

MICROPOLITICS

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PART I
THE ROLE OF IDEAS

1 Ideas and Events

The most difficult explanations to find are the ones no-one is looking for. The way in which ideas come to exert an influence on events comes into this class. People have supposed that there is nothing to explain, that events simply follow the ideas which suggest them.

In its very simplest form, this account has the political thinker producing the idea which the legislators then implement. This is obviously wrong. Many ideas are put forward, some of them conflicting with each other. Some attract attention at the time, others pass without notice. Some are put into effect, others are rejected. In democratic societies there is often a conflict of ideologies, with each putting forward ideas derived from opposing views about the way in which society should be organized. Clearly any explanation must take account of the fact that some ideas are implemented rather than others.

The simplest model may be modified to bring in the time factor. In the amended version, ideas are put forward. Then, over a period of time, the merits of some of them emerge and begin to influence the political process. This account allows for a 'drift of ideas' in which those deriving from a certain paradigm hold sway for a period, then are perhaps superseded by others. It might be the collectivist viewpoint whose

ideas are in vogue at one time, and individualism at another. There may be periods in between the transition when the fashion swings towards a mixed economy.

This explanation is not obviously wrong, like the simple version, and does afford at first glance a means of interpreting political change. The thinkers put forward their ideas, and some are eventually adopted. As the practical experience of them deepens, people look for improvement and turn to the ideas which derive from an alternative paradigm. These hold sway in turn until they are eventually supplanted. We have what appears to be a plausible account of how *laissez-faire* interludes, for example, can alternate with periods of 'social conscience.'

Even the model with the time factor included is incomplete unless it supplies a mechanism to account for the 'emergence' of ideas. Granted that the scholars are at work producing the ideas, we need to be told how it is that some of them eventually attract the attention of policy-makers. Scholars usually work in the public domain; that is, they publish books or papers, or deliver lectures. We can take it that their ideas are normally available to interested parties.

Only rarely do we encounter a Gregor Mendel, whose work was unknown until after his death. Even more rarely in the field of social studies do we meet with a Giambattista Vico, whose pioneering work was insufficiently circulated to be influential either in its day or in the century which followed it. Scholars usually make their work available, especially if they are anxious to influence events.

This leaves us with the problem of tracing the ideas from their first publication to the point at which they are acted upon by legislators. How do they emerge? It would be naive to suppose that political leaders spend a great deal of time ploughing earnestly through

scholarly publications to keep abreast of the output of ideas; so we have to look to some intermediate agency which brings the one to the attention of the other.

There are at least two possibilities, not mutually exclusive. One is that there is a body of persons who read and write about political ideas, and have contact both with the academic work of the scholars, and with the world of practical politics. They could be party activists, informed commentators, popular writers or lobbyists. All that is required of them in this respect is that they keep abreast of theoretical developments in politics and economics, and that they are in a position to influence those at work in active legislation.

A second possibility – although there may be many others – is that the ideas come to be of influence through a generational change. A significant proportion of our governing classes have undergone higher education. It could be during this process that they were exposed to the new ideas, either from the scholars themselves, or by the studying requirements of university and college courses. The process of immersion in an academic environment could suffice to make them aware of the new thinking, and influence them when young to such an extent as to influence their actions when they later rise to prominence. This version has the attraction of explaining why some political ideas seem to take a generation before they are applied in practice.

We still have to explain why it is that some ideas are taken up rather than others. Again, the simple answer is to suppose that their merits emerge in the process of academic discussion and critique. Both Milton and John Stuart Mill espoused the view that in a fair and open contest, truth would emerge triumphant. Both, indeed, regarded this as one good reason to advocate a high level of freedom of speech and discussion.

It would be pleasant if the real world took on the roseate aspect of this theoretical vision. Alas it does not.

In our world truth is often silenced by force. Galileo is made to recant; heretical books are consigned to the flames, sometimes accompanied by their hapless authors. The more velvet-gloved force of modern times gives academic preferment to those who toe the line, and denies it to others. Opinionated academics in positions of power advance supporters and sycophants, and try to deny a hearing to those who would challenge the work on which a lifetime's career has been built.

Still it is possible to argue that the base motives of men can only hold back the truth for a time. After all, was not Galileo vindicated? Does not Bruno hold more influence in today's world than the Inquisition which burned him? Similarly it could be argued that the outcast scholar will come through eventually if the ideas are sound. Rehabilitation and fame will come, even if posthumously. This is comforting to outcast scholars, but there is a strong element of hindsight to the argument.

It is true that some ideas did win through: these are the ones we know about. It is quite possible that other, true ideas did not: these are the ones we do not know about. We cannot say how many scholars failed to gain the position needed to develop and advance their ideas, or how many discontinued promising lines of research in order to be eligible for more temporal rewards. We do know of some ruined by poverty or driven to suicide. We know of many cases in which powerful men were able to swing influence behind inferior ideas by successfully squeezing out better ones.

The argument that the truth wins through eventually commits the Whig fallacy of history by assuming that the function of the past was to lead up to the present. We see what did happen, we do not see what might have happened in its place. The ideas which won through are the ones which now hold sway; we cannot call this 'truth.'

account of the way in which scientific revolutions are brought about. The prevailing paradigm rules, and the only work which gains recognition is that which is done within the context of that paradigm. The ideas are explored, extended and developed. They are never subject to frontal challenge because such work gains no recognition, no credit, and no reward for its perpetrator. Eventually, says Kuhn, the paradigm is taken as far as it can go. Its inconsistencies and inadequacies begin to accumulate to the point at which more and more people are convinced of the need to replace it by a major shift in thinking. This brings on the truly creative period while the paradigm is in flux. A new model comes forward, usually from the next generation of scholars because their careers have not been inextricably bound up with the old one. As it wins acceptance, so work takes place to develop it and to extend it, and it settles into a new status quo. Scholars who first advocated it at an unfashionable time are now rehabilitated and given credit as trail-blazers.

If instead of scientific revolutions, we substitute the major changes which take place in political ideas, the Kuhn pattern is seen to be very close to the model considered so far. It could explain, at least at the theoretical level, how political ideas come to change. There would still remain the need for the group to act as a bridge between the theoretical realm of ideas and the world of practical politics. Given such a group, however, we would be able to explain how ideas at an intellectual level can eventually come to be accepted at the level where decisions are made and events are influenced.

The Kuhn model is particularly instructive because it operates on the level of psychology. It was proposed by Kuhn as a means of accounting for the growth of scientific knowledge; but instead of dealing with ideas themselves, it deals with the way in which people react

to those ideas. Popper and Lakatos have criticized the account to good effect on the grounds that the acceptability of a theory, or the ways it might be used to make or thwart careers, tells us nothing about its content. The question is not whether the idea wins favour, but whether it passes the criteria we require for scientific knowledge.

Even if it can be faulted as an explanation of the growth of scientific knowledge, however, the Kuhn account does tell us a great deal about scientific fashion. It presents a very plausible explanation of the way in which theories come into vogue and inspire subsequent research. There is a good case for suggesting that this is comparable with the way in which political ideas fall into or out of favour. When they win acceptance, they stimulate research and attract notice for their adherents. When they are in the wilderness of opposition to prevailing consensus, neither they nor their adherents enjoy such attention.

A major point of departure from the Kuhn model is that Kuhn deals only with the way in which ideas come to dominate the academic community. His concern is with scientific revolutions, and he has little to say, therefore, about how ideas become popular, or how they come to influence events. Even if we accept his model for the victory of ideas in the intellectual world, we still have to account for their acceptability in society, and the way in which they come to alter what is done.

The intermediate groups of acolytes and advocates could provide a bridge between the two worlds. For every great original scholar, there might be dozens or even hundreds of derivative thinkers who explore the ramifications of the original insight, contributing their studies and critiques to the total. These are often college and university lecturers and professors. After them come the students they influence, some of whom

become writers, journalists or opinion leaders of some variety.

Sometimes they band together in societies or institutes with the avowed purpose of securing wider recognition for the ideas which unite them, and to seek for those ideas an impact upon public policy. Writing and lecturing at a more popular level, their work can attract the attention of a wider audience, and perhaps merit coverage in the media to spread interest in the ideas ever more widely. This is the group which F.A. Hayek refers to as the 'secondhand dealers in ideas.' They perceive their task to be one of acting as salesmen for the original insights and ideas, taking them and explaining them at the level where they can be effective. This might be in front of decision-makers and legislators; it might be before the informed and educated public at large, in order to bring about pressure for their adoption.

All of the elements are now in place for the familiar picture of what is often called 'winning the battle of ideas'. The stage is set for a familiar scenario to unfold.

First comes the scholar. Going against the conventional political or economic wisdom of the day, he (or she) marks out an original position which suggests that the prevailing view is either mistaken or misconceived. A major work or series of works points to a radically new approach involving the overthrow of the existing paradigm. Shocked incredulity greets the exercise. The academic community either dismisses the work as absurdly out-of-date (always an excellent defence against new ideas), or resorts to the more traditional and more effective academic weapon of silence. The work is not reviewed, not cited, not taken seriously. The scholar is ostracized. He finds it difficult to have papers published or to give prominent lectures. The expected chair fails to appear; grants are hard to come by. Worst of all, his students find it difficult to gain

appointments. The years in the wilderness have begun.

Lonely as this academic isolation is, the scholar is not totally alone. A handful of junior colleagues recognize the merit of the work and begin to write papers which circulate at first only in minor journals. The number of students who have been influenced by them builds up over the years. The group is still a minority, but a cohesive and loyal one.

Then come the popularizers. Some of them former students, some influenced by what they have read or been told, they work over the years in the cause they believe is correct. They influence a rising generation of lecturers and students. They reach out to the informed public with monographs, pamphlets and magazine articles. Some of those they influence enter the political world, where they are regarded as a small and eccentric minority working for some half understood and almost universally discredited idea.

