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- p.9 line 14 'it' should read 'It'
- p.19 line 11 'lifes' should read 'lives'
- p.26 line 13 'organisation is the mobilisation of bias'
should be underlined
- p.32 line 22 'exist' should read 'exists'
- p.56 line 8 'common' should read 'uncommon'
- p.66 Footnote 2 'Lane' should read 'Land'
- p.71 last line 'interest' should read 'interests'
- p.84 line 5 'and Associated British Foods' should be
inserted after 'Rank Hovis McDougall'
- p.105 line 14 'the' should read 'be'
- p.107 Footnote 2 should refer to line 22 in the text
- p.108 line 4 'for' should read 'from'
- p.161 line 1 'the' should read 'that'
- p.213 line 4 'minoriry' should read 'minority'
- p.242 line 1 'Lord' should read 'Lords'
- p.245 line 29 'quality' should read 'qualify'
- p.246 line 7 'charge' should read 'charged'
- p.253 line 11 'countil' should read 'council'
- p.257 line 13 'Bacrach' should read 'Bachrach'
- p.270 line 3 'acid' should be inserted after 'trichloro-
phenoxyacetic'
- p.335 line 32 '(Agriculture)' should be underlined
- p.339 line 18 'Aquiescence' should read 'Quiescence'
- p.342 line 24 'Poverty' should be underlined

DIMENSIONS OF POWERLESSNESS

A study of agricultural workers in post-war England



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ABSTRACT

This inquiry into the nature of political powerlessness begins with a definition which posits that Q is politically powerless to the extent that it is unable to promote and defend its interests within authoritative processes of value allocation. Political powerlessness is said to derive from Q's lack of relevant power resources; and from T's exploitation of this deficiency through its exercise of power over Q. Contrary to pluralist assumptions, it is argued that T may exercise political power over Q both within and beyond formal arenas of value allocation: the determining factor is not where political power is exercised, but rather that it prevents Q from satisfying its interests within these authoritative arenas.

The above hypotheses are tested for their validity and utility by being applied to the experiences of the post-war agricultural work force in England. In particular, the study asks whether farmworkers' workplace powerlessness, as identified by Howard Newby in 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979), has been compensated for by their Union's promotion and defence of agricultural workers' occupational interests at the formal, political level.

Part One provides a theoretical, historical and descriptive setting for the empirical study. Part Two determines the extent to which the efforts of the Union and of its external political allies to influence the relevant value allocating institutions have resulted in the successful promotion and defence of farmworkers' objective interests. These interests are defined as: earning high wages (Chapter Four); living in housing which is independent from employment (Chapter Five); and ensuring a reasonable standard of occupational health and safety (Chapter Six).

The study shows that the farmworkers' Union has been largely unable to compensate for its members' industrial weakness by taking political action. The Union's political powerlessness is attributed chiefly to its lack of relevant power resources; and to its resulting vulnerability to power exercises both within and beyond the formal political arena, all of which have weakened the Union within that arena. It is suggested finally that the Union's recent merger with the Transport and General Workers' Union provides farmworkers with access to new power resources which may allow for greater success in the future promotion of farmworkers' occupational interests.

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INTRODUCTION : AN OVERVIEW

Ever since the Industrial Revolution began in England a popular device in literature, and more recently in the mass media, has been to offset the stark inequalities and social conflict of urban life with the presumed tranquility and harmony of English rural society. The communication media are replete with images of 'the city' as a hotbed of civic strife, torn by the antagonism which prevails between luxury home-owners and slum dwellers, between financial institutions and dole queues, between West End and East End ... in short, between the haves and have-nots of industrial, urban society. Conversely, the countryside is upheld as a welcomed retreat from such pervasive conflict, characterised as it is by an innocent preoccupation with the simple things in life which can be shared by all: the rhythm of nature, the village green, the local market and, of course, the countryside pub.¹

Whatever social functions this sort of contrast may be intended to serve, it is built upon a severely skewed image of rural England. A cursory glance through English social history reveals that extremities of poverty and wealth shaped the social fabric of the countryside long before the Industrial Revolution began and that they have continued to do so ever since.² Moreover, recent research suggests that the

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- 1 J.M. Shaw (ed) 'Rural Deprivation and Planning' (Geo Abstracts, Norwich: 1979) Introduction
 H. Newby 'Green and Pleasant Land?' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 13
 G. Jones 'Rural Life' (Longman, London: 1973)
 R. Norton-Taylor 'Whose Land is it Anyway?' (Turnstone Press, Wellingborough: 1982) p. 272
 - 2 E.J. Hobsbawm & G. Rude (Captain Swing) (Lawrence and Wishart, London: 1969)
 J.P.D. Dunbabin 'Rural Discontent in Nineteenth Century Britain' (Faber and Faber, London: 1974)
 G.E. Fussell 'From Tolpuddle to TUC' (Windsor Press, Slough: 1948)

persistent gulf between the rural privileged and the rural deprived has continued to engender a form of social conflict which may differ from urban unrest in kind, but not in degree.¹

