Chapter One, (section 1.4.3.) describes this 'step-by-step' process of gradually building a winning coalition (see Grofman, 1982, pp.77-78).

³ A senior Conservative councillor.

⁴ The research outlined in Chapter Five, section three, does not support the hypothesis that former rulers are excluded from administrations. However, as

Within a day or two of the result, chief executive David Macklin rang an "uncomfortable" George Creber (a defeated Conservative candidate but still technically Chairman of the Council) and suggested that he would have to get together with the group leaders and attempt to sort the situation out. A number of senior councillors had a meeting in Macklin's room ("as soon as the meeting began I left them to it") and within ten minutes the Conservatives had departed, "and left David Morrish and Saxon Spence to sort out how they were going to deal with the administration" (Macklin).

10.1.3. The Initial Steps in Building a Majority Coalition

The only possibility of a majority coalition lay in a Labour/ Alliance coalition of some sort. Publicly, Labour were careful to make it clear that they could not enter into any formal pact (WMN, 11/5/85), but privately there was a realisation that this was too good an opportunity to let pass. Not even the national Labour party's disapproval of agreements with other parties in hung councils could be allowed to interfere with the chance:

"I suddenly became a member of the Association of County Councils [and] I went up to a meeting and actually told Neil Kinnock that you've got to accept that there was no way you could put Tories in...this opportunity had to be taken, and they accepted that there had to be a local interpretation" (Spence)⁵.

The personal relationship between Spence and Morrish (who both worked in the School of Education at Exeter University) was important in establishing the first contacts between Labour and the Liberals;⁶ geography helped in other ways. Morrish is quite certain that:

"had Devon County Council met in Plymouth...the chemistry of Plymouth would have made it quite impossible, and several people remarked it was one of the wonders of the world that people who weren't speaking to each

Carter's (1986, p.10) research shows, where the Conservative former rulers have ruled in an arrogant manner, the opposition to them remaining in power will be considerable. This may help to explain the universal opposition to the Conservatives in Devon.

⁵ As Chapter Two (section three) argues, this is an indication that local groups can override central party objections to coalition agreements. The agreement on a 'local interpretation' might also indicate that central party opposition might be more for public consumption, and that pragmatism will usually triumph.

⁶ The importance of personal relationships is continually made by the multi-dimensional approach (see Pridham, 1986, pp.24-29). Mellors cites personal relationships as important at local level in a number of dimensions, including the historical and motivational dimensions (Mellors, 1989, p.7).

other in Plymouth were outwardly prepared to actually work together in Exeter...Distance enabled people to co-exist in a way that perhaps they found far more difficult had they been in Plymouth under the constant gaze of Plymothians and the Plymouth press" (Morrish).

Morrish's comments indicate the difficulties of an agreement with the Plymouth based SDP and the Plymouth Labour party members. There were voices within the local Labour party who echoed the feelings of many Labour members at Westminster concerning the possibility of doing a deal with the SDP, only even more vehemently. Plymouth Devonport was the SDP national leader David Owen's seat, and the bitterness felt locally at what was seen as treachery by former colleagues was heartfelt. David Morrish notes the "downright hate" that existed between some people in the groups, exemplified by veteran Labour councillor Reg Scott, who declared openly that a pact was out of the question with "the traitors and rats of the SDP" (WMN, 7/5/85).

However, the Liberals had already agreed to work with the SDP, and if Labour wanted a share of power it therefore had to bury those disagreements. Saxon Spence admits that "it did add a problem to our working any sort of agreement which would not be there in other counties". In fact, Labour at first refused to talk to the SDP, conducting their coalition discussions with Morrish alone, until Luscombe refused to agree to any deal which did not involve him taking part in the discussions. He told Morrish that Spence "has got to realise that whether she likes me or she doesn't, she has got to talk to me" and Labour "reluctantly" agreed to allow Luscombe to be a part of the discussions (Luscombe).

Despite the bitterness between the SDP and Labour they were close enough in enough policy areas to make agreement relatively easy. Labour found enough "common ground between the Labour manifesto and that [of] the Alliance" (Spence). Luscombe notes that while Labour had a whole host of demands, the Alliance "had no difficulty with supporting much of what she was saying", a point confirmed by Morrish. The Liberals and Labour have always tended to side together in Exeter,⁷ and the disagreements between the SDP and Labour were felt most in Plymouth. The fact that the dealing with the Alliance was orchestrated by Spence, a "lady from Exeter" who "clearly had seen this as a golden opportunity for her to stamp her thinking on the county of Devon" (Luscombe), may have helped the deal to go through despite the opposition of Plymouth's Labour councillors. It must also be remembered that the possibility of

⁷ Morrish and Spence have both served on Exeter city council; again, the importance of past experiences and personal relationships are apparent.

power after years of impotence is a powerful incentive to agree, and as Morrish notes, Luscombe, Spence and himself had "been around for a bit". They were already aware that this was almost certainly a "one-off" and that in four years they would be out of power again; they had "to make an impact" (Luscombe). The pressures for agreement were so great that the issue of personality clashes and old sores *had* to be overlooked. As Saxon Spence points out:

"every four years since 1973 [Labour] have produced a manifesto and I usually end up putting it together and you think 'why am I spending all these hours producing this document, it's pointless!', and suddenly it mattered and that was actually what held us together. All these personalities were in a sense not what mattered, what mattered was actually trying to make some progress on the things we believed in" (Spence).

One can readily understand the pressures on these three experienced councillors to reach agreement; the years between 1985-89 would probably be the only chance they would ever have to influence Devon politics. However, the process of what form the agreement was to take, and in particular the allocation of chairs, demonstrates the dangers of minimising the importance of personalities to maintaining political agreements. The parties had come to some surprisingly painless agreements on policy, concentrating on the abolition of the grammar schools and eleven-plus, an agreement that was to lead to problems not unconnected with the selection of the education chairman. The allocation of that office, in particular, was to be a major factor in ending the agreement between Labour and the Alliance, and the process by which the chairs were distributed will now be examined.

10.1.4. The Distribution of Office Pay-Offs

Despite Saxon Spence's successful appeal to Neil Kinnock that they must be allowed to make a deal with the Alliance, Clause Six of Labour's standing orders for local groups comes close to forbidding local Labour groups from forming "local pacts" with other party groups. This meant that Spence still had to be careful over the way her relationship with the Alliance was portrayed. The deal between Labour and Alliance was called by David Stanbury (Luscombe's SDP deputy) the "working arrangement", a deliberately ambiguous title, later described by Stanbury as "less than a coalition but more than a vague understanding" (Western Evening Herald [WEH], 8/4/86). All parties were aware that "it had to be loose so that everybody could live with it" (Morrish).⁸

⁸ Such ambiguity may have been necessary in a number of local authorities, one indication of why differences of opinion between the actors occasionally existed over the administration in place (see Chapter Three, section 3.1.2.).

For Spence, the 'working arrangement' was that "we identified common policies and therefore we agreed to a working arrangement to achieve those policies". Labour refused to enter into any formal alliance and refused the offer of committee chairs, but supported Alliance nominations for the chairs. However, the way in which chairs were allocated demonstrates the importance of political know-how and perceptions to such deals, and as we shall see, how important such deals can be to administrative longevity. Harold Luscombe was determined that the SDP would get its fair share of committee chairs and vice-chairs, although he admits that "many times I had my tongue in my cheek as to the ability of some of my members" (doubts that, he asserts, were assuaged by the "excellent job" his inexperienced colleagues performed). However, the decision that was to cause the most acrimony did not concern Luscombe's SDP appointments.

David Morrish offered Labour the chair of the social services committee, and the vice-chair of education. Although Spence had agreed with Labour colleagues from other areas at the Association of County Councillors meeting (see above) that "it would be a mistake to actually take any office", she says that if that offer had been changed around it would have "tempted us enough" to take the chairs. However, Luscombe believes that "if she had forced the issue we would have given her the [education] chairmanship, and I would have been quite happy for that to have happened". The decision by Spence not to force the issue and to settle for policy concessions was to be a major contributory factor to the break-up of the working arrangement.

When Saxon Spence was told who was getting the chair of the education committee she says she "nearly had a fit". A new member, Margaret Rogers was given the chair of the committee responsible for the major part of Devon County Council's expenditure. Spence says that Morrish saw Rogers as:

"the only person who can sort out Ted Pinney [which] must be the most amazing error that David Morrish has ever made in his whole life, because that's not the way to deal with Ted Pinney...that was what he told me, she can deal with him" (Spence).

Pinney, the current (1992) chairman of the council, is a tough, long-serving politician with great experience in education matters, who Spence believes "would have been delighted" to have given a newcomer some help, a view with which Arnold Sayers concurs. Spence still finds Morrish's decision difficult to fathom, noting that in "confrontation with Ted Pinney you are on a hiding to nothing".

Whatever the troubles that this decision would bring, the mood was one of confidence among what a leading Tory dubbed the "Triple Alliance" (WMN, 25/3/86). Within a few weeks of the 1985 election, Morrish was able to announce a one year pact between Labour and the Alliance parties based on "a number of shared policy objectives" and with Labour supporting Alliance nominations for the committee chairs (WMN, 17/5/85). Despite the reservations now expressed by Luscombe and Spence about some of the appointments made, the mood was optimistic.

Section Two: The Maintenance of the Working Arrangement

This section begins by examining the organisational form which the 'working arrangement' between Labour and the Alliance took. The process of making the first budget will then be assessed. Finally in this section, the forces which led to the end of the working arrangement are scrutinised.

10.2.1. The Working Arrangements of the 'Working Arrangement'

Having reached agreement, the Alliance and Labour had to decide just how the council was going to be run. A surprise awaited the victorious leaders of the 'working arrangement'. David Morrish details his introduction to a hidden side of Devon's politics:

"I only discovered where the power was in Devon County Council after the election...David Macklin came up to me...and said 'Mr Morrish, I'd like to discuss the date on which we are having the chairman's meeting', so I said, 'well, what's that?'. 'Well', he said, 'the regular monthly meeting [of] all the committee chairs and the chief officers...I have got a draft agenda here', he said. I looked at it and it was set out on the County Council's agenda paper and it was essentially the agenda of what one might normally expect to be coming out of the Policy Committee...I said 'well, what it seems to me is what you have got here is the Policy Committee minus the opposition members'. 'Well, you could say that' he said...I had no idea that there was this monthly cycle of meetings of the chairmen of committees and that in effect it was a cabinet...and I said "I am not having one"...because I thought it was a dangerous model of having essentially a meeting of the Policy Committee behind closed doors. And it seemed to me to give a level of concentration of power at the top which I personally as a Liberal would find unhealthy. I had no idea it was meeting" (Morrish).