Patiently, the lonely group labours on over the years, drawing comfort from each new convert, and never failing to point out the inadequacies and failings of the assumptions they are fighting. The familiar scenario calls for a happy ending. The existing political ideas reach crisis point as their failings are revealed by events. The systematic work has meanwhile paid off. A rising generation of new scholars accept the alternative paradigm. The ideas become respectable. Research workers rush to print with theses and studies derived from them.

Meanwhile the work of the popularizers has gone so far that the ideas have now trickled down to the informed and educated layman. Just at the time they become academically respectable, there is popular interest in the new alternative ideas. There is a demand for something to replace the system which is visibly failing. The combination of popular pressure and academic respectability now enables legislators to move

in. Inspired by the new ideas they act to implement them.

The scholar, if this has happened in his lifetime, finds himself a celebrity. The lecture tours begin and the book offers flood in at last. The early supporters now break through the promotion barrier and gain the rewards for those wilderness years. An idea has succeeded in changing events. Meanwhile, of course, a lonely scholar is about to be ostracized for putting forward a radical new paradigm. . . .

The scenario is not only a familiar one; it is also a comforting one. Scholars who fail to gain recognition for their work can take solace from the thought that one day their turn will come. Even if it comes too late for them personally, they can hope for the posthumous triumph of their ideas. Latterday Marxes labouring in the British Museum can dream of a success such as his. Their disciples and supporters, although shunned and shut out of academic influence can similarly hope that with the acceptance of the ideas will come fitting recognition of those who saw their merits early on, and who sacrificed career opportunities in order to advance them. The popularizers, the 'secondhand dealers in ideas' can take comfort from the hope that the patient work will eventually pay off. When the ideas are sufficiently popular to enable politicians to move, those who brought this about gain the huge psychic satisfaction of having helped to influence history and to determine events.

The popularity of this scenario derives partly from its inherent plausibility, and partly from the satisfaction it brings to all of the parties involved. In the first place, it traces through an account of how 'ideas have consequences.' It shows how work from the realm of ideas can be translated into a chain of influence which ultimately has its impact on events. Secondly, it comforts all the parties involved, the scholars, the

disciples and the popularizers. Those who see the ideas triumph can claim a share in the success. Those who do not can take heart that their day will come.

It is the popularity of this familiar scenario which attaches so much importance to 'winning the battle of ideas.' If future events will be determined by the ideas which dominate in the next generation, then those who wish their vision of reality to prevail must influence it now. If it is the spread of ideas among educated opinion leaders which prompts politicians to act, then those who want them to act in particular ways must convince those same opinion leaders of the correctness of the ideas.

This is the fundamental reason why the battle for ideas is fought at two levels by those who wish to determine the future shape of society. The two levels are connected; it is by winning the minds of today's students in schools and colleges that the advocates of radical change expect to influence opinion leaders of tomorrow. A major advantage of this concentration on education is that it can be self-accelerating. A few teachers can influence many students, and when they in turn become teachers, they influence even more. Eventually it might be possible to so dominate education that an entire generation is imbued with the ideas.

Disciples and acolytes of the original scholars act to influence and infiltrate the academic world. They try to influence both the literature and the teachers. A battle is waged over textbooks, with those espousing a radical change to the prevailing paradigm trying to control the reading content of courses. News stories tend to concentrate on the remarkable (and remarkably crude) attempts to influence the minds of young children; but a more serious struggle takes place for the control of higher education materials.

The advocates of innovative thinking spend both time and resources in attempting to place their materials

into the class libraries and on to the course lists of college and university courses. They establish research centres both on and off campus, and publish and promote reading matter designed for course adoptions. Some of them count success in terms of the quantity of material published, the penetration of faculty or college libraries, or the number of course adoptions for their work. Others concentrate on lecturers and scholars, holding seminar courses to attract promising ones. The content of these seminars and the speakers are such as to convert to the new ideas, or to reinforce the convictions of those already persuaded. Scholarship grants are made, essay prizes awarded, all to those who show some academic promise and commitment to the new thinking. The aim is to invest in people, and to use resources to win over the next generation.

University and college departments begin to resemble colonies as this activity proceeds. A useful person, well-placed, will secure appointment for junior people of like persuasion. Graduate students will be attracted, or steered, in the direction of those departments which emphasize the new ideas. Over a period of time a few departments acquire a reputation for commitment to a certain paradigm. Those who share it apply there and are welcome; those who do not seek academic preferment elsewhere.

The 'battle' for ideas is well-named, for the military metaphor is overpowering. One is led into seeing the struggle to capture the next academic generation as a long drawn out war, punctuated by skirmishes on different fields, a few major set piece engagements, and the dispatch of troops to reinforce critical or newly won positions. Occasionally the discreet but constant struggle surfaces, as a major institution is won over. Resignations and recriminations give a brief glimpse to outsiders of the ferocity of the battle.

One feature of the 'wilderness' period is the clan

loyalty of those engaged in the struggle to have the ideas accepted. Being in a minority, one might expect them to broaden their base of support and endorse allies who accept some elements of the new thinking. The reverse often happens, with a determination to keep the ideas undiluted and uncontaminated by deviant thinking. This can lead in turn to exclusivity, in which only those who take the master's ideas pure and unmixed are accepted. The use of key code phrases and specialized vocabulary in publications and lectures gives outsiders the impression that they are looking at something close akin to the incantations of a religious ritual.

For those who popularize to opinion leaders as well as to the academic community, success is measured in terms of coverage. The circulation figures for their publications take on crucial significance. Sales of their books are assiduously counted, not for any revenue this brings, but for the influence which is implied. A feature devoted to the scholar or his ideas which appears in an important newspaper or magazine is a major event. More people probably read the copies circulated to each other by supporters than read the original article when it appeared.

Serious radio or television programmes which cover the ideas in question are hailed as major victories in the battle for ideas. The assumption throughout is that the original ideas are being kept out by what amounts to a conspiracy of silence, and a refusal by informed commentators to take them seriously. Television or radio exposure thus represents a breakthrough, no matter how low the viewing figures might be for the programme itself, or for the channel on which it appears.

In all of this activity, as in the scientific revolutions, there are those whose careers are bound up in the struggle. In academic institutions there are some whose

promotional opportunities are tied to the victory of the new ideas. Others who fail to make a mark in the conventional paradigm can perhaps gain recognition in the smaller circle which seeks to overthrow it. Directors of research institutes earn their salaries at the same time as they work to advance the cause. Writing and lecturing by both groups provide sources of additional income and opportunities to travel to international conferences and seminars.

But this is true of the academic and intellectual worlds in general. Most scholars seek to promote themselves as well as their beliefs. Most of them seek opportunities to publish or to lecture. Expenses-paid international trips are plums to be sought and rationed out carefully. If anything, direct self-interest is less true of those who work to bring recognition for the bold innovations than it is for the rest of the scholarly community.

The rebels against the prevailing orthodoxy tend to be motivated by three clear beliefs. First, they believe that the original insights put forward are essentially correct. That is, they too see the failings implicit in the status quo, and accept the analysis which undermines its validity. They are therefore very much motivated by principle itself, and like most of those who are so motivated, are ready to endure privation and ostracism in the cause of what they believe is right.

Secondly, they are motivated by the belief that ultimately their view of things will prevail and gain general acceptance. To them it is only a question of time and effort before the truths which are obvious to them are revealed to others. They are sustained in the wilderness by the nourishment which hope brings. Their firm conviction is that the day will come, preferably within their own lifetime, when the intellectual community in general will admit to the truth of what they maintained all along.

The third belief is the one least questioned. It is that when the battle for ideas has been won, events will follow in the wake of that victory. The assumption is that winning through in the world of the intellect will automatically at some date thereafter bring similar gains in the real world as those ideas are put into effect. Because they are convinced that the ideas are right, and that they will win the intellectual battle for acceptance, they also believe that the effort to achieve that victory will finally result in changes to the way in which people live.

The source of this third conviction is not difficult to fathom. All of the participants in the 'battle for ideas' are very much people of ideas themselves. The original scholar blazing a lonely trail; the disciples who take up the cause; the students and the supporters; men and women in research institutes; those who work to spread the ideas at a popular level: all of them live, to some extent, the life of the mind. Their chief concern is with ideas. It is ideas which move them, which preoccupy their thoughts, and which have the power to excite them. It comes naturally to such people to suppose that ideas are the ultimate determinants, and that to win the battle for ideas is to win thereby the battle for events.

Intellectuals throughout history have exalted the role and influence of the intellectual. That the great works bear witness to that role is hardly surprising, since it was the intellectuals who wrote them. Most men and women of ideas have taken it for granted that it is men and women of ideas who make the important steps for human progress. They downgrade the contribution of merchants and traders, of explorers and soldiers, of farmers and builders.

While many intellectuals, consciously or unconsciously, adhere to this view, its best expression comes perhaps in the words of John Maynard Keynes, a man of ideas not without influence himself. He wrote:

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.

Scholars have been mesmerized by those words, not least because they elevate the status of scholars. Part of their allure is that they downgrade those who appear to exercise power and influence events. Keynes' famous saying presents temporal power as an illusion. Those who appear to exercise it are doing no more, he says, than bringing to fruition the seed sown previously by a person of intellect. The ruler wields the sceptre, but the scholar guides the hand.

The spell of Keynes is a powerful one, at once convincing and comforting to those whose lives are spent in academic cloisters. It tells the intellectuals what they want to hear, what Keynes himself believed, that they are the real rulers. It goes some way towards explaining why men and women of ideas never question that victory in the world of ideas translates into victory in the real world.

Convincing and comforting as it is to the intellectual community, the Keynesian view is not self-evidently true. It is by no means necessarily so that people in authority are the unwitting puppets of former scribbles. The familiar scenario by which 'winning the battle of ideas' takes place is at its weakest in the final scene. The assumption that the battlefield of ideas decides the future of society is one which can be questioned. If it is to be sustained, a link is needed between the intellectual victories and the practical ones. A process has to be shown whereby the ideas which win through their acceptance by intellectuals are the crucial determinants of public policy.