In contemporary England, the poverty of the countryside is well represented by the hired agricultural workforce, while its great wealth is typified by their employers. If one defines poverty in terms of relative deprivation,² and if earnings levels are taken as an index of material well-being, it becomes impossible to describe Britain's 130,000 full-time farmworkers as anything but poor. Indeed, their earnings have been considerably lower than those of their industrial counterparts ever since the nineteenth century. In 1886 average agricultural earnings constituted 77% of average industrial earnings; by 1924 farmworkers found that they earned on average just over half of what industrial workers earned; and although the gap between agricultural and industrial earnings had narrowed by 1952 to return to the 1886 level, by 1983 the figure had slipped down again to 65.9%. In 1984, despite their long hours of work - between 46 and 49 per week, depending on occupation - agricultural workers were earning a weekly average of £115 which was over £50 per week less than the national average wage.³

1 H. Newby 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 1

2 Peter Townsend 'Poverty in the U.K.' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979)
R. Holman 'Poverty' (Martin Robertson, London: 1978)

3 New Earnings Survey 1983 Part A, Department of Employment London HMSO
New Earnings Survey 1984 Part A, Department of Employment London HMSO
J.G.S. and F. Donaldson 'Farming in Britain Today' (Allen Lane, London: 1969) p.29

Annual Review of Agriculture 1984 (MAFF, London)

Relatively little statistical information concerning the work situation of farmworkers in England has been found in the course of this study. Consequently, although the study is concerned primarily with English farmworkers, it has been necessary in many cases to use figures relating to British farmworkers as a whole. The main source of statistical information has been MAFF.

But is it valid to relate these low earnings to the prevalence of poverty among farmworkers? Unfortunately, there have been few studies which have tested for the possible relationship between agricultural wages and poverty - a fact which may reflect the widespread belief in rural 'contentment'. Nevertheless, the available evidence does suggest quite clearly that farmworkers in England are not only low paid, but are also in many cases living in what can reasonably be termed poverty. For example, a small-scale survey conducted in 1975 found that out of 110 farmworkers' families across the country, 43 went without proper breakfast because they could not afford it; 87 had no regular night out, 75 of them because they could not afford it; and 33 had never had a holiday away from home.¹ Further evidence of farmworkers' poverty can be gleaned from their dependence on means-tested benefits provided by the state. In 1983 as many as 12,000 farmworkers with families were claiming Family Income Supplement (FIS) so as to keep above the 'official' poverty line; a further 12,000 were estimated by the Department of Health and Social Security as qualifying for FIS, although they failed to claim it. Farmworkers have for many years been one of the largest occupational groups among two-parent families to claim FIS, a fact which confirms their poverty relative to other occupational groups. Moreover, the survey quoted above, as well as farmworkers' dependency on FIS both suggest that in many cases the quality of life of farmworkers and their families is not ameliorated in any significant way by the income which spouses might bring home.

The agricultural worker's deprivation, which stems from the size of his weekly wage-packet, invades virtually all spheres of his life, the most significant of which is arguably agricultural accommodation.

1 M. Brown and S. Winyard 'Low Pay on the Farm' (Low Pay Unit, London: 1975)

Roughly 50% of the agricultural workforce live in tied cottages which are houses owned by their employers and provided along with the job, either rent-free or for a nominal weekly rent. The provision of this housing is not as advantageous as it may at first seem. Firstly, tied cottages are used repeatedly to justify farmworkers' low wages, thus perpetuating their poverty. Secondly, the tied cottage is invariably situated on or very near the farm at which the worker is employed. This arrangement allows for savings on time and money spent on the journey to and from work, but by the same token it spells isolation for the farmworker and his family from other dwellings and from essential services and amenities such as doctors, schools, shops and entertainments. Thirdly, the double dependency of the worker on his employer for both housing and employment fosters an insecurity which few other workers are subjected to. This was particularly the case until fairly recently, for the loss of a farm job was accompanied almost invariably by immediate eviction. Fourthly, the worker is 'on call' for virtually 24 hours a day, to cover for emergencies which may arise on the farm. Finally, tied accommodation has restricted the occupational mobility of those farmworkers who may wish to leave agricultural employment, since finding a new job requires in virtually all cases locating suitable new housing. Farmworkers are often prevented from finding and paying for alternative housing by their isolation and lack of financial savings. Yet, despite these many problems attached to tied accommodation, farmworkers are often compelled to accept it, because the high prices and rents of private housing, coupled with the

scarcity of rural council housing, make it the only affordable means of sheltering themselves and their families.¹