Saxon Spence and Harold Luscombe were also unaware of the existence of what was in effect a formal and secret cabinet.⁹ Arnold Sayers introduced the chairman's meetings

⁹ Such committees are not uncommon in majority control councils (see Stewart, 1983, p.45). Chapter Seven (section 7.2.3.) has already shown that, as in Devon, such one-party committees do not survive the arrival of hungness. The removal of

when he became leader in 1981, and sees good reasons for the secrecy of the discussions:

"it was a sort of cabinet at which we discussed matters and tried to thrash out our policy and I found it extremely helpful because, inevitably, when you are taking decisions you have to discuss the options. If you say you are going to shut, for the sake of argument, 50 primary schools as being one of the options, almost certainly you are going to chuck it out of the window but you want to consider it, and you can raise a whole lot of [issues] which if you ventilated them in public, would cause mayhem. So from that point of view it was very helpful" (Sayers).

For chief executive David Macklin "this was part of a cabinet government", and he was surprised to discover that senior opposition councillors had not:

"been conscious that it had been going on...it was called the 'committee chair'. In fact it was of course the leading people of the Conservative party, but it was very clearly called a meeting of the committee chairs so that there was no difficulty about officers being present" (Macklin).

While Sayers maintains that David Macklin was at pains to stress that in local government the chief executive had a responsibility to all members, the existence of this 'cabinet', attended by officers and unknown to three long-serving opposition leaders, suggests that these meetings may have remained secret because of the clash with the ethos that local government officers have a duty to provide information to all members. Officers discussing policy initiatives in, for example, education, without the knowledge of opposition education committee members does mean that those excluded are severely hampered in terms of the policy debates.

Whatever the rationale for the chairman's committee, Morrish (with the agreement of Spence) was determined that this arrangement would not continue, and he also did not want chairman's briefings from officers just before a meeting, which "might enable officers, if they wanted to, to bounce initiatives on me in a space of time where I couldn't discuss with anyone else whether these were acceptable or not" (Morrish). He introduced 'agenda meetings' where party spokespersons and chairpersons from the administration:

"could meet with the chief officers when the agenda was being put together for the [committee] meeting...It seemed to me [that] if you are trying to run a council it was better in fact to be in on that stage one, and to be well informed about what's coming through the pipeline" (Morrish).

such committees will also be a factor in the loss of power of elected political elites noted in section three of Chapter Eight.

Morrish admits "there were some committees [where the agenda meetings] didn't work very well", because of personality clashes. David Macklin feels that the real problem was that Morrish's disapproval of the committee chairmen meeting meant "that officers really weren't able to be at the meeting at which the issues were being discussed" and were therefore ill-informed about the administration's preferences.

As well as officers being less able to run things smoothly, the abandonment of the 'cabinet' meetings may not have brought any improvements in openness. Saxon Spence recalls that Labour spokespersons "started going to briefing meetings and that was stopped very quickly", to be replaced by agenda meetings, which Morrish admits were "patchy" in their workings. David Macklin feels that:

"quite a lot of significant decisions...would disappear from our view and emerge out of whatever discussion took place between the Alliance and Labour and I am not conscious that much of that was public open debate. In fact, in a sense it was no less closed than it had always been; to [the officers], of course, it was more closed" (Macklin).

This does not suggest a more open decision making process than the previous chairman's committee, and Morrish himself notes that when his party took over, "I suppose the working arrangement was a new kind of member elite".¹⁰

Other changes were made organisationally, with the Alliance (with Labour support) cutting the number and the size of committees. For the Alliance, the stated reason was to cut bureaucracy, but for the Tories it was because they couldn't guarantee attendance (WEH, 24/5/85). During the summer of 1985 the business of the county council was relatively uncontentious. However, the administration was still working to a Conservative budget. Any divisions would not be expected to come to the surface until budgetary negotiations had to be undertaken in the New Year. The one year agreement between Labour and the Alliance seemed to guarantee a measure of stability. That first year will now be investigated.

10.2.2. The First Year: Budget Making and Consolidation

The Conservatives were out of power for the first time, and there is no doubt that they found it hard to cope with. Sayers notes that his party were "shell shocked...because we weren't used to being in opposition, so it took us several months to get used to

¹⁰ Chapter Eight (see section 8.3.2.) has suggested that the increased importance of committees in terms of relative power, might indicate an increase in officer influence, because officers will control the flow of information to committees. Macklin's response suggests that officer power is partly dependent on organisational structures, and might actually diminish in hung councils.

that". For Luscombe, they were a "laughing stock", who "didn't even know how to move an amendment". Macklin notes that their reaction in debate as opposition members "distorted the whole process". Whatever the decision, they were always trying to display the Alliance as committed to big budgetary increases, which:

"knocked on the head the possibility of having a rational open debate about where the priorities lay...the Tories...were in a state of such dismay, I don't know whether they really organised themselves" (Macklin).

The dispirited Conservatives were the least of the administration's worries during the opening months of the working arrangement.

The problems of the Liberal's refusal to have a party whip meant that "there were quite a number of votes...when some Liberal members didn't vote the agreed line" (Morrish). In November, 1985, the tendency of some Liberals to go their own way after hearing Tory counter-arguments (as Harold Luscombe incredulously notes, "there were some shockers like that!") put the pact in danger of collapsing. Several Alliance members voted with the Conservatives against plans, proposed by Labour with Alliance group support, to "tighten up grammar school entry"; the loss of a motion to ban the eleven-plus led several Labour members to question the validity of the working arrangement. Following this, some Labour members voted with the Conservatives to allow mining at Hemerdon, which was opposed by the Alliance.¹¹ Labour members publicly argued that unless the Alliance pushed through the abolition of the grammars the deal would be over, but despite Spence claiming "the pact is near breaking point" (WEH, 1/11/85) the problems were smoothed over.¹²

The first budget was also remarkably easy to agree to, and the discussion procedures generally "worked well" (Spence). By the end of January, 1986, the working arrangement had agreed a "budget for jobs", with a rate rise of 19.8 percent which created 400 new council jobs. The Conservatives pointed out that this was the biggest increase since reorganisation. Harold Luscombe remembers that Labour:

¹¹ Given such voting behaviour, the difficulty of automatically regarding parties as unitary actors, especially at local level, is apparent. As Chapter Three (section 3.1.3.) points out, the Liberals are the least disciplined of the three major parties at local level. However, despite Luscombe's comments, it must be noted that the Liberals usually voted the agreed line, and when they did not, Morrish says he was usually aware "in advance" and would "moderate my speech accordingly". He was "quite prepared to accept that some members of the group after fair argument would not accept our view, but I don't like to be up front arguing and then when I turn round to see the vote being counted find half the group voting against me".

¹² The grammar schools were not abolished in Devon.

"obviously wanted to put more money in...but at the end...they backed off that...We made a number of modifications, and in some senses that was very helpful to us because we were having some difficulties with our own people and so [David Morrish and I] were able to turn around and [say to our members] 'well, I'm sorry, but you can't have that because the Labour party are demanding this'...so it was a helpful thing in some ways that we could sort of play one against the other" (Luscombe).¹³

David Morrish describes the excitement of putting the first budget together:

"[It] proved to be quite a cliff-hanger budget, and we had tea-break adjournments and all the rest, it was good exciting...Boys Own stuff, and the Express and Echo gave terrible headlines...all about chaos in the city, county council big rows, bust-ups, collapse, mayhem, you name it. In actual fact...Devon County Council did not adjourn one single meeting because it couldn't reach a decision...through the whole of that period. We spent less time putting our budget through than many other councils...I was quite happy about that first budget exercise" (Morrish).

Despite Morrish's satisfaction with the budget, and Luscombe arguing that, apart from those of a long term nature, most of the 'working arrangement's' policy objectives had been delivered, Labour members were discontented, both with what had been achieved and with the lack of credit they had been given for what *had* been achieved; Labour also complained of a lack of consultation. Luscombe agrees that Spence never achieved the recognition she deserved for what happened, noting that the Alliance usually took credit for policy initiatives which were really pushed for by Labour.¹⁴ It was not surprising that, during March and April 1986, reports appeared regularly in the local press of the problems the Alliance and Labour were having in agreeing to a continuation of the working arrangement. The Conservatives had also "started to get their act together" (Luscombe), and Arnold Sayers was offering to talk to the Alliance if they dropped their plans to abolish the grammar schools and curbed their spending (WMN, 25/3/86).¹⁵

Despite the problems, they reached agreement to continue the arrangement, with Labour still refusing to take chairs. Accordingly, Morrish and Luscombe had to decide

¹³ This demonstrates one way in which the party elites can maintain some of their power, especially if the backbench councillors of the coalition partners, as in Devon, regard each other with suspicion.

¹⁴ Labour's decision not to take chairs may have been one factor working against them achieving the recognition Luscombe admits they deserved. The importance of holding the chair to achieving policy objectives has been recognised as important by those leaders who are actually participating in government (see Chapter Four, Table 4.8 and discussion).

¹⁵ The importance of time to the process of learning has been discussed throughout this work, and Arnold Sayers admits it took them some time to get used to the new situation.

whether to keep the chair appointments as they were. Luscombe says that they decided that there had to be a number of changes to eradicate the "weak links", and:

"that's when the problems started because we had to agree that as far as the SDP was concerned there was no real weak link...The only people he wanted to move were going to be Liberals, and that was his problem, because when he started to sound various people out about changing these people around he came up against an awful lot of argument." (Luscombe).

For Spence and Luscombe, one post in particular was causing problems. Margaret Rogers, allegedly put in by Morrish to handle Ted Pinney, was not a popular choice as education chairperson. Arnold Sayers notes that:

"Margaret Rogers' inexperience didn't help her...because she wasn't sure of her ground she was all the more dogmatic and I think it made her life very difficult. I think on a personal level a number of us found her very difficult to cope with and let's face it...there has to be behind the scenes an understanding between opponents and personal relations do count for a great deal" (Sayers).

For Spence "she got across everybody", and Luscombe is forthright:

"she upset everybody, she upset her own people, she upset the officers...it wouldn't have been so bad if, at the end of the day she had produced the goods in terms of policy decisions, because she didn't" (Luscombe).

Despite this, no changes were made; the same people continued in the same posts. Luscombe thinks this was because the Alliance were having enough trouble keeping the Labour party happy without rocking their own boat. Disagreements concerning Mrs Rogers would eventually be a major factor in depriving the county council of any political leadership, but other factors connected with education were more pressing. The difficulty of satisfying Labour demands on the grammar schools issue, in particular, was soon to lead to more problems.

10.2.3. The End of the Working Arrangement.

Saxon Spence made it plain that the Labour party would pursue a more independent line in the new arrangement (WMN, 12/4/86). Despite the Liberals relinquishing the chairmanship a year ahead of schedule to allow the first ever Labour chairman of the council (Bill Evans), the Alliance "wavering" on abolishing grammar schools, with conflicting statements about intentions coming from Liberal and SDP spokespersons (Spence, WMN, 7/7/86), led to an early finish to the working arrangement within six months of the new one year deal being agreed. In October, 1986, Labour pulled out of the arrangement because "there was no longer the unity of

purpose in the Alliance groups to justify its continuance" (Spence, WMN, 16/10/86).¹⁶

Morrish believes that, while it was true "that there had been various hiccups in the Alliance", the stated reasons were merely a pretence. He believes one factor was the the forthcoming district elections in Plymouth and Exeter, a belief shared by David Macklin:

"the trouble was that we were coming up to the city elections and the Labour party weren't prepared to work with the Liberals at County Hall and fight them in the streets...they couldn't be seen to be too cosy with the Liberals/SDP " (Macklin).¹⁷

Spence agrees that this was part of the reason, but felt that there was by then considerable resentment at the Alliance owing its position to Labour; especially, "there was a bitterness [between Labour and the SDP] which made a happy working relationship quite difficult" (Spence). She feels Labour got very little out of the re-negotiated working arrangement, and the arrangement became harder to sustain as the district elections approached, "so the logic of not being linked in any formal way was almost irresistible" (Spence).