It is quite possible to accept the role of the innovator

scholar and his years in the wilderness, to admit the importance of the part played by disciples, advocates and popularizers, and yet question whether this is enough to influence events. Conceding even that the process outlined is a valid description of some of the battles for ideas which are won or lost, there remains a critical gap between the ideas and the reality.

The assumption by those engaged in the struggle is that the ideas are enough, and that when they gain both academic respectability and popular support it will become possible for politicians to enact them. This is the weak link in the chain of reasoning. It is weak because it is an assumption, rather than a reasoned claim backed by evidence and argument.

It is possible to argue that changes in public policy do not follow directly from victories won in the world of ideas, and that the relationship between ideas and policy is more complex than the simple model will allow.

2 Theory and Practice

In every department of human affairs Practice long precedes Science: systematic enquiry into the modes of action of the powers of nature, is the tardy product of a long course of efforts to use those powers for practical ends.

John Stuart Mill, *The Principles of Political Economy*

Plato's 'Republic' is one of the earliest classics of political science. Although cast in the form of a dialogue ostensibly in search of justice, a large section of the book described how the ideal society might be constituted, what its rules would be, the form of its education and customs, and even what its myths would be.

The vision of perfection described by Plato would seem somewhat austere and brutal for modern tastes. It must have seemed so at the time to his Athenian audience. Children were to be brought up in common, never knowing or caring who their natural parents were. They were to be exposed early on to a tough life designed to inculcate the martial virtues. Only the lightest of coarse clothing was to be permitted, only the plainest of food. Simple black bread would suffice for the citizens of this brave new world. Strict censorship would prevent them reading anything which might distract or deflect them from the paths of virtue and

strength. No plays would be allowed which depicted weakness or emotional indulgence. Even music would be strictly regulated, with only the harmonies permitted which aroused suitable feelings of courage. Every aspect of life would be controlled in order that the state might be better served by its citizens.

Citizens would live communally, eat at benches, enjoy no luxuries except that of sneaking out occasionally to perform the duty of begetting the next generation of children. The job of supervising these rules would fall to what would in modern times be called a secret police, but which Plato described in more philosophical terms.

Guardians, Auxiliaries and Workers would all know their place and accept it, sustained by the 'noble lie' that they were descended respectively from the metals of gold, silver and bronze. Only a lack of appropriate technology, one suspects, kept Plato from proposing Huxley's sleep-talk voice reciting to the children 'I'm glad I'm a gamma; alphas have to think too hard, and betas have too much responsibility. . . .'

The ideal society, which produces and sustains philosopher kings is described in meticulous detail. It would be an achievement of the imagination on grand scale, were it not for the fact that such a society already existed in all of its basic elements. What Plato is describing is, for the most part, the totalitarian state of Sparta. Since Sparta was the enemy of Athens for a sizeable part of Plato's early life, it tells us much about Athenian toleration that he was allowed to exalt it as a model of perfection.

Plato embroiders and improves it in his text, but the basic pattern of Spartan life is unmistakable. The censorship, the ban on luxuries, the harsh conditions are all there. So are the ephors who enforce the rules. Spartans existed, as did the citizens of Plato's Republic, to live out lives decreed for them by the state in every

detail. Sparta had existed for generations before Plato provided the gloss of an intellectual justification for it. Its rules were there in practice to govern and direct the lives of its citizens long before Plato analysed their workings and wrote about them as theory. The practice came first, and the theory followed in its wake.

What Plato did was to advance at a theoretical level the basic format of a society which already existed, and which met with his approval. Sparta may have been tough and brutal, its citizens unrefined and ill educated, but it did practise what Plato regarded as simple virtues uncorrupted by luxury as the Athenians were, and it did win wars. Indeed, the whole society more or less existed to achieve that object. Much of what we might regard as humanity was sacrificed to that end, including arts, sciences and intellectual enquiry. Plato approved of the trade, regarding the contemplation of virtue as sufficient to satisfy man's higher aspirations.

Sparta was there before Plato wrote about it. He did not invent it or set down its rules. With some changes he described them and justified them. Plato's 'Republic' is an *ex post facto* rationalization of the state of Sparta. He wrote as theory what men had already achieved in practice.

John Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government* were hailed in their day and to present times as classic studies in the control of absolute power. People who had previously lacked the arguments which justified limiting the powers of a ruler now found in Locke the intellectual support they were looking for. Locke set out a series of principles under which power derived from contract, and was subject to limits and constraints.

The defence of sovereign power had not been in short supply. From the old feudal pledges of allegiance, through the divine right of kings, right down to Thomas Hobbes and the need to restrain the brute in man, the justification had been available to rulers aspiring to

absolute power. Now with Locke's ideas the intellectual lead passed to the other side. Here were carefully thoughtout and developed arguments deriving from first principles, which denied the right to absolute rule.

Not only was power constrained under Locke's system, it was divided to keep it under constraint. Furthermore, the rules were laid down under which dissent and resistance were permissible. Whereas previously this had involved defying God's deputy, or breaking solemn allegiances, now it was a case of justifiable action in the event of breach of contract by a sovereign.

Locke, like Plato, was describing what already existed and providing the intellectual superstructure to justify it. Despite the case for absolute power, people in Britain had resisted it under Stuart monarchs. The Glorious Revolution had already happened when Locke wrote. There already was a constitutional monarchy which accepted limits on its power, and which had been brought about by the overthrow of a legitimate sovereign who was felt to have abused his power.

Locke was writing after practice had already achieved what he now justified in theory. The British had made their Glorious Revolution, now Locke became its philosopher and spokesman. He it was who gave them the words and arguments to justify what they had already done. In elevating Locke, those who had done the deed elevated themselves. What might have been construed as the self-interest of a threatened class now became a stand of high principle, vindicated by man's moral nature and the foundations of civil society.

Locke's work, like Plato's, was derived to a large extent from what had already been achieved. His ideal of society, like Plato's, was based on a model which existed. He analysed its merits and demonstrated its virtues systematically. In doing so, he undoubtedly gave people a better insight and understanding of it. He

also gave them the justification they were looking for; but the point is that they were looking for it. The world came first, the books followed.

Vladimir Illyich Lenin is credited, if that is the appropriate word, with the foundation of the first Marxist state. By leading the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, he is widely regarded as the person who gave Marxist theory its practical application. He thereby lent some substance to the claim of Marx that his theories were a scientific account of human progress and that with them the future course of history could be predicted.

It is worth recalling some of the key elements of Marxist theory in order to measure how accurate was their predictive power. Marx had proposed that the course and development of a society were determined by economic and material factors, specifically the means of production available to it. 'The corn mill gave us the feudal lord, the steam mill the industrial capitalist.'

Different types of production required different types of economic and social organization to sustain them. The various institutions of society, including its method of government, its law and its ideology, all derived from its mode of production and all ultimately served it.

Societies progressed by conflict. Changes in the productive mode would create strains in the institutions established to fit its predecessor. They would be inappropriate to the new method. Each stage of history bred within it the seeds of its replacement. The factories required concentration of labour, for example, and this promoted class consciousness and antagonism. At each stage there would eventually come a violent clash of the prevailing state (called in Hegelian terms, 'the thesis') with its opponent ('the antithesis'). From that conflict would emerge the new state ('the synthesis'), and the cycle would begin again. The progress of history would

stop when economies advanced to the stage where the final conflict produced a classless society.

It was in its day, and remains now, a fertile theory to use in the interpretation of previous ages. Its adherents are forced into Procrustean distortions by the attempt to make it account for every phase of human development throughout the entire scope of human history. They are, nonetheless, forced to do this because the theory makes no less a claim. Despite the excesses, it contains considerable insight and explanatory power.

If its central tenet is correct, then human history is working towards its inevitable destiny in a classless society. The more advanced an economy is, the nearer it is to that destiny. Here is a central prediction. Marx saw history as progress, and assumed that the advanced societies would complete the development cycle first, to reach the final phase. It is an essential aspect of his theory that the revolution will come first in the economies which have advanced the furthest.

Russia in Lenin's day was not among the advanced economies. It was in the early stages of industrialization, and was only just developing the factory system of mass production with all of the changes which this implied. Had circumstances been otherwise, it might have gone on to develop into a bourgeois liberal society, replacing its absolute Tsarist monarchy with a constitutional system characterized by democratic elements. Had it done so, it would have conformed to a large extent with the Marxist model of economic and social progress. But it did not.

Had Lenin really wanted to apply Marxist theory, he would have started in the most advanced economies, attempting to lead them into the terminal phase of class revolution as predicted on the Marxist model. If he were determined to succeed in Russia, he would have either had to wait until it reached the more advanced

economic stages, or perhaps work to advance its progress toward a liberal industrialized society. In this way he would have been bringing forward what Marx foresaw as the inevitable day when its strains and conflicts would explode into the final revolution.

Lenin did not do either of these things. What he did ran counter to the Marxist theory to which he professed adherence. He became an active revolutionary, doing whatever was necessary to overthrow first the Tsarist rule, then the Kerensky government in order to seize power for himself and his supporters. He was a man of action. Instead of applying Marxist theory, he found from practical experience how a small but ruthless and dedicated band could seize control of a mighty nation and hold that power.

That he succeeded is history. It was not an application of Marx's theory; it was the establishment of an élite with a monopoly of power. Lenin did what was necessary and rewrote the theory after the event. His 'modifications' of Marxist theory are so drastic that it is now called 'Marxist-Leninism' in his honour. It is no longer a theory which predicts the course of economic and social progress, but one which tells revolutionary élites how to seize power over societies, and how to set about remoulding them so that the rule of the party élite becomes permanent.

Of course, many of Marx's terms appear in the new version. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is there, along with 'classless society.' None of these familiar expressions suffice to hide the new reality which Lenin created. The fact that he created what purported to be a Marxist state in a relatively under-developed economy itself led to major modifications to the original theory.

The function of these modifications is to explain, *after the event*, why it was that the revolution did not first come about as predicted in the most advanced economies, those further down the road to their inevitable

destiny. The 'theory of empire' is one such explanation. Marx's revolution *would* have happened first in the economic front-runners, but for the fact that they developed overseas empires. Exploitation of these overseas empires sufficed to prop up the capitalist system, and bring the lower classes just enough extra rewards to keep them below their revolutionary potential. The workers, instead of 'expropriating the expropriators,' became, in effect, their partners in the expropriation of the product of workers overseas.