Whether they live in a tied cottage on the farm or in a private or council house in a near-by village, many farmworkers find that their opportunities for travel and communication are severely restricted. Since the late 1950s there has been a series of cut-backs in the rural bus service which has led to a decline in the physical mobility of many farmworkers and that of their families, since few of them can afford the expense of running a car. At the same time, rising costs are forcing village shops and post offices to close down, pushing agricultural workers and their families further afield for their essential purchases. Meanwhile, the decline in the number of telephone kiosks, a forecasted 'side-effect' of the recent privatisation of British Telecom, will further curb the agricultural worker's contact with the world beyond the local village. Yet another problem facing the rural poor is the scarcity of public information and advice centres which tend to be concentrated in towns and cities. While private professional services and solicitors are beyond the financial means of most farmworkers, free advice and information services are often beyond their reach because of the sheer physical difficulties involved in reaching them. These various forms of social deprivation mean that for many agricultural workers, the only easily

1 H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' pp. 178-194
 H. Newby et al 'Property, Paternalism and Power' (Hutchinson, London: 1978) pp. 163-167
 Shelter 'Report on Tied Accommodation' (Shelter, London: 1974)
 National Board for Prices and Incomes 'Pay of Workers in Agriculture in England and Wales' (Report No.101, January 1969) p. 7
 B. Irving and L. Hilgendorf 'Tied Cottages in British Agriculture' (Tavistock Institute, London: 1975)

accessible and regular channels of communication with society at large are those which they can select on their television screens.¹

The principles of orthodox free market theory might lead the observer to assume, on the basis of farmworkers' low wages, that agricultural work is neither skilled nor arduous nor dangerous. For, as Barbara Wootton explains, a central postulate of classical economic theory is that:

"... the monetary and other advantages of any occupation will tend to balance one another so that jobs that involve disagreeable or dangerous work, or inconvenient or long hours, will be more highly remunerated than those that do not."²

Agriculture is certainly one sector of the labour market which challenges the wisdom of this 'free market' theory of wages. For, regardless of what wage levels suggest, agriculture ranks as Britain's third most dangerous industry after mining and construction. Dangers to the health and safety of the workforce are rife, ranging from the effects of contact with toxic chemicals to the occurrence of accidents and contraction of ailments during the operation of heavy machinery. Although certain precautions are taken, in 1983 alone a total of 63 people were killed in farm accidents, while the number of non-fatal injuries runs at an official rate of 4,000 per year, with unofficial estimates placing the figure as high as 120,000.³

1 'The Country Would Miss the Bus' (Rural Voice and The Bus and Coach Council: February 1983)

The Times 27 June 1984 'Rural kiosks could close'

'The Right to Know' (The National Council of Social Service and the National Consumer Council: 1978)

2 B. Wootton 'The Social Foundations of Wage Policy' (Allen and Unwin, London: 1955) pp. 54-55

3 S. Winyard and R. Danziger 'Hard Labour' (Low Pay Unit, London: 1984)

Considerable skill is involved in agricultural work, partly because so much dexterity is required to forestall some of the more avoidable occupational hazards. But agriculture demands from its workforce other skills, too, and this has been increasingly the case as the industry has become more technologically sophisticated. The National Board for Prices and Incomes acknowledged this fact when it reported in 1969 that the 6-7% per annum increase in agricultural output over the previous ten years had been at least partially due to the fact that agricultural workers had managed to "develop new skills, increase their versatility and adapt their working methods to new machinery and new techniques".¹ Yet the sophistication and complexity of agricultural work remain by and large overlooked, both in pecuniary and in status terms. What one observer wrote in 1923 of the typical farmworker still holds today:

"... his is a skilled trade. it seems absurd that this should have to be emphasised, but it is necessary to do so, for it has become the custom during the last century or so to speak of the agricultural worker as synonymous with the lowest type of worker - this is doubtless attributable partly to ignorance of the nature of his duties and partly₂ to subconscious association with his small cash wage."²

Half a century after this was written, agricultural workers were still being denied the rightful recognition of their skill and sophistication, with the mass media continuing to present farmworkers as either 'country bumpkins' or as unskilled farm 'labourers'.