However, Morrish thinks the main reason it broke up was that it was going too well, and the two major parties could not afford to see the Alliance showing they could govern. Therefore:

"Labour...were looking for a way out and the Conservatives were looking for a way which they could trigger off the mayhem and chaos...which would enable them to ride back next time as the people...to manage things" (Morrish).

David Macklin also feels that, not in any coherent or orchestrated sense, but "in the negative sense", Conservative and Labour were "both united in the desire to denigrate the efforts of the Liberal/ Social Democrats...to see these people off".¹⁸

¹⁶ A demonstration of the importance of discipline between coalition partners, as well as another indication that had Spence demanded the education chair her frustration at failing to achieve policy objectives might have been avoided.

¹⁷ Another indication of the importance of factors that formal theory might have difficulty in incorporating. The existence of elections at other levels of local government appears to be a significant influence on local coalitional behaviour. Saxon Spence also notes that the forthcoming general election played a part in ending the working arrangement.

¹⁸ While it *may* have been the case in Devon that the two established parties were working together behind the scenes to minimise the influence of the SLD (see Leach &

However, the "mayhem and chaos", if that was indeed what the Conservatives really wanted, appeared some way off. Morrish and Luscombe decided to carry on as an Alliance minority administration without agreement with another party, and despite a great deal of "rates brinkmanship on the county council" (WMN, 9/2/87) this arrangement successfully negotiated a second budget with Labour; "we pushed them there and they didn't like that very much, but we did get our way" (Spence). Ted Pinney congratulated Spence and Morrish on "eating dirt" in public, and a leader in the following day's Western Morning News rather piously noted "party politics was the name of the game at yesterday's budget meeting until, surprise surprise, the Alliance and Labour decided to split their differences and join forces to fix the rate" (WMN, 20/2/87).

The Alliance was governing alone, without any agreement with another party, but despite the inevitable uncertainty this could produce during votes, the arrangement appeared relatively stable. Alliance party policy was close enough on many issues to make agreement with Labour relatively easy, and despite the difficulties the two groups had come to an agreement on the budget. However, according to David Stanbury, the 4 months from March to July was a period of "phoney peace", while behind the scenes Labour and the Conservatives were forging links to topple the Alliance (WMN, 29/7/87). The day following Stanbury's comments in the Western Morning News, a successful vote of no confidence would leave Devon "leaderless", a situation that would prevail effectively until the next county council elections. In addition, it would eventually contribute to many Liberals sharing the bitterness already felt against the SDP by Labour. The processes leading to the vote of no confidence and more alleged SDP "treachery" will now be assessed in section three.

Section Three: From Breakdown to Betrayal

As the previous section has shown, the Alliance was able to continue effectively running the council even after the end of the 'working arrangement' with Labour. David Macklin feels the council was "effectively run" by the two groups, and although it was more difficult after the collapse of the formal agreement (Macklin) the groups were still close enough together to make agreement relatively easy. As we have seen, they successfully agreed a budget in February, 1987, but just five months later the tensions between Labour and the Alliance ended any hope of future co-operation. A

Stewart, 1988; Leach & Game, 1989), Chapter Five found no evidence of this in the wider study. The findings in Chapter Nine (section four) of the great influence wielded by the SLD in policy terms, is also evidence that, in general, if the 'unholy alliance' is trying to minimise SLD power, it is failing.

successful Conservative vote of no confidence in the Alliance minority administration was supported by their former allies, the Labour party. This section will chart the movement from the breakdown of the relationship between Labour and the Alliance, towards the breakdown of trust which was eventually to occur between the former Alliance partners.

10.3.1. The Vote of No Confidence

As would be expected, opinions differ as to the reasons for the collapse of the Alliance minority administration in July, 1987, following a Conservative motion of no confidence. For Saxon Spence, the reasons go back to the appointment of the education chair:

"I was rung up at ten to eight one morning by a colleague, who said, 'have you heard what Mrs Rogers is saying on the radio, she is blaming the other groups, the officers, everyone but herself for the budget problems she [is] having', because she was in a budget crisis in education, so I rang up the press and [got a tape]. I listened to it and I was very affronted because it was a very nasty attack on the chief education officer...we were so incensed...there was a vendetta between the chair of the committee and the chief officer, she tried to get him the sack and that's the beginning and end of it, it was disgraceful" (Spence).

With the support of Ted Pinney she moved a vote of no confidence in Mrs Rogers at the education committee meeting, which was unsuccessful, but the Alliance group felt that more was to follow. In the week before the council meeting, David Morrish warned both David Macklin and his Alliance group meeting that a vote of no confidence could be coming, and got his group's agreement that if a successful vote did come they would resign. He saw Arnold Sayers on the day of the council meeting, and challenged him as to:

"whether there was any other business that he was going to bring up this afternoon other than that which he had told us about. I was told there was not...the chief executive had also sounded him out and had got nothing to indicate that there was anything else coming up [but] the manner in which the denial was given wasn't the way I expected had it been the case. But there was this denial right up to the last minute" (Morrish).

When the education committee's minutes came to the council Arnold Sayers moved a vote of no confidence in terms Spence says she had no option but to support:

"we were very concerned, not only about the education budget, but [also] social services...we kept saying it was in a mess and they wouldn't listen to us and our particular strength is in social services" (Spence).

Inevitably, there were allegations of a 'pact' between Labour and Conservative, after what the press called "an extraordinary alliance" against the ruling Liberal/ SDP Alliance (WMN, 31/7/87). Both Saxon Spence and Arnold Sayers say this was quite untrue:

"I can assure you there was absolutely no pact. We did hear on the grapevine that we might be supported in that vote by the Labour party, but there were no discussions beforehand as I remember it" (Sayers).

Spence says not only was there no pact, she did not know there was going to be a vote of no confidence in the administration. She assumed it was going to be a vote of no-confidence in Margaret Rogers, but the Conservative leader Sayers:

"made it more general, a vote of no confidence in the administration, but in fact he did it in terms which summarised our own growing anxieties about social services and education...how you can show it wasn't a conspiracy was because we were all totally unprepared for what happened" (Spence).

To support her argument that there was no 'secret alliance', Spence points out that, perhaps surprisingly given the seriousness of *any* motion of censure, not only was there no pre-group meeting of Labour members before the council meeting to discuss a vote of no confidence, but also that "it wasn't a unanimous vote on our side". David Macklin also doubts if there was any "secret deal", and while Morrish says "it never surprises me to see it when the Conservatives and the Labour party get together", he does not seem to feel that there was any prior agreement. Harold Luscombe puts it down to clever politics by the Conservatives:

"after the first 12 months, the idea that they were in opposition...all of a sudden began to gel, and they started to get their act together. And getting their act together, of course, it meant that they could flex their muscles a little bit. They knew the relationship with [the Alliance] and the Labour party was not good and therefore they took a chance on a vote of no confidence, and Saxon got on its coat tails" (Luscombe).

There was a great deal of criticism about Morrish's decision to resign, a decision he feels was unavoidable:

"Maybe I've got an old fashioned view about political conventions but a vote of no confidence doesn't come up very often...I have a clear indication what it means, it means you have got no confidence in the people who are running it and you want them to step aside for somebody else. But for [Conservative and Labour] to go 'round afterwards saying that 'well, of course you should have stayed there' and, 'you were really rather spoiled

children by going'...I think indicates that we are dealing with people who, should I say, seem to have different principles and standards in politics than I have got" (Morrish).

Spence feels that "the daftest thing they ever did was resign, they didn't have to. they just took the huff" and regards Morrish's reasons for resigning as a sign that "he likes the high moral ground". She feels that if he had adjourned and taken notice of Luscombe things would have been different. Certainly, for Luscombe, it was a "very bad decision...I would have put two fingers up to them and just carried on..it's no good being upset". For Harold Luscombe the resignation decision by Morrish was a crucial factor in their continuing relationship, and "from that point on we started to drift apart". Despite his obvious admiration for David Morrish, Luscombe sees him as not hard enough at such times:

"you're a politician, while you can have very strict morals in your personal life, when it comes to arguing policy...you've got to use every opportunity you can to get the the objective you want...If that means you've got to be a bit naughty from time to time then you've got to be a bit naughty..politics is a hard game" (Luscombe).

It is impossible to imagine Morrish agreeing with such sentiments. He genuinely felt he had no alternative but to go,¹⁹ and argued that the Alliance now regarded Sayers as *de facto* leader of the council, an honour Sayers declined (WMN, 4/8/87). For Macklin and his officers, the summer months were as good a time as any to be leaderless because of the relative lack of committee activity (WMN, 1/8/87). For the remainder of 1987, the council drifted along from meeting to meeting with no administration, heading inevitably towards more problems when the 1988 budget meeting arrived.

10.3.2. The Collapse of the Alliance

The six months between the vote of no confidence and the 1988 budget were characterised by numerous problems, in some of which (for example, a monetary

¹⁹ In British national politics, a successful vote of no confidence has been established by constitutional convention as requiring the government's resignation followed by a general election (as in 1979). In German national politics a successful vote of no confidence requires an alternative and viable government proposal (as in 1982). No such requirements exist at local government level, and Morrish would have been perfectly correct in remaining in office, given that there was no opportunity of dissolution, and as subsequent events demonstrate, no viable alternative administration. In such circumstances, Luscombe's response is probably the most sensible. More seriously, what this incident does demonstrate is the importance institutional factors (which vary from country to country) can have on coalition formation and maintenance. A successful coalition theory will have to be capable of adapting to take account of such important variables.

crisis in social services) officers recommendations were followed. Macklin feels that "uncertainty developed because there were no powerbrokers reacting with any confidence", and Sayers remembers David Macklin:

"coming here on one or two occasions when the Alliance had abandoned control, urging us to take control, because it would have meant from the officers point of view that they would have felt that the thing was running coherently..it was all very cumbersome and not very good" (Sayers).²⁰

Other voices, notably David Morrish and Independent member Mary Turner, also felt the Conservatives, as the largest group, had a duty to take responsibility, Turner feeling the council had become "a laughing stock" (WMN, 8/1/88). Sayers argued that there was no way that they would have taken what "would only have been a form of nominal control" (Sayers). Throughout this time accusations of pacts between Labour and Conservative were made and denied, but Sayers' defence that "Conservative and Labour are trying to act in a responsible way so that the county can continue to do its business" (WMN, 8/1/88) was not enough to stop the rumours.