Like so many of the alterations made to Marxist theories after the facts, it has an inherent plausibility. The evidence does not bear it out, however, because investment in empire brought lower rates of return throughout most of the imperial period than could have been obtained by investment in other advanced countries or in non-empire areas such as South America.

The function of such explanations – and Lenin himself was prolific in the production of them – is to modify the theory after the facts. The theory was not applied in order to change the world. The world was changed first, then the theory was reconstructed to give those changes their theoretical superstructure and their intellectual justification.

If Tsarist Russia was an unlikely candidate in 1917 for a Marxist revolution, how much less suitable was China following the Second World War. Russia had at least the early stages of industrialization. It had its concentration in the cities, its factory workers, its dock workers, its urban proletariat. It had the nucleus of a force to fan the flames of protest and to man the barricades. The China which Mao Tse-Tung led to revolution was overwhelmingly a peasant society characterized by primitive agriculture. It did not have the industrial concentrations which even Lenin had been able to work from. On Marxist theory it should never have been able to develop the class consciousness needed for collective

action. It was not a plausible candidate in any sense for a Marxist revolution. In terms of economic development it was centuries behind the advanced countries. The 'laws of history' had a long way to take it before it reached its revolutionary stage.

Even on Leninist theory, it was not a suitable country for party cadres to seize and maintain power. It lacked most of the instruments which Lenin had used. In addition to its lack of concentrations of industrial workers, it was a rural society with poor communications, and without the educated class of disaffected intellectuals to lead the workers' struggle.

If Mao had applied Marxist, or even Marxist-Leninist, theory, he would have acted very differently. Indeed, it is improbable that he would have succeeded. What he did do was to act on the basis of the circumstances which prevailed. He did what was necessary, engaging in a struggle appropriate to local conditions. His was a rural warfare, in which guerillas 'swam like fishes' between villages, attacking the enemy where he was weak, and melting away when faced by his strength.

The tactics he used were successful in China and brought his army to power. His communist revolution fitted nowhere into either the Marxist or the Leninist model. It fitted instead into the Maoist model, for he, like Lenin before him, did what was necessary and rewrote the theory afterwards. Marxist communism, which started as the inevitable product of advanced industrial economies at their last stage of development, had by this time been turned into a means whereby an élite group could take over the world's largest peasant society.

In the case of both Russia and China, the élite group called itself 'the people,' and used all of the trappings of Marxist terminology. In both cases this did not disguise the fact that the techniques of insurrection were used to bring to power a group in no way equated with the

ordinary working class, and one which developed methods of maintaining its rule, even against popular aspirations if necessary.

The pattern which emerges from these examples is one in which the action precedes the theory. The cases have been ones in which advances in the realm of ideas appeared to determine events, but where the events in fact came first, and the ideas which rationalized them and justified them followed in their wake. The theory, by the time it was articulated, was describing a practice instead of proposing one.

The story of Che Guevara is a particularly instructive one because it illustrates both theory and practice. Trained as a doctor, Che Guevara took up the struggle with Fidel Castro's band to take power in Cuba in the name of the masses. The story is a famous one of the handful of followers seeking shelter and succour from the downtrodden high-hill farmers, and seeing their numbers grow against an enemy impotent to resist their form of hit and run warfare.

It was not an application of Marxism, Leninism or Maoism. What it represented was an ably-led group taking advantage of local circumstances and finding the way to succeed in the society they fought over, and in the terrain they fought in. The Batista régime, watching the enemy's strength grow, found their own will to resist sapped by their inability to get to grips with the elusive foe. When they left while they still had the chance, Castro's forces were able to impose and consolidate the rule of the party, as in Russia and China.

Guevara was the intellectual and the spokesman, as well as the man of action. He is one of the mythopoeic figures of his age because he represents the yearning of all intellectuals for the action that most of them will never know. He strikes the chord identified by Dr Johnson when he said 'Every man who has never been a soldier feels guilty because of that fact.'

It was Guevara who rewrote the theory again to accommodate once more what had been done in practice. There was now a Latin American version of Marxism, just as there was a Russian version and a Chinese version. The Latin American brand, moreover, like the other two brands, was available for export.

This is where Guevara's story becomes instructive. Like true heroes he found it difficult to settle into the routine of ordinary life. After a brief spell in the Cuban government, he headed off to Bolivia to instigate a Castro style revolution. In this case, instead of doing what had been done in Cuba, he tried to apply the theory. He looked at Bolivia and saw Cuba. His tiny band made for the subsistence hill farmers, to repeat the Cuban experience. In fact the society and the terrain were different, and called for different tactics.

Had Guevara not been obsessed by the theory which was afterwards supplied to underlie the Cuban revolution, he might have recognized revolutionary potential in the tin miners of Bolivia. Here was a class which could have been taught about exploitation and which could have provided the growing numbers for his army. It was not to be. The hill farmers he went to save and seek support from regarded Che Guevara and the war he engaged upon as one more hazard in an already difficult existence. They betrayed him for a reward, and he was killed by US-trained Bolivian rangers.

Success came in Cuba because practical exigencies overcame any theoretical preconceptions. Castro's group did what worked and did not worry overmuch about what the theory said. The theory was rewritten afterwards, as it is after every success. Failure came in Bolivia because the theory dominated. Instead of adjusting to local circumstances and conditions, the attempt was made to put into effect a theory of revolutionary struggle. That theory had been written for a different society and a different topography. It

had, moreover, been written retrospectively, with the hindsight knowledge of the methods which had gained success there.

The theory which Guevara might have applied to Bolivia, instead of being transfixed by the model which brought victory in Cuba, is that success depends upon opportunism. Men of action seize the moment to do what it takes to win in the conditions they encounter. Their brilliance is not in analysis or theoretical application. It is in seizing the chances as they come, and taking advantage of whatever becomes available. They often learn as they go along, improving by trial and error. Sometimes their mistakes are nearly fatal, as in the case of Castro. They succeed by learning from them and not repeating them.

As for the theory, this can always be written in the leisure of success. After the world has been changed there is always an interest in hearing why and how it was done. Because the theory explains the circumstances of success, being written to do precisely that, it commands the attention of men and women of ideas by supplying rationality to the events.

The role of theory in the above events is an interesting one in so far as its status is concerned. The theory is that which, had it been devised and known about in advance, would have explained that which eventually came about. Instead of predicting what will happen, it supplies an *ex post facto* rationalization for what did happen. Its role is thus one of interpreting events after they have happened.

Of course, the theory claims to predict future events. It appears as a modification of Marxism which explains all that has occurred so far, and on whose basis future action can ostensibly be taken. The factual situation is that each new circumstance requires yet more modification to the theory. For a theory to be acceptable, it must explain the past. It must enable one to 'retrodict' what

did in fact occur. It should also be susceptible to tests of its predictive power. If it fails every time, then rewriting the theory after each event begins to resemble rewriting history. The theory, in other words, begins simply to list what has occurred rather than to make it understandable by analysis.

There is, curiously enough, an earlier version of the Marxist approach which does allow room for men of action as well as the logic of ideas. Frederick Wilhelm Hegel was one of the most potent influences on Marx. He had proposed, a generation before Marx, that human history was set on a certain course towards the emergence of reason. He did not use the term to mean human reason, but rather that some kind of logical determinism was moving mankind through inevitable stages of social development toward a predetermined goal. He it was who devised the dialectic of progress in which the conflict of 'thesis' and 'antithesis' produced the 'synthesis' of the next stage.

Marx adopted much of the Hegelian system, adapted to a different conclusion, and with the base of economic determinism grafted on. Although Marx left little room for individual will in his system, Hegel had recognized the role played by great men in history. In his version there was space for the 'World Historical Figure' who has the honour of ushering in each new stage of history when the time is right. Thus Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon all have the function of bringing about the next phase of history. It might be the end of Greek city states, the end of the Roman republic, or the emergence of the modern state.

Hegel's version appears to have the attraction of an underlying theory which nonetheless allows opportunists to win victories for it and rewrite it along the way. Unfortunately, Hegel's theory is totally retrospective. There is no way of predicting when these 'World Historical Figures' will come, who they will be, or

which ones will succeed. They are only identified as such and named after their success. In other words, Hegel's theory is like that of Marx, to be modified by every major event which history throws up. Like Marx's, it allows only for *ex post facto* rationalization after the critical events have already taken place.

The clear implication of the foregoing analysis is that major advances in political theory come only after practice has already established them in the world. The writer who appears to be engaged in putting forward a radical innovation at the theoretical level may in reality be setting down the intellectual basis for something which has already come about. The message is that the practice precedes the theory. The textbooks are engaged in description, albeit under the guise of prescription.

There is nothing anti-rational in such a suggestion. It is consistent with the respectable view that more knowledge is gained in the world by trial and error than by the computation and application of complex formulae. The formulae codify and amalgamate what has been learned. They unify what would otherwise seem disparate and unconnected pieces of knowledge.

The experience of advances in political theory suggests that the process is similar, with the writers and thinkers setting down in analytical form what has already been learned in the real world. But an important question arises from this insight. If we accept the primacy of practice over theory as a source of political innovation, where does this place the battle for ideas?

If theoretical ideas follow from and interpret the changes which have already taken place at the practical level, then 'winning the battle for ideas' loses importance as a means of influencing events. It is downgraded from a struggle to determine the future course of society into a struggle to decide how changes shall be interpreted. The battle becomes a battle between competing explanations, rather than a contest to decide

future outcomes. If theory really does follow in the wake of practice to supply its rationale and its intellectual superstructure, then the battle between prevailing theories and innovative ones becomes a contest to decide how events will be interpreted.