Just as the farmworker has retained in certain circles the image of almost backward simplicity, so the farmer has held on to his high social standing of the 19th century. That farmers enjoy a relatively high status is shown in the continued public perception of the farmer's

1 N.B.P.I. 'Pay of Workers' p. 3

2 J.A. Venn 'Foundations of Agricultural Economics' (Cambridge University Press, London: 1923), p. 232

occupation as an admirable and enviable 'way of life' (rather than as just another means of earning a living); and also by the fact that for many people the "ultimate British aspiration is still normally to be a member of the landed gentry". And, as in the case of the farmworkers, so too the status of farmers matches at least to some extent the level of their material wealth.¹

The profitability of running a farm is not based solely upon the livelihood which the farm enterprise as such can provide. It also has much to do with the fact that farming "brings in its train automatic access to capital gains of a kind which, on the record of post-war years, has headed the league for all major types of assets".² Among the financial privileges enjoyed by many farmers is the receipt of subsidies and grants paid for by the Treasury at an estimated value of between £13-20,000 per farmer per year. Meanwhile, due to a complex system of concessions, farmers pay in return only 10-15% of their income to the public purse in the form of taxes.³ The strongest evidence of farmers' material prosperity and security is to be found in the willingness of banks to lend vast sums of money to agricultural enterprises for the construction of new farm buildings, the acquisition of new machinery or for the purchase of more farm land. Bank loans to farmers rose by 30% in 1979, 25% in 1980 and a further 20% in 1981 when the total amount of agricultural bank loans stood in the region of £4 billion.⁴ It should be noted, however, that the country's larger farmers receive the bulk of these

1 S.J. Rogers 'Farmers as Pressure Groups' New Society 5th February 1970. 'Public Attitudes Towards Farmers' a Mori Poll report, commissioned by the National Farmers' Union, March 1983

2 Investors' Chronicle 23 March 1984 p. 78

3 R. Body 'Agriculture: the triumph and the shame' (Temple Smith, London: 1982) Chapter Two
Norton-Taylor op.cit. pp. 100-101

4 Annual Review of Agriculture 1984 (MAFF, London)

bank loans. They are responsible for the majority of agricultural production and they take the lion's share of state grants and subsidies; in turn, this makes them the most 'reliable' investments for the banks.¹

The wealth of many farmers must also be attributed to the industry's outstanding and ever-increasing rate of output. The increased application of new machinery, chemicals, breeding techniques and other scientific novelties has seen unprecedented rises in agricultural production over the past 30 years. Between 1954 and 1981 yields of wheat to the acre rose by 98%, barley by 62%, sugar by 23%, while dairy cows produce on average 48% more milk and hens lay 52% more eggs. Although agriculture's contribution to the gross domestic product has been declining ever since the Industrial Revolution took off (standing at a current rate of 2.3%) and food represents only 17% of consumers' total expenditure, agriculture remains highly productive on its own terms, with little sign of any decline in its output levels. Furthermore, because it provides 60% of all food consumed in the U.K. (thus saving on imports) while also producing billions of pounds worth of exports every year, agriculture is widely regarded as a valuable national asset, insofar as it supports Britain's balance of payments. It is largely for this reason that Britain's post-war governments have continued without exception to protect the industry by providing it with the grants, subsidies and concessions noted above. The result of this arrangement has been the accumulation of enormous wealth among the country's large farmers - a wealth which is just as striking as is the poverty of their employees. But what is more remarkable than the simple existence of this great disparity in material well-being is that it appears to have been tolerated for so long by the materially disadvantaged whose silence has enabled the popular myth of rural harmony to persist.

1 Body op.cit.

R. Body 'Farming in the Clouds' (Temple Smith, London: 1984)

The most common response to this anomaly is the observation that, because of its scattered and isolated nature, the agricultural workforce has never been able to combine in the way that industrial workers have done in protest against their poor conditions of work. Thus, although farmworkers may indeed resent their poverty which contrasts so starkly with the affluence of many of their employers, there is little that they can do to improve their situation. While there is a certain validity in this argument, it is worth noting also that farmworkers have at their disposal a potential opportunity for quick and effective industrial action which is denied to most other groups of workers who instead have had to carry out what are often protracted and costly battles in their pursuit of better wages and conditions. Unlike almost all other industries, agriculture is based upon animate produce which, in the case of live-stock, requires around-the-clock attention; or, in the case of crops, demands periodic stretches of concentrated labour. In either case, the effects of a threatened or actual stoppage of work for even a short but carefully timed period could be devastating.