However, Spence had already insisted that her party would not support the Conservatives (WEH, 4/8/87) and had called on the Alliance to join in the running of the council (WMN, 9/9/87). However, national party politics, in the shape of the movement towards a merger of the Liberals and SDP, were beginning to affect the ability of the Alliance to deliver a coherent response to such requests. As Morrish notes:

"clearly the events that were going to lead to the break-up of the Alliance and to the establishment of new parties and goodness knows what, were already in fact casting a shadow on the relationship between the SDP and the Alliance" (Morrish).

By the end of 1987, the 34 existing Alliance members, although still just together, were effectively 3 factions, comprising (1) the supporters of the merger, which included both Liberals and SDP members, (2) SDP members opposed to the merger, dubbed 'Owenites', and (3) Liberals, including Morrish, opposed to merger, dubbed 'fundamentalist Liberals' (WEH, 28/12/87). Within a few weeks of 1988 commencing, the seven Owenites (a group which included Luscombe) pulled out of the Alliance citing "differences of opinion which could not be reconciled" (Luscombe, WMN, 23/1/88). Morrish, still the leader of the Alliance despite his opposition to a

²⁰ Another indication that, despite the greater *power* officers may have had without a coherent political response, good officers may be more concerned with ensuring effective and efficient government.

merger supported by the majority of his members, remarked, "we go our separate ways with good friendship" (WMN, 23/1/88).²¹ The revised party positions on the 85-member council were: Conservatives 38, Alliance 27, Labour 10, SDP 7, Independent 3, with one of those Independents shortly to join the Tories (WEH, 23/1/88).

10.3.3. Budget Betrayal

Luscombe's decision to go it alone preceded the making of the annual budget in January/ February, 1988. Some of the differences of opinion cited by Luscombe for leaving the Alliance were budgetary and the SDP produced their own budget, as did the other 3 party groups. Macklin recalls that time as:

"politically extraordinarily difficult [with] corridor discussions [going] on to produce some compromises..the treasurer was doing most of the drafting...you hoped there would be one of the budgets that would be carried" (Macklin).

However, one by one, all of the four budgets were voted down. Luscombe recalls the Labour, Alliance and SDP group leaders and their secretaries getting together "to see if there was any common ground", but there was not enough to reach agreement. Then Luscombe received a "complete surprise":

"Arnold Sayers and Ted Pinney came and said, 'is there any chance we might come and talk to you?'...I was absolutely amazed. I met them, said 'these are our proposals, take them or leave them'...the amazing thing was how easy the Tories caved in...there was no common ground at all" (Luscombe).

Unsurprisingly, the Conservatives remember being rather closer in general terms than Luscombe remembers. Arnold Sayers recollects that the council had:

"reached a stalemate...and my pragmatic approach was that the SDP budget was closest to ours and, therefore, we ought to get our heads together...and I shall never forget, however many, six of us, getting together in a small, not particularly smoke-filled room...on our side it was...myself, Graham Andrews, [who] was spokesperson on the finance committee on our side, and there was Harold Luscombe from the SDP and David Stanbury [SDP] whom I always got on with very well, and then the treasurer came in with his adding machine, purely to make sure that the figures matched. It's not

²¹ The simultaneous break-up and merger of the Alliance demonstrates most graphically the impact of external political forces beyond the control of local actors (see Pridham, 1987; Mellors, 1989). The particular nature of Devon's response, with a longer tradition of Liberal politics than most areas of the country, and an important position in the SDP's short history, meant such forces were even more turbulent there than in other regions.

good government, because you are trying to thrash out a compromise, and I was very conscious of the fact that there were people hanging around outside and we had to come to a very quick compromise. [It took] inside of an hour [to come to an agreement]" (Sayers).

Luscombe recalls that:

"In a very short period of time Arnold Sayers said...'if you're prepared to do a little bit of manipulating'...it was very insignificant amounts, we were talking about one hundred, or whatever, two hundred thousand...we said 'okay'. We didn't cut any money off our budget or increase it...we just swapped the headings" (Luscombe).

In the "most bitter and acrimonious budget debate seen in the main chamber for years" (WMN, 19/2/88), Harold Luscombe moved the "compromise deal" as an SDP budget with Conservative support. In fairness to the Conservatives, and in response to Luscombe's memory that nothing was cut off his original proposals, the agreed rate increase was 11.27 percent as against the SDP's original proposal of 11.75 percent (WMN, 18/2/88 and 19/2/88) so the Conservatives may have achieved more than Luscombe credits. The Western Evening Herald listed a number of county projects it says the SDP "sacrificed...by throwing in their lot with the Conservatives" (WEH, 19/2/88). Even so, Sayers conceded that some Tories were unhappy with the deal (WMN, 19/2/88). The Alliance and Labour were certainly upset, although Spence thought the SDP "were being very clever...using their new role as powerbrokers".

The SDP's movement across the political spectrum inevitably brought renewed calls of treachery, and Luscombe recalls being called "a traitor and a Tory" by other councillors. David Morrish told the SDP councillors, "you have abandoned the principles on which you were elected" (WEH, 19/2/88). However, Luscombe feels that he did try to reach agreement with Labour and the remains of the Alliance, but when Saxon Spence's belief that "you can't do anything without me" gave way to the realisation that they could, because the Tories "would support you if your policies were right" (Luscombe), his pragmatism triumphed. The bitterness which he feels had resurfaced between the SDP and the Labour party may have hardened Luscombe's resolve further.²²

²² Throughout this study, the power of the middle party has been demonstrated. What the SDP's ability to forge alliances with all three parties on the council may also show is the power of a centre party with an 'ambiguous' ideological position, even in an effective 'four-party system' like Devon. The wide ranging responses of experts to Castles & Mair's (1984) survey concerning the ideological position of the SDP (see Chapter Nine, section 9.2.1.) may be evidence not of the ignorance of respondents, but of the SDP's particular ideological mixture of, crudely speaking, to the left on social issues and to the right on economic issues (see Owen, 1986).

From that moment, Devon drifted "rudderless", awaiting what was seen as the inevitable return of the traditional rulers. The urgings of Luscombe and David Owen for the ex-Alliance partners to reach an accord to prevent a "Tory landslide" in the forthcoming county council elections, were rejected by Morrish as "pointless" given the SDP's vote with the Conservatives (WEH, 21/11/88), and following merger between the Liberals and 'non-Owenite' SDP councillors, Morrish and two Liberals resigned from the new party. The 'Alliance' was over, and the Social and Liberal Democrats (later renamed the Liberal Democrats) rose from the ashes.

What the Western Morning News called the "impossible dream" was soon to be over, as "reliable sources" informed the paper's reporter that the Conservatives had already selected their chairpersons in anticipation of returning to power in the May elections (WMN, 7/4/89). Section four of this chapter briefly considers that final year.

Section Four: The Aftermath

This final section will examine the role of council officers in the decision making process during the final year or so, and then briefly assess the impressions the actors involved now have about the period between 1985-89, when the process of decision making was no longer a formality and debate mattered.

10.4.1. The Power of Officers

Following the Conservative/ SDP budget of February 1988, for the remainder of the period of hungness the council lacked political leadership. There were no permanent chairs, and some committee meetings were abandoned because no one would take the chair. Urgent business was dealt with by council officers "after discussion with group leaders" (WMN, 31/3/88), and the following year's budget decisions were officer-led. A senior official was quoted as saying "nobody has the courage to take unpopular decisions" (WMN, 4/3/88), while another un-named officer remarked:

"having no leadership means enormous problems. Because there is no corporate drive within the parties, they are breaking down into purely tribal factions. Tribalism is a good description of what is going on" (WMN, 4/3/88).

This factionalism may be one reason for the Liberal councillor John Walker's claim that in the last 15 months of Devon's period of hungness, power was "handed over to the officers" (WEH, 21/8/89). The opinions of the main actors regarding that claim are contrary.

Arnold Sayers is in no doubt that Walker's assertion is true, but feels it is understandable:

"I think undoubtedly the officers had to assume more power, because the governmental machine had to grind on and things had to be done. Inevitably, [officers] had to do things that in normal circumstances they would have put to the leader of the council or the chairman of the committee" (Sayers).

Harold Luscombe agrees with Sayers, but is more forthright, believing that:

"the officers were more or less running the show. They were deciding what was going on the agendas. It was fairly obvious it was being orchestrated...officers were allowed to get on with it" (Luscombe).

However, David Morrish, who "couldn't have wished for better officer/member relationships" throughout the 4 years of life in the balance, disagrees with Sayers and Luscombe:

"At the end of the day, what was decided, of course, was decided by the elected members whatever the officers might want to do. What I think was lost was the momentum of bringing in new initiatives. I don't think power shifted to the officers, I just think power drained a bit" (Morrish).

Like Morrish, Saxon Spence has "a more favourable view than some of my colleagues" about the role of officers in policy making during that time:

"I think if you've got good officers they play a major part in your affairs, and the one characteristic of Devon is that we have never appointed political officers. We have always had all parties sitting on appointments and we will disagree or agree across parties" (Spence).

For Spence, politicians should do the politics and officers should serve them. Spence's comments concerning good officers are demonstrated by the respect the group leaders had for their chief executive, a respect he returned. Before the end of 1988, David Macklin had retired, and he was not in position for the final ten months of hungness. However, he still talks knowledgeably about the idea that officers were then controlling the council, and the final authoritative word on this must be his:

"well, I wasn't there, but I think that there is a great myth about the officers running the council...in a sense it always happens because we are full-time...and so the officer's job is to provide leadership...I actually think it ought to be like that, that you employ professional people to know about things who put up proposals and perhaps alternative proposals and make a decision. If you are in a position where you are *not* going to get a

decision at all...you should never just say, 'the committee must decide', you should say, 'here are the alternatives and I think you should do this and the best chief officers always do. And in a sense, I think they always should have been running the council, but the members make the decision. The fact that members are indecisive means that the officer's advice is more likely to be taken, because you have got to make a decision and there is one in front of you" (Macklin).

The politicians are in disagreement about the role of officers during that period. However, it is inevitable that local professionals are involved in decision making, and Macklin's analysis perfectly sums up the classical view of the officer-councillor relationship, while taking into account the problems that a lack of political control will bring to that relationship.²³

10.4.2. Four Years Of...?

Finally, how do the actors concerned look back now on those 4 years? Inevitably, while the parties who had their only taste of power at county level during that time are sad those days are gone, the Conservative traditional rulers exhibit relief that it is all over.²⁴ Arnold Sayers is unequivocal:

"I actually hated it, because you never knew where you were going and everything was open to question of one sort and another...I don't think it was good government...[it was] incompetence and extravagance...people thought the county council was a shambles" (Sayers).

However, Sayers' criticism that "everything was open to question" would undoubtedly be seen by David Morrish as a positive rather than a negative characteristic of that period. For Morrish, "the committees became more interesting and more exciting, debate mattered, people listened to it. Everything is totally predictable now" (Morrish). Luscombe also agrees that "it was very exciting...it was a very good

²³This range of responses to the question of officer influence reflects the diversity of opinion already discussed concerning the officer-councillor relationship in hung councils (see Chapter Eight, section 8.3.2.). Moss (1983, p.9) notes the possibilities hungness gives to officers "to manipulate the political process and effectively exercise control", while on the other hand, Blowers sees that officers may become reluctant to venture proposals (Blowers, 1987, p.45). The responses of officers does not suggest that officers enjoy a lack of political leadership.