The events themselves take place as people seize opportunities to achieve goals. Only afterwards does theory come to place the successes into the context of a new political framework. To call the motives which move people by the name of a political theory is to elevate them too high. They may be no more than the ordinary passions which people act from, such as greed, the lust for power or fame, or the desire to help others and make a better world. It is sufficient for the moment that some people act in innovative ways and produce a new reality. The events which they cause need to be explained and understood.

The lonely scholar, labouring away in the wilderness with the new and unacceptable idea, is more likely to be providing a theoretical basis for interpreting recent events than proposing a leap into an unknown future. It is more likely that recent events have left existing explanations and interpretations inadequate to deal with them. The innovative scholar has realized this, and has produced an innovative theory to accommodate those recent events.

The intellectual battle is as bitter, the struggle as intense and drawn out. But the victory when gained in the world of ideas can no longer be seen to pull events automatically in its tow. The battle in the world of events may have been fought and won on the field of practice. The assumption made by intellectuals, and distilled in the words of John Maynard Keynes, was that when the ideas triumph, rulers will act as their unwitting servants and handmaidens.

The reverse may be true instead. It may be that men and women of ideas, thinking themselves quite exempt

from any influences, are in reality the slaves of some defunct man of action. Scholars who fancy they hear voices in the air suggesting new ideas may be doing no more than distilling the practical experience of those whose impact is made upon the real world.

3 Illustrations from Democracy

Although it is evident that in many cases the even lead the way with the explanatory theory following, could be argued that this model is not applicable to democratic societies. The men of action might take the lead where public opinion is of little consequence, but where governments need a wide measure of popular support to gain power and implement policies, it could be crucially necessary to win first the battle for ideas.

Plato wrote in praise of the oligarchic government of Sparta. It is true that the Athens in which he lived and wrote was a limited democracy, but Plato's ideas were not adopted there. He was idealizing a form of social organization which already existed, and his work did not lead his own society to emulate it. It is of note that when military defeat led Athens into a temporary period of oligarchy approved of by Sparta, many of Plato's friends and relatives participated in that government, although Plato himself was soon disaffected by it.

Plato did make the attempt to influence a real society by taking the post of advisor to Dionysius, then Dion of Syracuse. In both cases he attempted to shape the society concerned by direct input through the ruler rather than by convincing the citizens. The attempt to found his Republic in the temporal, as opposed to the ideal, world foundered on both occasions, and Plato

narrowly escaped the fate, typified by Che Guevara, of those who approach society with a preconceived theory.

The Glorious Revolution which instituted the constitutional monarchy given its justification by Locke was not achieved by democratic means. It was, in effect, a *coup d'état* brought on by those who feared the designs of a Catholic king armed with absolute power. Informed opinion was divided. Indeed, the myth that James I had 'abdicated' (by being forced to flee) was put forward as the justification for giving away his throne, and the constitutional Protestant monarch, William III, was obliged to share the throne with his wife Mary, who was closer to the Stuart blood line. Both of these moves were designed to assuage those opposed to the *coup*.

The events set in motion by Lenin, Mao and Castro all took place in non-democratic societies, with no need to win the battle for ideas. All that they had to win was power, and then institute the means to maintain it independently of popular opinion. It is significant that there are virtually no cases in which Marxist or communist governments have come to power on a majority vote, and none at all in which they have left it by such means.

It may be that the cases cited all took place in societies where informed opinion counted for little, and that the formula whereby the action precedes the rationalization of it is simply not valid in a democratic society. It could be that 'winning the battle of ideas' is an essential prerequisite of change wherever informed opinion is of consequence.

When the American constitution was adopted in 1789, it was in a society with a strong democratic element, and certainly one in which informed opinion counted. Yet the constitution which emerged from the convention was not one for which arguments had been fought and won, for the most part. Many of the delegates had not been empowered to do what they did.

Just as it had been a minority of Americans who had fought and won the war for independence from Britain, so it was a minority who turned the Articles of Confederation into a federal constitution. Again, the event had some of the elements of a coup, with a few leaders pushing through a constitution to give a strong and central identity to the United States. As in the other cases examined, its theory and its justification came after its success. The *Federalist Papers* were not written in order to persuade informed opinion to do the deed; they were written afterwards to provide a retrospective rationalization. In this respect they stand in the same relation to events as do the *Two Treatises on Civil Government* by Locke. The argument did rage after the event, as it did in Locke's time, and there was a battle of ideas. But it was once again a battle for explanation; a struggle to justify what had been done.

There are two recent cases from democratic societies which merit close attention; they are the administrations of Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States. Both deserve study in the context of the present argument because each is alleged to provide an example of how previous victories in the battle for ideas made possible their election and the policies they were able to implement.

While there are important and obvious differences, relating in some ways to the different constitutions and societies under which they serve, there are similarities so striking that some latterday Plutarch would have no difficulty dealing with them as 'parallel lives.' The coincidence in time inevitable leads to a comparison, with Mrs Thatcher's winning her first election in 1979, and Mr Reagan his in 1980.

There is a further and highly significant parallel. In each case there had been a predecessor of the same party elected on a broadly similar mandate. The predecessors were not immediate: in each case there

were intermediaries. Richard Nixon took up office as President of the United States in 1969, Edward Heath as Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1970, and each left office in 1974. Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter separated Mr Nixon from Mr Reagan, while Harold Wilson and James Callaghan separated Mr Heath from Mrs Thatcher.

The significance of Nixon and Heath is that they were elected to do what Reagan and Thatcher were elected to do. The difference is that they did not do it. Whether or not their lives ran close enough to each other to attract a Plutarchian comparison, neither of them implemented the programme they were elected upon. Each achieved some notable and perhaps lasting accomplishments, but both are currently remembered more for their failures than for their successes.

A look at the rhetoric of their election campaigns, and the manifestos on which they stood, show striking similarities. The thrust of the Nixon stand was anti-big government, freeing US business from some of the regulations which stood in its way. The burden of government, expanded hugely under Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' programme was to be lifted. Foreign policy would assert national interests.

The media and contemporary US historians remember the election as dominated by the 'peace' issue of withdrawal from Vietnam, with Eugene McCarthy's upset victory in the New Hampshire Democratic primary effectively knocking Johnson out of the race. In history, as opposed to memory, Johnson won that primary, and both Nixon and Humphrey went into the election opposing immediate withdrawal of US forces, defusing it as an issue.

It is striking today to realize how conservative was the tone of the Nixon campaign of 1968. It is even more striking to examine the manifesto on which Heath's Conservatives fought the 1970 election in Britain, and to

look back to the Selsdon Park Manifesto which immediately preceded it. The familiar sentiments call for rolling back the state, denationalizing public industries, cutting the costs of government and its involvement in the economy. The breath of free enterprise which blew through the Nixon election programme found an echoing breeze in the British election which followed.

Nixon in America and Heath in Britain were both elected on a mandate broadly hostile to collectivism, in favour of more space for enterprise, more freedom from regulation, and less burden of taxation. Nixon was elected twelve years before Reagan, Heath won nine years before Thatcher. It did not take those intervening years to convince the electorates on both sides of the Atlantic of the merits of the stance. In each case they voted for it the first time.

The significant fact is that both Nixon and Heath won. The voters were sufficiently in favour of the anti-government and pro-free enterprise ideas being put forward to elect their proponents into office. If it took a battle of ideas to reach that stage, it had been won by 1968 in America and by 1970 in Britain.

Given the programme on which they were elected, the clear way in which this was put forward during the campaign, and the mandate given to it by the voters, the subsequent behaviour of both of the two administrations requires some explanation. Neither of them did what they said they would. Both to some extent performed more of the policies which they had opposed during the elections.

In the United States Nixon further limited the freedom of the market by introducing wage and price controls in Stages One, Two and Three. Regulation was extended under his term of office. The judicial activism of government agencies, such as the forced bussing prompted by the Department of Justice under Civil Rights legislation, continued, and was extended in a

major way into the cities of the Northern states. An entire new agency was set up to handle 'legal services,' which meant, in effect, providing public funds for a department to regulate by litigation.

The size and cost of government increased, and the total burden of taxation increased. Inflation dragged many people into higher tax brackets which had originally been intended only for the very rich. Most disturbing of all to those who supported the manifesto on which the President had been elected, the pattern was intensified whereby federal agencies in effect made law without reference to Congress by the use of detailed rules to interpret broad statutes. American individuals, businesses and corporations found themselves assailed by a minutiae of law put into effect by the Food and Drug Administration, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, and the alphabet soup which made up the federal agencies.

While this was happening in the United States, its parallel was unfolding in Britain. The Heath administration had been committed to a large degree of denationalization. It managed to sell the state-owned Carlisle brewery, taken into government hands in the First World War to discourage drunkenness among munition workers, and to dispose of a state owned travel agency. These tiny acts of denationalization were outweighed by the government's takeover of the ailing Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and Rolls Royce, the aero-engine manufacturers.

The Heath government introduced its own wages and price controls, in the British case via Phases One, Two and Three. It reorganized local government into huge bureaucracies remote from ordinary people, and without the old names and local loyalties. It debased the currency by a huge increase in the supply of money, nominally to fund a 'dash for growth,' but in fact funding a stampede towards paper fortunes made in

speculative property deals. The phrase 'U-turn' entered the political vocabulary to describe a government which turns in the exact opposite direction to the one it started upon.

The obvious question to be answered is why both of these administrations, given majority support in the elections for a conservative programme to limit the government's power and scope, should not only have failed to implement such a programme, but should have done the opposite. If the battle for ideas had been won to give them that majority support, why did events not follow in its train?

Several explanations have been advanced, with varying degrees of sophistication, to explain this event which happened in two major countries at roughly similar times. The simplest is also the least plausible; it is duplicity. This explanation would have us believe that neither Nixon nor Heath ever believed in the ideas on which they were elected, or had any intention of trying to implement them. On the contrary, the argument runs, they saw that the battle for ideas had been won by the advocates of less government and free enterprise, and simply cashed in on that sentiment in order to secure election.

The argument is implausible because both leaders in fact made early attempts to introduce at least some parts of their promised programme, and only later in their terms of office did they make the U-turns. This same fact probably defeats the second argument, a slightly more subtle version of the first. This is that both Nixon and Heath were at heart members of the governing class, and shared its general values and preconceptions.