To argue that this opportunity for action is purely academic in the sense that it would require a degree of organisation which farmworkers' scatteredness precludes them from achieving is to overlook the fact that their employers are similarly dispersed - and yet, roughly 90% of farmers belong to the National Farmers' Union, an organisation noted for its record of successful action.¹ It is this discrepancy in the two groups' respective capacities for effective organisation and action which leads one to conclude that although isolation undoubtedly contributes to the inability of farmworkers to organise themselves, this is

1 R. Mackintosh 'The Problems of Agricultural Politics' J.A.E. Volume 21 No.1 1970 (for a list of abbreviated journal titles please refer to the Bibliography 'Section B')
 D.H. Wrong 'Power' (Blackwell, Southampton: 1979) pp. 135-136
 P. Self and H. Storing 'The State and the Farmer' (Allen and Unwin, London: 1962) p. 37

not the sole factor which can explain their apparent silence. It is, of course, incumbent on the observer to justify the assumption that farmworkers would seek improved conditions of work if they were able to do so. But once this assumption is justified (Chapter One), the question remains: why have farmworkers refrained so far from demanding and achieving better conditions of work?

The apparent acceptance by farmworkers of their social and material deprivation has been studied in detail by Howard Newby. Newby explored the widespread belief that what has traditionally prevented farmworkers from protesting against conditions which few other groups of workers would tolerate has been the paternalism of their employers and their own reciprocal deference. What Newby found in his study of deference among East Anglian farmworkers was that:

"The deference which is often attributed to the agricultural worker ... rest(s) largely upon a fallacious inference made from his largely quiescent social and political behaviour. This quiescence ... must be seen to result from the agricultural worker's dependence rather than from his deference. The dependence of the agricultural worker upon the farmer for employment, and in many cases for housing in addition, militates against the overt expression of dissatisfaction ..."¹

Newby's study concludes that it is a complex 'system of constraints', rather than social-psychological properties such as 'deference', which best explains the apparent passivity of the contemporary farm workforce in the face of their deprivation. What he suggests is that their quiescence is on the whole a rational, rather than irrational, response to a situation of extensive powerlessness which stems chiefly from farmworkers' weakness in both the labour and housing markets.

¹ H. Newby op.cit. p. 414

The workplace powerlessness among farmworkers which Newby identified in his research, coupled with the lessons of history, together have provided a stubborn barrier against the use of mass industrial action by the farmworkers' Union in its pursuit of improved conditions. The last organised strike by farmworkers took place in 1923. That strike was so painful a lesson in the superior strength of agricultural employers that since that time the farmworkers' Union has relied almost exclusively upon its access to formal policy-making institutions and upon external allies in its struggles to improve the farmworker's lot. For example, the Union has negotiated minimum wage rates for farmworkers since 1948 through the centralised machinery of the Agricultural Wages Board (England and Wales), a body whose decisions have statutory backing and on which the workers are guaranteed equal representation with their employers. Similarly, the long-standing campaign for the abolition of the tied cottage has not been fought on the farm; instead, it has been pursued largely by putting pressure on the Labour Party to pass legislation to achieve this end. And in its struggle to gain safer conditions of work, the Union has relied often upon the support which it can muster from other Unions, and partly on the pressure which it can bring to bear upon official and semi-official bodies concerned with health and safety at work. In none of these three areas of campaigning has the Union leadership since 1923 actively sought large-scale grass-roots involvement in the form of direct action.

In view of the farmworkers' powerlessness at the grass-roots level, Newby regards this dependency on formal institutions and outside help as the only reasonable course of action open to the Union. This is suggested when Newby posits that the only hope for a "dramatic improvement" in farmworkers' life chances lies in "external political action, including

legislation" and through the "decisive intervention of external agencies".¹

The aims of the present study are in a sense two-fold. Firstly, it seeks to examine the concept of political powerlessness and to formulate an approach to studying that concept (and the related concepts of power and interests) which may prove useful in social analysis. Secondly, the study attempts to determine the extent to which farmworkers in the post-war period have in practice satisfied their interests by participating in formal policy-making institutions and by making use of the assistance of external groups such as the Labour Party. Are these the best means by which to improve farmworkers' social and economic conditions? Or are the farmworkers' formal pursuits conditioned by their workplace powerlessness in such a way that they are similarly constrained at both the workplace and the institutional levels? In answering these empirical questions the proposed approach to the concept of political powerlessness will be put to use: in this way it can be tested for its validity and its utility in social analysis. The overall purpose of the thesis is thus to explore the phenomenon of political powerlessness at both a theoretical and an empirical level. In certain respects it is highly distressing that the contemporary agricultural workforce should provide the student of powerlessness with such a perfect case study. But from the academic observer's point of view, the powerlessness which pervades farmworkers' organisational, political, social and economic lives is auspicious insofar as it provides a strong base from which to develop an understanding of that important social phenomenon, the experience of powerlessness.