²⁴ The responses of Devon's leaders support the findings in Chapter Eight concerning attitudes to the policy process (see for example, section 8.1.2., hypothesis 5.3). Former rulers were overwhelmingly against the new decision making processes, while former opposition parties were largely in favour.

period" (Luscombe). Unsurprisingly, Saxon Spence agrees with Morrish and Luscombe:

"it was great fun, I enjoyed it, I mean it is the concern that majority parties have that the...small minority can actually call the tune, and it is quite exciting but you try and use it to achieve your political policies and that's what we did" (Spence)

Even for those who enjoyed the experience, not everything was positive about that time. For Spence, one negative factor was that:

"what you don't get as a minority group is any credit, as you realise when you talk to everyone. We were seen as the people who ruined everything for the Alliance, or on the Tory side allowed to ruin everything, but we did our best...I certainly wouldn't mind [going back] to being hung" (Spence).

The final words go to David Morrish, and they give some hint as to what an exciting time it must have been for the politicians involved:

'nobody could give us a textbook as to how to run a balanced council; we were writing it ourselves as we went along'.

The conclusion of the 'textbook' came on May 4th, 1989, when the Conservatives, under the new leadership of Ted Pinney (replacing the retiring Arnold Sayers), easily won back control of Devon. The newly formed Social and Liberal Democrats lost 16 seats, and were left with only 11 councillors. Only 2 SDP councillors, one of them Harold Luscombe, retained their seats. Still standing as a Liberal, David Morrish also retained his seat, as did Labour leader Saxon Spence.

Conclusions

Throughout this case study, the importance of personal relationships to forming and maintaining political coalitions has been apparent. It is also clear that both office and policy considerations are important, and that the failure to deliver crucial policy objectives will lead to pressure to break up an otherwise successful coalition.

The lure of achieving policy pay-offs to coalition formation is apparent in Devon. Not even having to deal with a party they regarded as 'traitors' was enough to prevent Labour from reaching agreement. However, the understandable wish to be a part of the policy process after years of opposition may have contributed to the later problems of maintaining the coalition. Perhaps a more reflective approach would have avoided the mistakes that were made in allocating committee chairs. With more

political know-how, the appointment of a novice to the most crucial chair, both in budgetary importance and in terms of the coalition's cohesion, would not have been made. In addition, a different leader than David Morrish might have been more ruthless when it became clear that some appointments were unsatisfactory. Not only that, with more determination Labour could probably have attained the education chair. If they had done, the failure of the Alliance to tackle the grammar school issue, and the inevitable frustration of that failure combined with an unsympathetic chair, might well have been avoided.

The potential importance of holding office to achieving policy pay-offs, noted in the empirical chapters, is apparent here. However, some of the behaviour patterns in Devon, for example, the exclusion of traditional rulers from initial coalition formation, have not been demonstrated in the larger sample of hung councils, which illustrates the importance of not reading too much into the findings of descriptive studies with few cases. However, the reverse is that a deeper study of a hung council like this demonstrates both the complexity of the relationships, and the different ways equally honourable people will interpret the same events.

The potential importance of institutional structures and conventions is indicated in this case study in a number of ways. Morrish's decision to resign after the vote of no confidence was constitutionally unnecessary, and most politicians (and certainly Spence and Luscombe) would have acted differently. However, other systems, with different institutional requirements, would have given politicians like Spence and Luscombe no opportunity to remain in power. David Morrish would probably have acted the same whatever the conventions, a demonstration that characterising all politicians as "office-driven" is inaccurate. If that had been the case, Morrish would surely have held on to the rewards of office; Morrish's whole approach stamps him as a "policy-pursuing" politician. Other institutional factors have been highlighted in this chapter, most notably the importance of structure to control. The abandonment of the one-party chairman's committee, and the decision not to replace it with a more open 'administration' committee, did not result in greater openness, as Morrish admits. Chief executive David Macklin felt that this decision resulted in the bureaucracy's knowledge of what was going on declining, which suggests that officer power is partly dependent on organisational structures, and might actually diminish in hung councils without such coordinating committees..

Throughout this thesis, it has been noted that factors beyond the scope of a large-scale questionnaire based exercise will be influences on coalitional behaviour. This chapter

has highlighted a number of those areas, especially those involving personal relations. The personal and geographical closeness between Spence and Morrish contributed to the formation of the working arrangement. Variables not normally mentioned have been seen to be influential; for example, even the location of the council offices has been convincingly cited as a factor in coalition formation. Once the initial coalition had formed, a better relationship between certain crucial actors in the coalition could have saved the working arrangement, and may have prevented the vote of no confidence. The hostility between the SDP and Labour, a feeling that probably ran much deeper in Devon because of David Owen, also played a part in the politics of that period.

However, despite all the undoubted insights into life in a hung council this chapter has given, this analysis has demonstrated the problems of trying to ascribe 'reasons' for the political behaviour of the actors involved. For example, was the collapse of the working arrangement because of the Alliance's failure to deliver its policy promises, or was it because of the forthcoming elections? Was the vote of no confidence mainly inspired by Mrs Rogers' alleged treatment of her officers, because Labour and Conservative had a vested interest in demonstrating the lack of ability of the Alliance parties, or because the Conservatives wished to create the conditions favourable for their return to power? What were the SDP's motives in agreeing a budget with the Conservatives, when an experienced politician like Luscombe must have realised it would effectively mean the end of any hope of future co-operation with parties the SDP's electoral future probably depended upon?

The realisation that this sort of individual study still leaves many important questions unanswered reminds the observer of the complexity of political behaviour. Perhaps surprisingly, it also reminds one of the value of formal theory. What this study indicates is that knowledge of the peculiarities of a particular political system and the personalities involved may be essential to an understanding of strategies pursued by the actors involved. This does *not* mean that an attempt at general explanations is pointless; it means that general explanations will need to be modified by knowledge of the system involved. However, even such knowledge is incapable of explaining all the motives and tactics of political actors. Thanks to formal theorists, we know the importance of office and policy, and formal theory provides a fundamental core from which more accurate assessments of political behaviour can be made.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

This study has been a continuation of Laver & Schofield's (1990) effort to bridge the gap between the different approaches to coalition studies. Throughout, the 'multi-method approach' has enabled a number of different perspectives to be utilised in the task of understanding what happens when a local council becomes hung. The analysis has had no particular theoretical or methodological axe to grind; its main purpose has been to understand the politics of hung councils. The results detailed in this thesis show that the approach has succeeded in throwing new light on the phenomenon of English hung local governments. The findings have supported some previous suppositions, and confounded others, in the areas of both coalition studies and local government studies.

A great many areas have been covered in this examination of 'life in the balance', but it is not proposed to re-address all the findings here.¹ This conclusion will assess the general findings of this thesis in three particular areas. First, we scrutinise the effects of hungness on the location of power, and assess attitudes to the new process of decision making. Second, the strategies of the major political parties are examined. Finally, the consequences of some of our findings for the possible construction of a formal theory applicable to local government coalitions are assessed.

The Effects of Hungness on the Power of Local Actors

One of the most important questions that this research has asked is, "where does power lie in hung councils?" Previous writers, relying largely on evidence from a small number of hung local authorities, have posited that party elites may lose power to the body of councillors as a whole and that officers can assume a more influential role as 'power-brokers'. However, this research is the first large scale exploration of the location of power inside hung councils, and can offer a more authoritative view than those previously advanced.²

¹ The conclusions at the end of each of the empirical chapters (Chapters Four to Nine inclusive) go into considerable detail on the results of testing the many hypotheses generated during this study, and it is not proposed to go over much the same ground as those conclusions here. For specific conclusions in each of the areas examined by the main body of this work, the reader is referred to the relevant chapters.

² The findings have been published in Temple (1991).

It is very clear that the location of influence shifts considerably when a council becomes hung. The findings from the control group of non-hung councils support the widely held view that a 'joint elite' of leading councillors and officers control the direction of policy in English local government, with the elected *political* elite supreme in the policy process when one party has an overall majority. However, the distribution of influence is radically different when a council is hung, with both politicians and bureaucrats regarding committees as the most influential bodies. From their dominant position in non-hung councils, elected party elites become only the fourth most powerful body of influence in hung councils. Whether such a loss of power means that 'backbench' councillors gain power is more difficult to decide, but the greater influence ascribed to the full council meeting and the committees suggest that the power of the individual councillor *is* increased.

The committees, relatively unimportant as arenas of policy-making in non-hung councils, become the new focus of the decision making process. This is contrary to the findings of many previous observers (for example, Blowers, 1987, Mellors, 1983), who have argued that it is the full council which gains power at the expense of the committees. While the full council meeting also assumes new significance, it is in committee that both chief executives and party leaders see power as concentrated. The vast majority of institutional changes introduced in hung councils concern the composition of committees, with innovations such as the abolition of *ex officio* membership, the introduction of proportionality for committee membership, rotating chairmanships, and substitute member schemes, all indicating the central role of committees in the conduct of local authority business.

The responses of political actors concerning their influence over specific policy areas also indicates a more diffuse form of decision making. It is clear that many more feel influential in hung councils than in non-hung councils. This greater influence extends to the process of budget making, and the contention that there is a more open and consensual form of decision making in hung councils appears to be supported by this research. For many local political actors, debate becomes important for the first time in their political experience. Committee decisions become uncertain, and the full council meeting achieves a new importance when votes can no longer be taken for granted. As the responses of Devon's party leaders indicates, leading councillors become unsure of just which way their troops will vote. All this appears to support the contention that backbencher councillors become more influential.

The increased influence often attributed to officers when a council becomes hung is less apparent than the loss of power of the elected political elite. That said, officers will largely control the flow of information to committees, and the premier importance of committees in hung councils *may* indicate a policy process dominated by officers. However, the general enthusiasm displayed by local politicians towards the new style of decision making does not indicate a policy process dominated by officers. Most hung councils have introduced improvements to the access politicians get to chief officers, which suggests that the loss of power by the former political elite is at least partly offset by the greater access *all* politicians get to chief officers. The example of Devon County Council, where the previous unofficial 'cabinet' was disbanded upon the arrival of hungness in 1985, also offers an indication that officer power might actually decrease in hung councils. Committee structures generally change to reflect the more open process of decision making, and the previous close relationship between the 'joint elite' can disappear, with officers no longer as closely involved in day to day policy making. Conversely, the final 15 months of hungness in Devon (before the 1989 election returned overall control to the Conservatives) illustrates the possibility that, when there is no administration in place, decision making power could pass over to the officers.