While they might play with the rhetoric of radical change, they were determined in fact to keep to the kind of politics which was understood by the business and financial community, and with which they felt comfortable. Although this version is rather more

polished than its primitive counterpart, it again fails to explain why they both started on one set of policies and then changed to another. Surely the time to reassure the business and financial leaders was at the start of their terms of office?

A third explanation, and one advanced most often by disgruntled former supporters whose aspirations had not been realized, was that neither of the two men was 'tough enough.' This criticism is often accompanied by the assertion that they should have struck earlier and harder, while their mandate was hot. It might be true, but an examination of the personality and record of each of them reveals an extraordinary strength of character.

Nixon showed considerable resilience over a year and a half of relentless Watergate investigation and media abuse. A weaker man would have broken much earlier. Heath showed then, and since, a strength of will and a determination which characterize a reluctance to give way on anything. The description of them as 'not tough enough' simply does not fit. It tends, in any case, to be used by supporters disappointed that the millennium does not arrive in the first week of a new term of office. It has been used of both Reagan and Thatcher, of whom it is no more accurate.

There is a fourth explanation with the advantage that Mr Heath, among others, appears to subscribe to it. It is that things look different in opposition. When one looks from the outside, ideas are put forward, and plans laid. Government itself, however, is a learning process, and leaders soon come to realize just which things are possible and which are not. In other words, the promises made in opposition should not be taken too seriously; they represent more of a declaration of intent. It is assumed that once in government, leaders will have to modify their plans to fit in with political realism.

On this model, both Nixon and Heath soon found out

that some of what they had promised just could not be done. Both of them concluded that it was not realistic in modern times to think in terms of less government. With the world and society growing ever more complicated, government, too, has to increase in complexity and scale. With more international interaction and interdependence between nations, governments can no longer afford to stand back from national industries.

A series of several similar assumptions builds up into a picture in which it is simply 'unrealistic' to expect conservative programmes such as those promised by Nixon and Heath to succeed in the modern world. This view is one which was quite widely held in the bureaucracy of government in both countries, and was at the time generally espoused in such media in both countries as aspired to be thought of as enlightened. This explanation was the most plausible, and perhaps the most widely believed, until the advent of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations showed that it was possible to implement major parts of a conservative programme and to make serious efforts to fulfil election promises.

A more complex version of the above explanation suggests that while the battle for ideas had been won, it had not been won in the right places. Even though the ideas were acceptable at a popular level, and to an extent sufficient to propel their exponents into office, perhaps the battle had not been won among opinion leaders. The attempt to implement them, on this version, was met by fierce resistance and incredulity on the part of an intellectual class whose approval was needed by government.

Thus, although the public and the party leaders were persuaded, the intellectual community was not. The policies were scorned in the academic world, in the powerful echelons of the Civil Service and among the influential media commentators whose opinions are

valued by administrations. Even with a popular mandate, the Nixon and Heath governments were unable to fly in the face of what appeared to be virtually all informed opinion. The battle for ideas had to be won in that group before success would come.

An attractive feature of this explanation is that there did appear to be a disparity between the popular opinion which returned the Nixon and Heath governments, and the views of the intelligentsia. In Britain John Braine on television pointed out the contrast between the scorn which an educated BBC audience accorded to his views, and the results board which showed the country at large voting for them. In the United States, the Vice President Spiro Agnew was castigating the 'effete corps of intellectual snobs' and the 'philosophical eunuchs.'

Despite its truth content, this disparity between popular and intellectual opinion falls down as an explanation for the failure of Nixon and Heath to carry out their programmes because it was still true for their successors. Academic and intellectual opinion leaders had not been won over by the time of the Thatcher and Reagan governments. The 364 economists who wrote to *The Times* in England denouncing Thatcher economics typify an opposition to her views among educators and intellectuals. Polls in America contrasted the huge support enjoyed by Reagan among ordinary citizens with the equally huge majorities against him among informed commentators.

If the hostility of the intellectual community had been sufficient to thwart Nixon and Heath despite a popular mandate, why was it unable to stop Reagan and Thatcher? The battle for ideas which had been won among ordinary voters in Britain and America by the time of the 1968 and 1970 elections had still not been won among the intellectual classes by the time of the 1979 and 1980 elections.

The experiences of the Nixon and Heath administrations are very revealing for those concerned with the battle for ideas. On the conventional, and rather attractive, model, the advent of Reagan in America and Thatcher in Britain represented success in the struggle. The long years in a scorned minority had paid off; the patient and diligent effort had achieved its objective. Now those once mocked ideas became standard currency, and leaders espousing them were carried to office on a popular upswell of sentiment in their favour. Only then did it become possible to act.

What appears as a classic illustration of the importance of making the ideas acceptable at all levels, and as an inspiration to others to put in the same kind of dedication, melts away when the evidence is examined. If the battle for ideas had not been won at a popular level in 1968 and 1970, how is it that Nixon and Heath were elected on a platform constructed of those very ideas? If the battle had not been won among the intellectual classes in 1968 and 1970, how did that differ from the situation in 1979 and 1980?

There is a vital ingredient missing from the recipe. Nixon and Heath were elected with a popular mandate, albeit with opposition from 'informed' opinion, on the basis of a programme to curb big government and promote free enterprise. They did not do so, for the most part. Reagan and Thatcher were similarly elected, roughly a decade later, also with a popular mandate and lack of endorsement by the intellectual classes. Their programmes also pledged to cut government and boost private enterprise. They implemented substantial parts of those programmes. If the contrast cannot be explained by differences in the characters or the preconceptions of the participants, and it cannot be glossed over by talk of what was or was not 'realistic' at the time, the explanatory gap remains to be filled.

One possible way of filling that explanatory gap

would involve the supposition that both Nixon and Heath were badly equipped to do what their supporters expected of them. This would suggest that they were sincere in their declared election programmes and that they were not lacking in strength of character, but that neither of them appreciated the magnitude or complexity of the task which faced them.

The prevailing view of the day contained the implicit assumption that changes in events follow automatically upon changes in ideas. Both Nixon and Heath probably shared the general view that reforms came about by being wanted and proposed. Since there was general support for their programme, both assumed that when it was introduced in the legislature it would be put through and would achieve the desired changes. When it failed to do so, they concluded that the ideas were inappropriate to the real world, and looked instead for alternative policies which would succeed.

Both were victims, in a sense, of the 'battle for ideas' outlook which assumed that it was enough to muster general support for free market ideas and opposition to big government. They both had the will to make a radical departure from past practices, and they enjoyed a climate of opinion generally favourable to such action. Neither of them, however, knew what to do.

The point is that the battle of ideas takes place at the level of generalities. Concepts such as 'free market' are set in opposition to others such as 'big government.' The debate takes place in the realm of theory and abstraction. Practical evidence is drawn from the world of experience to support or confute positions laid down in theory.

Detailed academic studies might be performed which show that the record of government-owned steel industries, for example, is poorer than that of privately owned ones in other countries. The results might show that the state-produced steel costs more per unit to

produce, that manpower is used less productively, that delivery dates are not met, and that quality control is nowhere near as effective as for its private counterpart. Other theorists might even step in with suggestions as to why this is so, and to explain the reason for the practical outcome.

Activity such as this might establish a case against state ownership of steel industries. Indeed, empirical and theoretical studies had established just such a case against state ownership of industry in Britain by the late 1960s, if not earlier. Similar work in the United States had shown the baneful effects of regulation on the wealth creating process and the crowding out effect of government spending.

All of this might motivate popular opinion and political leaders with the determination to change things; but none of it tells them what to do. It is one thing to know that a state-owned steel sector is inefficient and inferior. It is quite another to know what to do about it.

The response of the simplistic supporter of private enterprise is to say: 'Get rid of the state steel industry.' That this is a difficult and complex task requiring detailed knowledge of sophisticated techniques does not occur to him. He elects a government to get rid of state steel, and watches with mounting impatience as months, perhaps years, go by without action. He wants to know why, and suspects weakness or duplicity. He resolves next time to elect someone tougher who will go in harder on the first day and actually do it.

Meanwhile, the government he helped to elect becomes increasingly frustrated as it tries to find a way of doing something about the state steel industry. Every suggestion seems to promise dire consequences. Figures are produced by its Civil Service to show that it will be less costly to continue subsidies to state owned steel than it will be to support the hundreds of

thousands of people who would lose their jobs otherwise. Bleak scenarios are set before ministers in which supporting industries are forced to close. A domino effect is predicted in which bankruptcies and closures follow one upon the other. The government hesitates and reconsiders.

It is not attracted by the 'hair shirt' strategy urged upon it by its most ardent supporters. This, in essence, claims that any thing worth doing in politics is bound to produce unpleasant effects and unpopularity to begin with. An incoming government therefore has a duty to do everything all at once in the teeth of an outcry of enraged opposition. It should then sit back and ride the storm of unpopularity and possible violence, until the long-term beneficial effects of the market have had time to work through and show people the wisdom of the government's deeds. With luck, and if the government's programme is not delayed by opposition and constitutional processes, this might come about before it has to seek re-election.

It is unfair for supporters of the Nixon and Heath governments to criticize them, as they do, for not adopting that strategy. In the first place, it took the experience of office to make them realize the problem. By the time they realized that they lacked a technique, it was already too late to implement the 'hair shirt' solution. Secondly, it must be said that the checks and balances of democratic societies, the separation of powers and the space provided for a voice of opposition, are all designed precisely to prevent such tactics being used.

The Nixon and Heath administrations are remembered more for their failures than their successes not because they did not want to implement their programmes, nor because they lacked the support for them, but because they did not know how to do it. They might have known that free markets were a good thing,

but they did not know how to get them. They might have been persuaded of the case against big government, but they did not know how to make it smaller.