1 Ibid. pp. 435-436

The study is divided into two parts, each of which comprises three chapters. The first part provides a theoretical and descriptive setting for the case study, beginning with Chapter One which analyses the concepts of political power and powerlessness. The objective of this Chapter is to provide operational definitions of the concepts of powerlessness and power, rather than a comprehensive understanding of the concepts. Chapter Two considers the context of capitalist agriculture in which agricultural labour relations are played out, and looks at the outstanding profitability of the post-war agricultural industry - largely a result of the industry's increasing capital intensity. Of particular interest in this Chapter are the effects which government policies since 1945 have had upon agriculture and, more specifically, their implications for farmers' ability to promote and satisfy their occupational interests. Chapter Three reviews the workplace powerlessness of the post-war agricultural workforce, concentrating in particular on the implications of the workforce's labour market weakness for the workers' ability to pursue their occupational interests through direct action.

Part Two considers the definitions of powerlessness and power which were put forward in Chapter One in the light of original and secondary empirical material concerning the experiences of the agricultural labour force. More specifically, this second part analyses the power relations involved in the processes of agricultural wage negotiation; the passage and effects of tied cottage legislation; and the regulation of agricultural health and safety. In attempting to understand the powerlessness of farmworkers and their Union in each of these areas the ideas and concepts which are explored in Chapter One are applied to the situation in which farmworkers find themselves.

Chapter Four studies the operation of the Agricultural Wages Board and suggests that the farmworkers' Union is almost as powerless to

improve wage levels through the Wages Board as it is by taking industrial action. This view is reached by analysing the Wages Board in terms of the mobilisation of institutional bias and by considering the distribution and use of power resources both within and beyond formal institutions of decision-making. Chapter Five analyses the Union's efforts to compel the Labour Party to promote farmworkers' interests in tied cottage abolition. This Chapter focuses on the Union's inability to set the parliamentary agenda - a crucial weakness which is attributed to the Union's lack of parliamentary and economic power resources and to the skilful exploitation of this weakness by the National Farmers' Union. Chapter Six looks at the controversy over the alleged hazards of 2,4,5-T use and draws on the notion that controlling information can be an effective form of exercising power, as well as using the concept of the mobilisation of dominant values to show how the Union has been kept powerless to promote its interests in the field of pesticide safety. Continuing the theme of power resources raised in Chapter One, this Chapter suggests that the single most significant power resource which the farmworkers' Union might avail itself of is solidarity with other groups of workers. Finally, Chapter Seven weaves together the theoretical and empirical findings of the thesis and concludes that the approach to political powerlessness put forward in Chapter One is of considerable value in analysing the contemporary situation of agricultural workers. Whether it is capable of wider application can be determined only by further empirical study.

Two additional points must be made at the outset. Firstly, it is held that the agricultural industry in the post-war period differs so greatly and in so many respects from its pre-war incarnation as to justify the choice of 1945 as the historical starting-point for this study.

Secondly, after much deliberation, the decision was taken to refer throughout the thesis to the individual farmworker and farmer in the masculine rather than the feminine form. This should not be interpreted in any way as a denial of the importance of the female farmworker who almost certainly suffers greater powerlessness than her male counterpart. The decision was taken partly on stylistic grounds, but chiefly because the great majority of farmworkers and farmers are, in fact, male.

Anyone who has been to the countryside and seen the way in which many farmworkers live out their lives will appreciate the importance of dealing with the present subject. Long hours of hard work in sunshine, rain and snow; difficulties in affording even the most basic commodities; limited contact with the world beyond the village boundaries; a constant fear of redundancy; and finally, an old age marred by disease and ailments which result from a life of working on the land. These are some of the more unpleasant, but nonetheless prevalent, features of the agricultural worker's life. An understanding of farmworkers' powerlessness will hopefully go some way towards finding out how their situation can be improved.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE: POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

The observation that 'power' constitutes one of social science's most extensively researched concepts has become a commonplace among political scientists and sociologists. Moreover, while it might be difficult to identify two students of power who concur over the meaning of that concept, almost without exception they are found to agree that 'power' merits all of the academic attention which it has so far received.¹ This consensus can be attributed to the common belief that power, however it is defined, is a factor which influences deeply the social and political lives of all people, regardless of their historical, geographical or social location. Yet social life is equally shaped by powerlessness - in spite of which, relatively few social or political thinkers have devoted their energies to analysing the nature of powerlessness.²