However, in the majority of hung councils, decision making becomes closer to the 'official' description of local democracy, with the full council also assuming new importance and officers moving closer to their formal roles as servants of the whole council. While many chief executives see the new processes unfavourably, the majority are either favourably inclined or see no difference in either the quality of decision making or the quality of the policies which emerge from the new structures. Given the upheaval hungness brings to the smooth routine established by officers and the previous political elite, such responses are surprising. The extra demands placed upon officers are considerable at times; for example, being required to produce three or four separate budgets, and then co-ordinating the inevitable compromises, is extremely time-consuming. The response of political actors to the changes hungness brings is largely favourable, with the exception of those who formerly ruled alone. However, in long term hung councils, even traditional rulers become more likely to see virtue in the processes of consensual decision making.

Overall, the responses of actors to this research suggest that the dominant view of coalition politics in British political culture as leading to uncertainty, loss of principles, and instability needs to be modified, if not completely changed. Hung councils can work extremely efficiently in England, even without a tradition of

coalition or minority administrations. However, not all actors support this view. As suggested above, traditional rulers (predominantly Conservatives) are generally opposed to the new decision making structures. Therefore, the political parties will have different views of coalition politics, which will affect the strategies they favour.

The Tactics of the Political Parties

This study indicates that the four major party groups at local level (Labour, Conservatives, SLD, and Independents) will adopt different strategies in hung councils. This is partly due to the views of national parties. The two major parties are obsessed by the need to win a majority at national level, and effective coalition politics at the local level may set an unwelcome precedent. Indeed, in support of the idea that national views will prevail, there is a distinct tendency for both Labour and Conservative groups to form minority administrations, and Labour is less involved in coalitions than any of the other three groups. However, as Devon shows, national party views are capable of being ignored if local needs demand it.

While it might be accurate to say that the political strategies adopted will depend on local factors, reducing all differences to local factors is to fall into the same trap as the 'multi-dimensional' approach. To have some value in comparative terms, we need to establish some general 'truths'. For example, connectedness on an ideological scale has been shown to be an important factor in the formation of durable cabinet coalitions in most western European democracies, and the same constraints appear to apply in English local government.

The construction of a unidimensional policy scale (see Chapter Nine, section two) was beset by a number of difficulties, but it did provide some evidence that, to a large extent, local party strategies appear to be dictated by the ideological position of the parties. When majority *coalition* administrations are formed, it is *ideological* connectedness rather than the closest party in policy terms that matters. However, an examination of single party *minority* administrations reveals that it is the party closest to the single ruling party in *policy* terms which is almost always the most influential opposition group when key decisions have to be made. When minority administrations form, the closest party on the policy scale to the single ruling party displays greater influence on the crucial budgetary decisions that have to be made than other opposition parties. The differences are very apparent.³

³ See Chapter Nine, Section Four.

After the construction of the policy scale, an examination of policy pay-offs indicated the powerful position of the SLD, especially in three-party systems. Given its policy position in the middle of the two major parties, the SLD is in the ideal position, and all the evidence indicates that SLD groups take full advantage of their opportunities. In the great majority of three-party systems, the SLD is either the ruling minority party, a member of a winning coalition, or the most influential opposition party where a minority administration rules. A general hypothesis of greater SLD influence in three-party systems (where the parties are Conservative, Labour, and SLD) could be proposed; the supporting evidence is overwhelming. The apparent relationship between policy closeness and budgetary influence in minority administrations gives the centre party an advantage, and the SLD's influence over the budget is considerable. It is more likely to achieve its budgetary aims than any of the other party groups.⁴

The SLD is not favourably disposed towards any particular party. Whether payoffs are committee chairs or budgetary concessions, the party will deal with any of the other groups, although its dealings with Independents are less common than its agreements with Labour or Conservative.⁵ The willingness of SLD parties to make deals with all other party groups has led to frequent accusations of 'opportunism' (see Blowers, 1987, p.42). Such accusations, usually made against small SLD groups at local level, receives some support from the evidence of this research. Small and pivotal SLD groups appear to be a contributory factor to administrative instability, with the SLD apparently willing to switch support in order to gain maximum political advantage. On the other hand, when a large SLD group forms a minority administration, such governments are very durable.

The stability of SLD minority administrations may be connected to the presence of small and pivotal Labour groups. It seems that such groups, too small to govern effectively as a minority administration, have little choice but to support the SLD if they wish to have some policy influence. Ideological proximity has been shown to be important to the formation of coalition administrations, and policy closeness has been shown to be important to achieving policy payoffs from a ruling minority party. This study has indicated that Labour's ideological position, out on the left of the

⁴ As Mellors (1989, p. 107) also demonstrates.

⁵ Although a number of multi-party coalitions involved both SLD/Alliance groups and Independents, there was only a single case of an Alliance/Independent coalition in the universe of 121 administrations.

political spectrum, means it has little choice of partner. In the majority of cases, Labour's only ideological neighbour is the SLD.

There are a few cases where Labour has reached agreement in a two-party coalition with Conservative or Independent groups, but such cases are rare.⁶ None of the other groups is as constrained as Labour in its choice of partner. The evidence suggests that, in the initial stages of hungness, Labour groups will shy away from agreements with other parties, but that continued exclusion from power will force Labour to modify this strategy. However, the Labour party is probably the most disadvantaged of the three major parties when it comes to achieving its policy goals in hung councils. If a local Labour group wants a share of power, it is virtually forced to deal with the SLD.

Despite the Conservative position on the far right of the ideological spectrum, the party usually has two potential partners to choose from, and the evidence suggests it will form coalitions with either Independent or SLD groups. The general closeness of Conservatives and Independents is indicated by the longevity of Conservative/Independent coalitions, which last longer than any other type of government. Conservative involvement in hung councils is considerable, and when all 121 administrations which formed during the lifetime of hungness are examined, it is the Conservatives who have been involved in more administrations than any other party group. This is partly explained by the large number of councils where they formerly ruled, and their attempts to continue ruling alone after the arrival of hungness. Although some of these minority administrations lasted a considerable amount of time, this attempt to rule alone appears to have meant that Independent groups were largely excluded from power during the early stages of hungness. The increase in Independent involvement is explained by Conservative willingness to deal with Independent groups, and all the two-party coalitions Independents were currently involved in were with a Conservative group. While this implies (probably correctly) that most Independent groups are close ideologically to Conservatives, the involvement of Independents with both Labour and the SLD is a warning that Independents cannot be automatically treated as 'closet Conservatives'.

Before addressing the final part of these conclusions, some general points about the administrations which form must be made. Previous research into hung councils has

⁶ There are two cases where Labour formed a coalition with just the Conservatives, and one Labour/Independent administration, although there may be less overt cases of co-operation between Labour and either Conservatives or Independents.

usually noted that administrations tend to be informal and single party.⁷ Both of those conclusions have been challenged, with majority coalitions (albeit, generally informally constituted) now the most common form of administration. Whether this indicates a learning process is debatable, as long term hung councils are *less* likely to generate coalition administrations than short term hung councils. Where minority administrations do form, they are overwhelmingly formal arrangements. The high number of minority administrations which are formally constituted may help to explain their greater durability; they are the longest lasting of all types of administration in hung councils. In the minority administrations in councils where we can place the parties on an ideological scale, policy pay-offs to the nearest party on the scale help to explain such longevity.

In fact, closeness in policy terms seems to be a greater influence on administrative duration than either ideological connectedness or coalition size. However, arithmetical factors are clearly important. When one party is close to an overall majority it tends to form a minority administration, and, despite the closeness to a majority, such administrations tend to be short-lived. Conversely, when no party is close to a majority, coalition administrations are the norm, and such coalitions tend to last longer than the average. Formal coalition theorists would not be surprised by such findings, which are easily explained (see the conclusions to Chapters Four and Six). However, a number of the findings of this research would have specific consequences for a successful theory of local coalition formation, and the final task of this thesis is to address those issues.

Some Consequences for a Theory of Local Coalitions

Although this study has not been intended as an attempt to formulate a theory of local coalitions, many of its findings could have consequences for such an endeavour. The difficulty of including particular local factors in a formal theory is apparent, and whether the construction of a specific theory of English local government coalition formation is a useful task is open to debate.⁸ Certainly, the construction of a *general* theory of local coalitions, capable of explaining local coalitional behaviour in a variety of sub-national systems, is highly problematic. For Laver:

⁷ For example, Laver, Rallings, & Thrasher (1987), Leach & Stewart (1988), and Mellors (1989).

⁸ We must assume that local parties generally act in a cohesive manner, and have specific and definable goals; nothing in this research has suggested those assumptions are too far-fetched.

"it seems unlikely that theories of local coalitional behaviour will develop in the image of theories of national coalitional behaviour. The single biggest reason for this ... is that national politics in any given system provides a range of particular constraints on local politics. These constraints force us, from a theoretical as well as an empirical point of view, to tailor each analysis to a specific system and militate against the development of general theories of local coalitional behaviour" (Laver, 1989, p.31).

However, it must be the case that such constraints have repercussions for *any* general theory of coalitional behaviour. The different constitutional rules and conventions practised by different national political systems surely militate against a general theory of coalitions in national legislatures, in much the same way as Laver argues the different constraints placed by national legislatures on local governments conflict with the notion of a general explanation of local coalitions. Despite this, Laver does not argue against attempting to produce a general theory of coalitional behaviour from "the universe of national governments in post-war Europe" (see Laver, 1989, pp. 16-17). Whatever the capability of achieving a general explanation, this study is solely concerned with English local government, and any attempt to build a model of the political processes in English hung councils will need to consider the following points.

At the very heart of local coalition studies, there are a number of definitional problems which ideally need to be addressed. Comparison between studies is hampered by the different ways writers approach key definitions, a difficulty this study has often noted.⁹ In any general explanation of English hung councils, it is important for comparative purposes that a common definition is found for crucial terms and concepts such as "coalition", "administration", "formality", and "duration". Deciding when a 'formal coalition administration' is in place, and just as important when it has terminated, is obviously dependent on the criteria adopted by the writer(s) in question. As already noted, the findings of this research on the increasing prevalence of 'coalition administrations', for example, may be partly an artefact of the definitions adopted. Such a caveat applies to much research, but a common definition of what constitutes a 'coalition administration' would enable a more accurate historical perspective to be taken.

Given the relatively small world of writers on hung English councils, it does not appear beyond the bounds of possibility for some agreement on common definitions to

⁹ Studies of national coalitions are just as hampered by the problem of contrasting definitions of key variables such as government termination, as previous chapters of this thesis have demonstrated.

be reached among researchers. Such an agreement does not prevent researchers from adopting their own criteria, but it would lead to a core of studies which are truly comparable, an invaluable aid for future research. It would also provide newcomers to the field with a ready made source of definitions drawn by experienced observers of hung councils. It is unlikely that new researchers would ignore such a source, thus perpetuating a series of comparable studies. However, it is probably unrealistic to believe that such problems can be clarified easily. Researchers will define their terms in the light of their specific requirements, and may be reluctant to accept a common definition. That said, it is difficult to believe such a basic problem is insurmountable.