The suggestion is thus that technique fills the gap between ideas and events. The knowledge of how to implement policies to achieve political objectives is no less important than the selection of the priorities to be sought. On this explanation, the reason why Reagan succeeded to a large extent in areas where Nixon had failed is not that opinion had been won over in the meantime, or that the 1980s were more suitable for such attitudes than the 1970s. It was that the Nixon administration did not know how to do it, but the Reagan team did.

In a similar way on the other side of the Atlantic, the Heath government's U-turns were brought on by its lack of techniques to implement its original policies. The climate of opinion had not changed substantially at either the popular or the 'informed' level between the election of Heath and Thatcher. Neither local nor international developments had made centralist policies any more or less appropriate during the intervening years. What was different was that the Thatcher government paid considerably more attention to the details of policy. They had a conception of what was needed, as did Heath's administration, but the Thatcher team also knew how to do it.

The crucial difference between Nixon and Reagan, between Heath and Thatcher, was policy itself. The early 1970s saw the return of governments with a broad grasp of the principles of free market economics, but which were forced to turn their back on those principles for want of detailed knowledge of how to put them into practice. The early 1980s, by contrast, saw the return of governments versed to a greater extent in the technical details of how the principles could be applied.

The difference reflected itself in a self-conscious

appreciation of technique by the later administrations. The earlier ones, faced with their inability to implement their programmes, had turned back to the old paradigm. The new governments, when early attempts failed, tried different techniques to achieve the same objectives. Instead of reversing their course, they both learned as they went along, discarding techniques which proved ineffective, and repeating ones that worked.

The factor which makes the difference between failure for the Nixon and Heath governments and success for those of Reagan and Thatcher is not one of the personnel, of the movement of ideas, or of the times in which they operated, but appears to be one concerned with the ways in which policy is implemented. The later teams were very much more concerned to have a battery of policy techniques developed, techniques, moreover, which showed acute sensitivity to that which is politically acceptable.

This leaves unanswered the question of why it happened that the early conservative programmes lacked policy techniques to enable them to be implemented, whereas the gap had been at least partly filled by the time of the later ones. To some extent the one may have been the cause of the other. That is, the experience of the failure of Nixon and Heath may have engendered in their successors a determination not to repeat the process. The experience of that false dawn of the early 1970s might itself have led to the development of policy techniques which would take later governments to success in the 1980s.

It may have been so. Just as there were those in the early attempts to achieve a free market programme who 'learned' from the failure that such ideas were no longer relevant, so there may have been others who took a different lesson, resolving to try in alternative ways if the chance came again.

There is an alternative explanation which may be true

either in conjunction with the first, or independently. It is that opinion in the early 1970s lacked a coherent theory of policy application, and thought that the task of political leaders was simply to 'implement' ideas. Some time during that decade, perhaps spurred on by the Nixon and Heath experiences, came the realization that it is not ideas which are implemented, but policies, and that there is a substantial gap between the idea itself and the policy which puts it into effect.

There were developments, in other words, which laid open to question the fundamental assumption that ideas have consequences of themselves. The awareness came instead that the battle for ideas is only a part of the story; on its own it will lack the power to change events. During the period between the first try to implement free market programmes and the second, there came the understanding that ideas and policy have a more complex and interactive relationship than was formerly grasped, and that without the detailed policies to give them effect in a way which succeeds, the ideas may change our thinking, but they will not change the world.

4 Scientists and Engineers

We praise the pure scientists who add to our understanding of the world. They give us insights into the universe and help us to predict what we shall observe there. Some gain recognition and reward instantly, for others the appreciation takes time. The great discoveries of pure science are not like the insights which great political thinkers give us into the organization of society. In the case of scientific hypotheses, there is an established procedure by which theories must survive tests which can be replicated before the process of acceptance begins. There is no such agreed methodology for accepting the work of political thinkers.

The social and political theorists are, however, like the pure scientists in one important respect. They try by their insights to increase our understanding of the world we live in. From Plato and Aristotle, through Adam Smith and Edmund Burke, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill, down to thinkers such as Friedrich Hayek in our own time, they can change our perception of the world.

In much the same way, thinkers such as Isaac Newton, Sir Robert Boyle and Lord Kelvin change the way we look at the world. Thanks to their contributions, it appears to us to be more unified and more comprehensible. The pure scientists change our understanding

of the world; they do not, however, change the world. It may look different after they have done their creative work, but it is the same world as it was before.

After the pure scientists have put forward their ideas, a second group of creative minds comes to build machines which operate on their laws. The activity is no less creative, but its function is to take the insights of the pure scientist as the starting point, and to construct engines which work on their basis. Just as we honour Newton, Boyle and Kelvin, so do we also honour the engineers who use their work to build the machines. James Watt, George Stephenson and Isambard Kingdom Brunel have their place in humanity's hall of fame, no less than the pure scientists whose work provided their starting-point.

With Newton we understand motion and optics, with Boyle the behaviour of gases, with Kelvin the dynamics of heat. We could list many others, and the area in which they extended our understanding. But it is to James Watt that we owe the working steam engine, to George Stephenson the locomotive, and to Isambard Kingdom Brunel the suspension bridge and the trans-oceanic steamship. The pure scientists change our understanding of the world; it is the engineers who change the world itself.

It takes a second type of thinking, no less original, no less creative, to devise the machines which will operate on the principles uncovered by the scientists. With Boyle we understand gases under pressure; with Watt and Stephenson we make it work for us. The scientists have interpreted the world; the point is to change it.

Of course, the work of the pure scientist is an essential precursor of the work of the engineer. Without the great creative insights our engineering would be no more than a few rule of thumb devices developed by chance and improved by experience. The ancient Chinese and the Romans did reasonably well on such a

basis, but the leaps and bounds of modern technology are made possible by a firm grounding in theoretical understanding of the workings of nature.

The pure scientist is essential, but so is the engineer. Without the second stage of creativity we would be left with a much richer understanding of the universe as we tilled our fields with wooden ploughs.

There is a parallel between the work of the pure scientists and that of the great social thinkers. To some extent Montesquieu and Locke resemble Hooke and Joule. The fact that human society is the subject of study in one case makes for important differences in what can be achieved, but the creative insights are still there to enrich our understanding. We feel after reading them that human society is more comprehensible than it was, and that we understand some of the principles which underlie it.

This understanding does not, of itself, change it. Just as with the pure scientists, the world remains the same after the social theorists have made their pronouncements upon it. It takes a second group of creative minds to put the flesh of practice on to the bones of social and political theory, just as it takes engineers to build machines based on scientific theory. The great scholars who analyse our societies and their laws need their engineers before the insight can alter the reality.

It is one thing for us to understand a principle, but quite another to make it work to our advantage. This applies no less to the study of society than to the study of nature. We honour our political theorists as we honour our scientists, for the insights they give us. But we should recognize that policy engineers are needed to make machines out of the theory, and that the activity is by no means automatic.

No one would suppose that after the work of Newton, Boyle or Kelvin, the machines which operated by their laws would simply emerge. If they did, we

would be waiting still. We know that it takes the application and work of creative minds. The machines do not happen; men make them. The same is true of political theory. The advances made at the theoretical level do not translate themselves into working policy. If, after the pioneering work of Adam Smith or Friedrich Hayek, we waited for a change in events to follow automatically in its wake, we would be waiting still.

It is as true of public policy as of pure science: the theorists change our understanding, the engineers change the world. Policy is an intricate process which requires skill, sensitivity and creative intelligence. It does not just happen, any more than machines do.

The 'battle for ideas' in political and economic theory can be likened to the disputes which take place in scientific theory. Scientists put forward competing theories, and they and their supporters fight to gain recognition for them. No doubt much of the decidedly unscholarly behaviour takes place in these contests as typifies academic infighting in general. Even though there are procedures for testing, these can occasionally be faked, hushed up, or ignored and denied publicity. The struggle, however fairly it is conducted, is for mastery of explanation. It is a contest between conflicting interpretations of the universe.

Ideas at the scholarly level in politics and economics are also engaged in a battle for acceptance, and it is also a battle for explanation. At the end of the struggle, it alters how we look at things. It does not alter the things themselves. For that we need policy engineers to construct the instruments we can use to have an impact on the world itself.

There is an intellectual fashion in Britain, and a regrettable one at that, which affects to sneer at the role of the engineer. The very term 'pure science' is elevated as though engineering were somehow impure. It is assumed that the work of the pure scientist is at a

higher level, more academically detached, and therefore more holy than the work of the man in overalls with grease stains on his hands and clothes. This is an intellectual fashion which arises partly from the priorities of our system of education, and partly from the legacy of a class system which accorded more status to an office job with clean hands.

Other, more successful, countries have no such scale of priority. They recognize that the creative requirement of the inventor is not less than that of the theorist; and they admit the social utility of the former. They honour their inventors and engineers as the British once did, and reap the reward of seeing their top talent move into that area.

Perhaps it is the preoccupation with 'pure' research which has led to the primacy of the notion that the 'battle for ideas' is what changes events, and for the essential role of the policy engineer to be overlooked. This is particularly unfortunate in view of the fact that the engineer's role in the application of social, political or economic theory, is possibly more important than that of his counterpart in the world of material things.

It is usually the case in the realm of technology that the work of the pure scientist comes first. The theoretician achieves the breakthrough in understanding, and the engineers, mechanics and inventors come at a later stage to build their creative ideas upon that base. It is not universally so. There are cases in which a working machine produced by an inventor prompts the theorists to re-examine their models of the universe. There were, after all, primitive working machines before the discipline of theoretical scientific study was established.

The ancient Chinese and Romans had crude, rule-of-thumb working machines long before the physical laws on which they operated were known. In their case it was only much later that the pure scientists were able to say why the machines worked as they did. There have

been more recent cases in which an engineer has produced a machine which ought not to have worked according to known laws. The presence of the machine has turned the attention of scientists back to those physical laws in order to restructure them to explain why it was able to function successfully.

These are exceptions to a general rule. In science it is usually the theory which comes first, and the machines which are built upon it. In the field of public policy, however, there is no such general rule. Inspection reveals the opposite pattern. In general it is the practice which comes first, and the theory which is later elaborated to interpret it and to fit it into an explanatory framework.