The present inquiry into political powerlessness begins with a review of some of the available literature on power. This is partly because such literature is more plentiful and in general more developed than works on powerlessness; but also - and more importantly - because

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- 1 R. Dahl 'The Concept of Power' in R. Bell et al (eds) 'Political Power' (The Free Press, New York: 1969) p. 79
 P.H. Partridge 'Some Notes on the Concept of Power' P.S. Volume 11 1963 p. 107
 A. Giddens 'Central Problems in Social Theory' (Macmillan, London: 1979) p. 68
 D.H. Wrong 'Power' (Blackwell, Southampton: 1979) p. 253
 J. Elster 'Some Conceptual Problems in Political Theory' in B. Barry (ed) 'Power and Political Theory' (Wiley, Bath: 1976) p. 249
 J.K. Galbraith 'The Anatomy of Power' (Hamilton, London: 1984)
 Preface
 - 2 J. Gaventa 'Power and Powerlessness' (University of Illinois, Chicago: 1980) provides a notable and excellent exception to this.

of the close empirical and conceptual relationships which exist between power and powerlessness. Before considering a selection of views on power, however, it should be noted that, for the purposes of this study, 'political' powerlessness is not limited to the powerlessness experienced in purely governmental power relationships. Instead, 'political' refers here to all of "those social processes by means of which values are authoritatively allocated for a community". Thus, for example, political activity could include wage negotiation and the activities of certain quangos, as well, of course, as the activity which goes on in the legislative, executive and judicial spheres of government.¹

I. The Pluralist Approach to Power

In the 1960s a popular approach to the study of community power, particularly in the United States, was that of the pluralist school. According to pluralist analysis, political power is exercised within centres of formal decision-making during a process by which members of the 'political stratum' are held to take concrete decisions over 'routine' and 'key' issues. Locating power is a matter of identifying "who participates, who wins and loses, and who prevails in decision-making", with the pluralist researcher paying most attention to "who prevails" because it is this which is believed to reveal which individual or group within the political stratum has the 'most' power.²

A central tenet of this school is that in any community with a pluralist system of government, virtually all groups can bring forward

1 R.J. Mokken and F.N. Stokman 'Power and Influence as Political Phenomena' in B. Barry (ed) op.cit. p. 48

2 N. Polsby 'Community Power and Political Theory' (Second Edition. Yale University, London 1980) pp. 4-5

their grievances and demands for the attention of elected political decision-makers. This opportunity is available to them largely because the "independence, penetrability, and heterogeneity of the various segments of the political stratum all but guarantee that any dissatisfied group will find spokesmen in the political stratum."¹

However, pluralist researchers have repeatedly observed that in spite of this alleged opportunity to bring their grievances to the notice of political decision-makers, in practice few people take any such action. Pluralists note that as a result of this popular political inaction, most issues are generated, developed and decided upon by a small minority of political activists.² The pluralists emphasise, however, that this narrow spread of actual political participation is by no means indicative of an 'elitist' political system.³ This is because the political abstention of most people in a pluralist society is regarded as the outcome of their own free choice, rather than the effect of living under a 'closed' political system. According to one of the best-known pluralists, Robert A. Dahl, the reason that most people abstain from political activity in a pluralistically-governed community is quite simply that:

"At the focus of most men's (sic) lives are primary activities involving food, sex, love, family, work, play, shelter, comfort, friendship, social esteem, and the like. Activities like these - not politics - are the primary concerns of most men and women."⁴

1 R. Dahl 'Who Governs?' (Yale University, new Haven: 1961) p. 93

2 Ibid p. 92
Polsby op.cit. pp. 123-124

3 Cf. Floyd Hunter's study of power: 'Community Power Structure' (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: 1953)

4 Dahl op.cit. p. 279

Thus, in a pluralist system, although the opportunity for widespread political participation exists, relatively few citizens choose to make use of it.