An important set of factors that a theory of English local government coalitions needs to take into account are institutional. To begin with, most theories assume the existence of a central government 'cabinet' where ministerial office payoffs, the reward for participation in a winning coalition, can be easily observed. While such a body is common in non-hung councils, its existence is unofficial, and all the available evidence suggests that it does not survive the arrival of hungness. Perhaps largely because of the absence of a cabinet, the majority of 'coalitions' at local level are legislative, rather than executive. Future studies will need to concentrate on effective ways of assessing legislative co-operation, rather than the much simpler task of detailing clearly discernible ministerial portfolios. Therefore, increased attention must be paid to the problem of measuring policy concessions in hung councils. While voting records would provide fairly precise details of any legislative co-operation, from parties voting together to tactical abstention by 'support' parties, the task of compiling such a record over the lifetime of each administration is daunting. Perhaps confining this task to certain key times, such as budget making and voting concerning the allocation of chairmanships, provides the most practical such way of measuring support.

Although a clear finding is that policy, rather than office, pay-offs are sought by local coalition actors, those parties which are participating in government are aware of the potential usefulness of office for achieving policy objectives. However, despite the increased sharing of committee chairs found by this study,¹⁰ this cannot substitute for the sharing of portfolios in cabinet coalitions. Ministerial office is different from, and endows much more power than, a committee chair. Too many parties which are openly co-operating in the running of a council do *not* share chairmanships, and in many hung councils the distribution of committee chairs fails

¹⁰ As against, for example, Laver, Rallings, & Thrasher (1987).

to reflect the nature of political control. Also, changes are often made to the role of the chair, notably an apparent movement towards a 'technical' rather than a 'political' role. Therefore, in many hung local authorities the possession of chairs may be seen as more of a duty than as a payoff for participation in a winning coalition, and theories which stress office-seeking as a primary motivation will struggle to explain local coalitional behaviour.

Given the finding of this research that policy closeness is important for local parties in achieving their policy objectives, the need to construct a realistic representation of policy positions is apparent for any convincing theory. This presents some problems for large-scale surveys. We can arguably place the major national parties fairly accurately on an ideological scale, and despite regional differences, local parties are generally close to their parent party. The position of local parties can be further specified by assessing the relative position of the local party against the corresponding national party, as this survey did. However, the importance of Independent groups at local level (under many appellations), means that a significant local actor often has to be excluded. One way future studies could tackle the problem would be to ask the main local party groups in each authority to assess the ideological positions, on a left-right policy scale, of both themselves and their opponents. After all, local political actors are probably the best judges of the relative policy positions of themselves and their rivals. Although the many flaws of such a proposal are acknowledged,¹¹ an aggregate of such responses could produce a workable policy scale for each party group in a local authority, and allow a wider assessment of policy preference/ ideological connectedness theories than this study has managed.

Other institutional factors may also need to receive special consideration in any theory of local government formation. It appears the differing electoral cycles in English local government tend to produce different coalitional strategies. Local authorities with a quadrennial electoral cycle are more likely to generate coalition administrations than councils holding elections by thirds, where minority administrations are the norm. If such results are reproduced by other studies, any predictive theory would have to consider the possibility, for example, that the application of a majority criterion might be more appropriate for councils with a quadrennial electoral cycle.

¹¹ For example, Conservatives (and similar motives apply to the other parties) may have a vested interest in portraying Liberal Democrats and Labour groups as occupying essentially the same policy space, or as being more 'left wing' than they actually are.

From the type of administrations forming and the type of payoffs made, we already know that local politicians cannot be adequately seen as predominantly 'office-driven'. The tactics adopted in Devon offer support for the contention that many local groups will be more interested in policy payoffs, and that the failure to deliver policy expectations can lead to the breakdown of agreements. The expectation of achieving policies can lead a party to overlook its antipathy towards another party, even when the bitterness is as deep as that felt by many in the Devon Labour party towards the "traitors and rats"¹² of the Social Democrats.

The case study of Devon highlights a number of important points. The tactics of Labour in Devon demonstrate that national party constraints may affect the longevity of a coalition. Aware of the negative view of Walworth Road, Labour was reluctant to take chairs, and this general reluctance probably meant that the one post they *would* have taken (education), was never offered to them; their coalition partners were also cognisant of the local Labour party's position with their national party. If Labour had got the education chair, the coalition might have lasted much longer. Devon also illustrates that future electoral consequences will affect coalitional behaviour, even when forthcoming elections are not for the local authority in which parties are co-operating. The breakdown of the Labour/ Alliance 'working arrangement' was largely because of forthcoming district and general elections. After their initial attempt to form a minority government, Conservative tactics were clearly driven by a belief that the county council elections in 1989 would bring a return to "sanity", that is, Conservative rule, and that the best electoral strategy was to avoid any direct involvement in government.

The importance of personal relationships is clearly demonstrated by the initial process of coalition formation in Devon, and personal closeness between politicians from opposing parties is probably more likely in the smaller environment of local politics. The personal characteristics of politicians will also be important, and a different type of personality to Liberal leader David Morrish would have meant a much longer lasting Alliance minority administration. There was no constitutional requirement for Morrish to resign after the successful vote of no confidence (another institutional factor which any theory would need to take into account), and SDP leader Harold Luscombe would have carried on. Different politicians will respond differently to the same stimuli, a 'fact' which *any* theory of politics will have difficulty integrating into a realistic representation of political behaviour.

¹² The description of veteran Labour councillor, Reg Scott (Western Morning News, 7/5/85).

Of course, many of these assertions concerning local tactics also apply to national government coalition formation. For example, while the past behaviour of 'traditional rulers' may well mean their exclusion from local coalitions,¹³ the same stricture could (and probably does) apply to national party politics. The historical dimension is obviously important to present day coalitional activity in whatever forum it occurs. The multi-dimensional approach pioneered by Pridham (heavily influenced by Groennings) has a huge list of such potentially crucial variables. However, expecting the multiple dimensions of politics to be successfully tackled by a theory of local coalitions is unrealistic, when most such variables have yet to be *considered*, yet alone *incorporated*, by formal theorists examining parliamentary democracies. It may be the case that specific local factors are crucial to the tactics of political and bureaucratic actors, and an approach such as Pridham's may well attempt to model a more accurate reflection of the real world than coalition theory's often simplistic assumptions. However, formal theory allows the observer of coalitions to build on a well proven framework that stresses the central importance of office and policy goals to most politicians.

Formal theory does *not* argue that office or policy pursuit can explain all coalitional behaviour, but it does recognise their centrality to political behaviour, providing a solid base from which to modify generally well-proven assumptions of their immense importance. That solid base has provided a platform from which this empirical examination has built. While the importance of factors such as personal relationships, past history, and national party views cannot be denied, this study of hung councils has confirmed the primary motivations of office and policy offered by coalition theory. It is policy goals which drive local politicians, and office is seen as important to achieving those goals. The achievements of formal theory have been greater than its critics allow, and this analysis would have been less informative without its utilisation of formal theory's considerable contribution to our understanding of the basis of *all* political behaviour, the formation and maintenance of coalitions. However, theorists can also learn a great deal from empirical studies of hung councils, and recent studies acknowledge that hung councils "provide an invaluable test-bed for the study of coalition theory" (Leach & Stewart 1992, p.3; see also, Mellors, 1989, p.17). There is a real need for a process of interaction between the many ways of studying coalition politics.

¹³ Although this was the case in Devon, the survey responses showed little general evidence of such a strategy by former opposition parties.

Hopefully, future coalition studies from all approaches will adopt a wider base of knowledge than hereto, continuing the vital process of bridge building commenced by Laver & Schofield. That process of bridge building has been continued here, and whatever their methodological approach, students of coalition behaviour should find the results of the multi-method approach adopted in this thesis relevant.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

QUESTIONNAIRE THREE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOUR

QU.1

The Local Government Chronicle is continuing its efforts to provide a comprehensive review of local government. To this end, we are following up our survey of two years ago into the operations of councils in which no party has overall control. At that time, many of the councils surveyed were new to this situation, and we are keen to discover how the passage of time has affected their attitudes to working in a 'balanced' local authority. In addition, we are attempting to discover the ways in which political parties in such a situation react to the need to co-operate with other parties, in order that their own policies can be passed.

We would, therefore, be grateful if you could answer the attached questionnaire in order to enable us to compile a more accurate picture of the current political and administrative arrangements. We intend to publish the results of this survey in a future issue of Local Government Chronicle. We believe the findings will be of interest and value to our readers in the local government community.

NAME

ADDRESS

LOCAL AUTHORITY

1. Please state the present party political composition of your council.

CONSERVATIVE

LABOUR

S.L.D

S.D.P

INDEPENDENT

OTHER

(please specify)

2. Which parties comprise the current administration?

.....

3. Is this a formal or informal arrangement?

.....

4. Is there any time limit on this arrangement?

5. How long has your council been hung?

6. Have the same parties formed the administration for this duration?
 (If NO, please give the details of former political arrangements and their duration)

7. Before your council became hung, which political party(ies) formed the administration?

8. Where applicable, please indicate on the list of committees below (a) their party political composition and (b) which party holds the Chair and Deputy Chair.

| COMMITTEE | PARTY | | | | | | PARTY HOLDING | |
|--|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|--------|---------------|--------------|
| | CON | LAB | S.L.P | S.D.P | IND'T | OTHERS | CHAIR | DEPUTY CHAIR |
| POLICY & RESOURCES | | | | | | | | |
| EDUCATION | | | | | | | | |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | | | | | | | |
| HOUSING | | | | | | | | |
| HIGHWAYS | | | | | | | | |
| TRANSPORT | | | | | | | | |
| FINANCE SUB-CTTE (or other budgetary committee) | | | | | | | | |

9. If there are any unusual committee arrangements in your authority, for example rotating chairmanships, please specify:

.....
.....
.....

10. (a) Prior to your council becoming hung, were there any one-party committees or sub-committees?

.....

(b) If YES, please specify and detail the present composition of the committees.

.....
.....

11. (a) Have the rules and practices of the local authority with regard to committee structure and composition been amended in any way since your authority became hung?

.....

(b) If YES, please specify the changes made.

.....
.....

12. Since your authority became hung, has the quality of decision-making, in your opinion: *(please tick one box)*

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| REMAINED THE SAME | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. Since your authority became hung, has the quality of policies, in your opinion: *(please tick one box)*

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| REMAINED THE SAME | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. Which of the following, in your opinion, is most influential in dictating the course of council policy? (please rank in order of importance: ie. 1, 2, 3, 4 ...)

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| FULL COUNCIL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| COMMITTEES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CHIEF OFFICERS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ELECTED PARTY ELITES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LOCAL PARTY ORGANISATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CENTRAL GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OTHER (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | |

Thank you for your co-operation.

If you wish your answers to be treated in confidence, please tick the box.

QU.2

The Local Government Chronicle is continuing its efforts to provide a comprehensive review of local government. To this end, we are following up our survey of two years ago into the operations of councils in which no party has overall control. At that time, many of the councils surveyed were new to this situation, and we are keen to discover how the passage of time has affected their attitudes to working in a 'balanced' local authority. In addition, we are attempting to discover the ways in which political parties in such a situation react to the need to co-operate with other parties, in order that their own policies can be passed.