The cases referred to all fit comfortably into this pattern. The Republic of Plato set out the general style and many of the detailed rules of the comparatively successful society of Sparta. The attempt to apply the theory of the Republic to Syracuse failed. Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government* delineated a theory for the already accomplished limited monarchy of the Glorious Revolution. The *Federalist Papers* argued the case in principle for a constitution of the United States already decided in practice. Lenin's revision of Marxism justified in theory what Lenin had done to win power, and showed retrospectively why it had been done that way. The same is true of Mao Tse Tung's modification of Marxist-Leninism, and of the theoretical additions necessitated by the success of Castro's revolution. In all of these cases it was the policy which was applied first, and the 'pure' theory which came afterwards.

In policy, as in science, it is the engineers who change the world and the theoreticians who change our understanding of it. The major difference is that it is usually the theorists who come first in science to pave the way for the creative engineers. In political theory the policy engineers usually change the world first, with

the academic theorists coming after them to explain things.

There is an interaction between theory and practice in both science and political theory. Once a valid theory has been put forward to explain the observations and to accommodate the practical cases, it might itself inspire some new practical applications. The study of case histories, on the other hand, can lead to modification of a supporting theory, as practice reveals facets previously unsuspected by theory.

The relationship is not cause and effect one way or the other. There is a complex pattern of feedback between the two, operating in both directions. While theory tends to lead in science, and practice tends to lead in public policy, the same type of interactive relationship between theory and practice is to be found in both fields.

In a hypothetical case in science, and perhaps a typical one, the original insight produces a general theory. On the basis of that general theory, innovative machines are devised and constructed. Some of those machines might point to circumstances not covered by the theory, leading to modification or extension of it to fit them in. This, in turn, might inspire newer types of machine.

A similar hypothetical case could be described in the field of public policy, as typical of its realm as the scientific example. An innovation is introduced, bringing practical success. The success brings it before the attention of the scholars, who apply creative insight to delineate the theory which accounts for its performance. That theory may, in turn, lead to other applications of the principle underlying the first success.

In each case theory and practice feed from each other, pointing those with creative imagination in the directions which might be fruitful. While in science the

general theory usually comes ahead of the machines, it need not. And while in social innovation the practice usually precedes the explanatory theory, it need not. These are general tendencies rather than universal rules, and there are easily recognized exceptions to both of them.

That said, there is an important corollary which follows for the field of human studies. If it is true that the practice usually comes before the theory which interprets it, and also true that theory on its own does not promote change without the creative activity of policy engineers, then it follows that the role of theory is of less significance in policy change than it is in the study of nature.

The battle for ideas might be equally intense in both disciplines in so far as the scholars and their supporters are concerned. Indeed, it might be more intense in political theory because of the impression that it is a battle for power over the future course of society. Despite this impression it is a battle in both fields over interpretation. Since the engineers tend to follow the pure scientists in the field of nature, victory in a struggle for interpretation might at least influence the generation of machines which are built upon the foundations of that general theory.

This is less likely to happen in political theory. With those who engage in policy engineering generally leading the way, the outcome of the conflict of ideas is likely to be of less consequence. It is more likely that the future has already been shaped by practical action, and that the battle is taking place to supply a contextual theory to cover it. The ideas are important because the way we look at our world is important; but it is the outlook over the long term on which they have their greatest impact, rather than on the policies which will be implemented in the immediate future.

Once the role of policy engineering is appreciated, it

becomes possible to account for the difference in the performance of the Nixon and Heath governments on the one hand and the Reagan and Thatcher governments on the other. There was, as already shown, no difference in the acceptability of the ideas between the administrations of the 1970s and those of the 1980s. They were sufficiently acceptable at a popular level both times to elect parties committed to them, and sufficiently unacceptable at the intellectual level each time to call forth widespread denunciation in academic and 'informed' circles.

The difference in performance could be attributed to policy. The Reagan and Thatcher administrations were much more equipped with the detailed mechanics of policy implementation, and aware of the need to develop even more practical policies in office. While the manifestos contained the same generalizations each time, the later governments had detailed policy options in preparation to put those generalities into effect.

Both Nixon and Reagan platforms referred to cutting the burden of government, but the Reagan team understood the mechanics of tax cutting, and had ready a detailed set of policy proposals which were designed to overcome some of the obstacles encountered previously.

Both Heath and Thatcher manifestos mentioned the desire to return state industries to the private sector. But whereas this remained only an unfulfilled wish of the Heath era, the Thatcher team went in with some conception of the policy problems, some notion of possible options, and a determination to learn from successful ones which techniques could succeed in a modern democratic society. The result was that in the Heath years more industry entered into the state sector, whereas the Thatcher years were characterized by its accelerating withdrawal from it.

The differences which some observers have sought in

the character or temperament of the participants, in their preconceptions, in what was realistic at the time, or in what opinion leaders were prepared to accept as reasonable, are now attributable to policy itself, to its mechanics and details. The first two leaders did not know how to do it; the second two did.

As a result of the experiences of the Nixon and Heath terms of office, some of those who supported their declared programmes decided to seek tougher and sounder standard bearers for those causes in the future. Others took a different message. Some who had been involved closely with those first attempts, either as participants or close observers, took the lesson that more subtle and more intricate policies would be required if they were to succeed in the future where they had failed in the past.

With the benefit of hindsight it seems as if the policy details were the deciding factor. It is true that Reagan and Thatcher appeared to those supporting their programmes to be both tougher and sounder than their predecessors. This is largely because unlike them, they did not abandon and then reverse those declared intentions. In other words, the success of the policies put into effect enabled both Reagan and Thatcher to remain true to their original programmes in a way which was not possible for their predecessors. It is because the policies were successful and could be repeated and extended that the leaders implementing them seemed stronger. It is not because the leaders were stronger that the policies were more successful.

The foregoing analysis suggests that a crucial switch in strategy took place some time in the 1970s among some of the elements which had supported political ideas conducive to the free market and hostile to the expanded domain occupied by government and the growth of government spending. Before the 1970s the argument had been fought on the level of principle.

That is, the emphasis had been on pointing out the evils wrought by collectivist policies, and of the superior virtues of the market economy. Books and papers were published, lectures delivered, seminars held, all designed to sell the case for free enterprise and to undermine centralist planning.

That the Nixon and Heath governments were elected on the basis of platforms strong on those themes attests to the success of that campaign of persuasion. That they did not succeed attests to the value of the maxim that one should not put one's trust in princes, nor indeed in the ideas which they profess to espouse.

The 1970s saw the emergence in both Britain and the United States of a new concern with policy itself. Many who supported a free enterprise programme continued as before to promote market virtues in general, and to criticize and expose the flaws of collectivist policies. Some continued to aim at academic opinion, others at political leaders, and some at the informed public. The new element was policy research, in which the detailed mechanisms of policy proposals were put under scrutiny, honed and polished to maximize their chances of success.

Part of the reasoning behind this new action was an appreciation of the time lag between the election of a new government and the preparation of its legislation. The process could take a full year, with a further year allowed for delay in preparation caused by civil service procrastination and obstruction. By the time the legislation could be put through in the following year, the end of a term of office would be approaching, and the government in power reluctant to take risks with unpopular policies.

One of the ideas which lay behind policy research was the idea of short circuiting the delays by having developed policies worked out in advance and ready for immediate action by an incoming government. The

view was current that some of the toughest fights would have to be fought first, and that a new government would have to be ready for them.

A further strand which led to the development of policy research in the 1970s was the appreciation that the civil service establishment enjoyed a virtual monopoly of practical knowledge. Outsiders might advocate ideas in general, but only within the bureaucracy of the various departments of government was to be found the experience and the expertise to set events in motion. The result of that monopoly was that the civil service view tended to prevail. Even the strongest willed minister with clear ideas of what should be done was alone against a united phalanx of expert opinion proclaiming this to be impossible.

The policy research teams took action in part to end that Civil Service monopoly. By advance preparation and detailed study of technique, they could offer the minister an alternative source of suggestion and initiative, and override the effective veto which the Civil Service had until then possessed by virtue of their exclusive command of detail.

A third intended result of the policy research was the breaching of the credibility barrier. Whereas general ideas might be dismissed as 'irrelevant' or 'unworkable,' a detailed policy proposal merited more serious attention. It would be harder to claim that certain things could not be done if there existed detailed plans and mechanisms for accomplishing them. Ministers who might otherwise have been persuaded that the prevailing paradigm was the only possible one would now be armed with worked-out alternatives showing this to be untrue. The detail given to the method of application lent credibility to the idea underlying it.

One of the important insights which led to the development of policy research was the realization that some techniques would be more successful than others, and that investigation could show which they were.

Instead of assuming, as previously, that victory in ideas would lead on to victory in events, some of those who advocated free market programmes now engaged in the work of identifying which policies would be likely to succeed. To do this involved them in consideration of the whole theory of public policy, so they could construct policies designed to overcome the hurdles which it placed before them.

The understanding that different ways of attempting to achieve similar objectives could be more successful than others led to competitive evaluation of policy proposals. The policy research workers began to test hypothetical scenarios to discover which proposals would attract support, and which might alienate popular opinion. Adjustments were made, details refined. A series of policy proposals gradually emerged during the 1970s, quite different from the broad advocacy of free enterprise ideas which had characterized the 1960s.

There were still groups, societies and institutes which carried on the work of winning converts to market solutions, and spreading disillusionment with the record of collectivism. But now there were new kids on the block. In both the United States and Britain there were established institutes whose function was not the advocacy of free enterprise, but the investigation and preparation of the detailed policies which might secure it in practice throughout the different areas of government. They were an important difference between the situation of the 1960s and that of the 1970s.

The new institutes took as their starting point the failure of the nominally free enterprise governments of the early 1970s to put market-oriented ideas into practice. They learned how the political system worked, and how to solve the problems it posed to would-be legislators. They researched ways in which choice and enterprise might be extended in practice, as well as advocated in theory. They gave policy-makers what they were looking for: policies.