We would, therefore, be grateful if you could answer the attached questionnaire in order to enable us to compile a more accurate picture of the current political and administrative arrangements. We intend to publish the results of this survey in a future issue of Local Government Chronicle. We believe the findings will be of interest and value to our readers in the local government community.

NAME
TITLE and PARTY
LOCAL AUTHORITY

1. Which parties comprise the current administration?
.....

2. Is this a formal or informal arrangement?
.....

3. Is there a time limit on this arrangement?
.....

4. In relative terms, how important were considerations of **office** (for example - committee chairmanships) rather than **policy** considerations (for example - budgetary concessions) to your party during the negotiations for the formation of an administration? *(Please tick one box)*

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| POLICY MOST IMPORTANT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| POLICY GREATER IMPORTANCE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OFFICE GREATER IMPORTANCE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OFFICE MOST IMPORTANT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NOT PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. PLEASE ANSWER THIS QUESTION ONLY IF YOUR PARTY IS PART OF THE ADMINISTRATION.

In your opinion, have the benefits to your party been mostly in terms of office, of policy, equally from office and policy, or have you obtained no benefits since your authority became hung? *(Please tick one box)*

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| FROM POLICY | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| FROM OFFICE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| EQUAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NONE | <input type="checkbox"/> |

6. Where applicable, how would you assess your party's influence in the following policy areas since your authority became hung?
(Please tick one box for each policy area)

| POLICY AREA | VERY INFLUENTIAL | QUITE INFLUENTIAL | NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL | NOT AT ALL INFLUENTIAL |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| HOUSING | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| HIGHWAYS | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| TRANSPORT | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| THE BUDGET | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. Where applicable, how would you access (in percentage terms) your party's influence since your authority became hung, in the policy areas below?
(Please enter % for each policy area)

| POLICY AREA | 0 - 100% |
|-----------------|----------|
| EDUCATION | |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | |
| HOUSING | |
| PLANNING | |
| HIGHWAYS | |
| TRANSPORT | |

8. In your opinion, which of the following best describes the access of your group spokesmen to Chief Officers? *(Please tick one box)*

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| VERY OPEN | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OPEN | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LIMITED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NO ACCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. In your opinion, which of the following best describes the differences in the access of your group spokesmen to Chief Officers since your authority became hung?
(Please tick one box)

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| MUCH IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NO DIFFERENCE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| MUCH DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Were the initial budgetary proposals for 1988/89 (as prepared by officers) discussed with representatives of all party groups? (*If NO, please specify*)

.....
.....

11. How would you assess your party's access to officers concerning the initial budgetary proposals since your authority became hung? (*Please tick one box*)

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| MUCH IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NO DIFFERENCE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| MUCH DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. How would you characterise the recent process of budgetary decision-making in your authority? Did it display a: (*please tick one box*)

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| HIGH DEGREE OF CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| FAIR DEGREE OF CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SMALL DEGREE OF CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NO CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |

13. How close was the final rate precept for your authority to your own party's preferences? (*Please tick one box*)

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| IDENTICAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VERY CLOSE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| QUITE CLOSE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| QUITE DISTANT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VERY DISTANT | <input type="checkbox"/> |

14. How would you assess your party's influence on the rate precept set for your authority? *(Please tick one box)*

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| VERY INFLUENTIAL | |
| QUITE INFLUENTIAL | |
| NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL | |
| NOT AT ALL INFLUENTIAL | |

15. In order that the budget could be passed, please indicate whether your party made or obtained concessions with respect to another party(ies) in the following policy areas.

(Please tick one box each side for each policy area, where appropriate)

| | CONCESSIONS MADE | | | CONCESSIONS OBTAINED | | |
|-----------------|------------------|-------|------|----------------------|-------|------|
| | MAJOR | MINOR | NONE | MAJOR | MINOR | NONE |
| POLICY AREA | | | | | | |
| EDUCATION | | | | | | |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | | | | | |
| HOUSING | | | | | | |
| PLANNING | | | | | | |
| HIGHWAYS | | | | | | |
| TRANSPORT | | | | | | |

16. Since your authority became hung, has the quality of decision-making, in your opinion:

(Please tick one box)

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| DETERIORATED | |
| IMPROVED | |
| REMAINED THE SAME | |

17. Since your authority became hung, has the quality of policies, in your opinion:
(Please tick one box)

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| DETERIORATED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IMPROVED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| REMAINED THE SAME | <input type="checkbox"/> |

18. Which of the following, in your opinion, is most influential in dictating the course of council policy? (Please rank in order of importance, ie. 1, 2, 3, 4 ...)

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| FULL COUNCIL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| COMMITTEES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CHIEF OFFICERS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ELECTED PARTY ELITES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LOCAL PARTY ORGANISATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CENTRAL GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OTHER (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

.....

19. Where would you place your local party, ideologically, in relation to your national party? (Please tick one box)

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| TO THE 'RIGHT' | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| TO THE 'LEFT' | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ROUGHLY SIMILAR | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for your co-operation.

If you wish your answers to be treated in confidence, please tick the box.

QU.3

The Local Government Chronicle is continuing its efforts to provide a comprehensive review of local government. To that end, we are repeating a survey we undertook in 1986 into hung councils, with the addition of selected single-party administrations. We would, therefore, be grateful if you could answer the attached questionnaire, which is intended to discover some of the differences between local authorities where one party controls the administration (as in your local authority) and those in which no party has an overall majority.

We intend to publish the result of this survey in a future issue of Local Government Chronicle. We believe the findings will be of interest and value to our readers in the local government community.

NAME

TITLE and PARTY

LOCAL AUTHORITY

1. Please state the present party political composition of your council.

CONSERVATIVE

LABOUR

S.L.D.

S.D.P

INDEPENDENT

OTHER (*please specify*)

2. Where applicable, please indicate on the list of committees below:
- (a) their party political composition, and
 - (b) which party holds the Chair and Deputy Chair.

| COMMITTEE | PARTY | | | | | | PARTY HOLDING | |
|--|-------|-----|--------|-------|------|--------|---------------|--------------|
| | CON | LAB | S.L.D. | S.D.P | INDT | OTHERS | CHAIR | DEPUTY CHAIR |
| POLICY & RESOURCES | | | | | | | | |
| EDUCATION | | | | | | | | |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | | | | | | | |
| HOUSING | | | | | | | | |
| PLANNING | | | | | | | | |
| HIGHWAYS | | | | | | | | |
| TRANSPORT | | | | | | | | |
| FINANCE SUB-CTTE (or other budgetary committee) | | | | | | | | |

3. If there are any unusual committee arrangements in your authority, for example rotating chairmanships, please specify:

.....

4. (a) Are there any one-party committees or sub-committees in your authority?

.....

- (b) If YES, please specify:

.....

5. Which of the following, in your opinion, is most influential in dictating the course of council policy? (*Please rank in order of importance, ie. 1, 2, 3, 4 ...*)

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| FULL COUNCIL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| COMMITTEES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CHIEF OFFICERS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ELECTED PARTY ELITES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LOCAL PARTY ORGANISATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OTHERS (<i>please specify</i>) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for your co-operation.

If you wish to be treated in confidence, please tick the box.

QU.4

The Local Government Chronicle is continuing its efforts to provide a comprehensive review of local government. To that end, we are repeating a survey we undertook in 1986 into hung councils, with the addition of selected single-party administrations. We would, therefore, be grateful if you could answer the attached questionnaire, which is intended to discover some of the differences between local authorities where one party controls the administration (as in your local authority) and those in which no party has an overall majority. We intend to publish the results of this survey in a future issue of Local Government Chronicle. We believe the findings will be of interest and value to our readers in the local government community.

NAME

TITLE and PARTY

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Which party(ies) comprise the current administration?

.....

2. Where applicable, how would you assess your party's influence in the following policy areas? (*please tick one box for each policy area*)

| POLICY AREA | VERY INFLUENTIAL | QUITE INFLUENTIAL | NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL | NOT AT ALL INFLUENTIAL |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| EDUCATION | | | | |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | | | | |
| HOUSING | | | | |
| PLANNING | | | | |
| HIGHWAYS | | | | |
| TRANSPORT | | | | |
| THE BUDGET | | | | |

3. Where applicable, how would you assess (in percentage terms) your party's influence during the current administration in the policy areas below (*please enter % for each policy area*)

| POLICY AREA | 0 - 100% |
|-----------------|----------|
| EDUCATION | |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | |
| HOUSING | |
| PLANNING | |
| HIGHWAYS | |
| TRANSPORT | |

4. In your opinion, which of the following best describes the access of your group spokesmen to the Chief Officers? (*please tick one box*)

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| VERY OPEN | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OPEN | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LIMITED | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NO ACCESS | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Were the initial budgetary proposals for 1988/89 (as prepared by officers) discussed with representatives of all party groups? (*If NO, please specify*)

.....

.....

.....

6. How would you characterise the recent process of budgetary decision-making in your authority? Did it display a: (*please tick one box*)

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| HIGH DEGREE OF CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| FAIR DEGREE OF CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SMALL DEGREE OF CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NO CONFLICT | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. How close was the final rate precept in your authority to your own party's preferences?
(Please tick one box)

| | |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| IDENTICAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VERY CLOSE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| QUITE CLOSE | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| QUITE DISTANT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VERY DISTANT | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. How would you assess your party's influence on the rate precept set in your authority?
(Please tick one box)

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| VERY INFLUENTIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| QUITE INFLUENTIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NOT AT ALL INFLUENTIAL | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. During the recent budgetary procedure, please indicate whether your party made policy concessions to, or obtained policy concession from another party(ies), in the following policy areas. (Please tick box on each side for each policy area)

| POLICY AREA | CONCESSIONS MADE | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | MAJOR | MINOR | NONE |
| EDUCATION | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SOCIAL SERVICES | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| HOUSING | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PLANNING | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| HIGHWAYS | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| TRANSPORT | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| CONCESSIONS OBTAINED | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| MAJOR | MINOR | NONE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Which of the following, in your opinion, is most influential in dictating the course of council policy? (*Please rank in order of importance, ie. 1, 2, 3, 4 ...*)

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| FULL COUNCIL | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| COMMITTEES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CHIEF OFFICERS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ELECTED PARTY ELITES | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| LOCAL PARTY ORGANISATIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| CENTRAL GOVERNMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OTHER (<i>please specify</i>) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

.....

11. Where would you place your local party, ideologically, in relation to your national party? (*Please tick one box*)

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| TO THE 'RIGHT' | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| TO THE 'LEFT' | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ROUGHLY SIMILAR | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Thank you for your co-operation.

If you wish your answers to be treated in confidence please tick the box.

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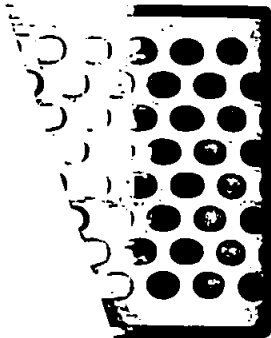
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