A further alleged characteristic of a pluralist system is that, regardless of their personal (lack of) interest in politics, all citizens possess some resources with which to exercise political power in decision-making centres. The political activists have access to, and make use of, more resources than do the politically 'inactive' citizens; and the activists also exercise greater power than do their apolitical counterparts because of the former's direct involvement in the decision-making process.¹ Nonetheless, the apolitical stratum is held to exercise power, too, although in an indirect fashion, through the influence which they exert over their elected decision-makers. This widely dispersed, indirect influence is based upon the elected decision-makers' desire to seek re-election. In order to win the electorate's vote in the next election these decision-makers must behave while they are in office according to how they think the voters wish them to behave. Thus, all citizens of a pluralist system are seen to exercise some power in the decision-making process, albeit in varying degrees, due to the power resource which the vote represents.²

The pluralist researcher's main interest is not in the potential or indirect power of the apolitical majority, but rather in the activities of the political minority which is directly involved in decision-making. By studying the actions of this minority during the decision-making process - noting in particular which participants initiate the alternatives which are finally adopted, which participants veto the alternatives

1 Ibid. p. 101

2 Ibid. pp. 163-165

initiated by others, and which ones propose alternatives that are vetoed - the researcher is said to be able to discover 'who governs' a given community.¹

The decision-making process itself is portrayed by pluralists as a competition between different political leaders who represent the interests of numerous organisations, all of whom possess effective resources which they use in their efforts to prevail in the decision-making process. Political resources are varied and can include (among other things):

"... an individual's own time; access to money, credit and wealth; control over jobs; control over information; esteem or social standing; the possession of charisma, popularity, legitimacy, legality; and the rights pertaining to public office. The list might also include solidarity: the capacity of a member of one segment of society to evoke support from others who identify him as like themselves because of similarities in occupation, social standing, religion, ethnic origin, or racial stock."²

In a pluralist system these resources are neither held to be equally distributed among all political participants, but nor are they perceived as being cumulative and concentrated in the hands of a political elite. Instead, the pluralists argue that the distribution of resources in a pluralist system is characterised by the following features:

"1. Many different kinds of resources for influencing officials are available to different citizens.

"2. With few exceptions, these resources are unequally distributed.

"3. Individuals best off in their access to one kind of resource are often badly off with respect to many other resources.

"4. No one influence resource dominates all the others in all or even most key decisions.

1 Ibid. p. 336

2 Ibid. p. 226

"5. With some exceptions, an influence resource is effective in some issue-areas or in some specific decisions but not in all.

"6. Virtually no one, and certainly no group of more than a few individuals, is entirely lacking in some influence resources."¹

It is this system of 'dispersed inequalities' which is said to guarantee that in a pluralist system the failure of a given group or individual to prevail in one area of decision-making will not imply similar failures by that group or individual in other decision-making areas.

II. The 'Second Face' of Power

Shortly after Robert Dahl tested and claimed to have verified the above hypotheses in his empirical study of power, the pluralist approach came under attack by two American political scientists who argued that whereas political power has 'two faces', the pluralists were capable of seeing only one.

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz concur with the pluralists that the question of "who prevails in the decision-making process" is an important one which must be answered in any serious study of political power. However, they argue further that a student of power must also devote attention to the 'second face' of power, which reveals itself in the process by which certain demands are selected and others are rejected for formal consideration by the political decision-makers. As Bachrach and Baratz put it,

¹ Ibid. p. 228

"Of course power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. But power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A."¹

It should be noted that there is nothing inherent in the pluralist approach which prevents pluralists from recognising that certain issues are kept off of the political agenda by individuals or groups whose interests would be threatened by the emergence of such issues. While some pluralists appear to take political issues as 'givens' without inquiring into their creation,² others note that not all potential issues reach the decision-making arena. For example, although Dahl argues that the openness of the political system is such as to guarantee to almost any dissatisfied group a political spokesman, he also observes that:

"... to have a spokesman does not insure that the group's problems will be solved by political action. Politicians may not see how they can gain by taking a position on an issue; action by government may seem to be wholly inappropriate; policies intended to cope with dissatisfaction may be blocked; solutions may be improperly designed; indeed, politicians may even find it politically profitable to maintain a shaky coalition by keeping tension and discontent alive and deflecting attention to irrelevant 'solutions' or alternative issues."³

Nevertheless, the clear recognition that certain issues are kept off of the political agenda does not mean that Dahl - or any other pluralist - views this phenomenon as an integral feature of political power. Instead,

1 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'The Two Faces of Power' A.P.S.R. Volume 56 1962 p. 948

2 Polsby op.cit. pp. 120-121

3 Dahl op.cit. p. 93

it is portrayed by pluralists as part of the 'political background', or as the context within which power is exercised, with 'power' being restricted to the relatively straightforward process of 'prevailing in the formal process of decision-making'.¹

By contrast, Bachrach and Baratz argue that a serious study of power must include an inquiry into both the process of formal decision-making and that of issue-selection, or agenda setting, because both of these processes are said to entail the exercise of political power. In an attempt to explain the 'second face' of power more clearly, Bachrach and Baratz refer to E.E. Schattschneider's astute observation that:

"All forms of political organisation have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some forms of conflict and the suppression of others because organisation is the mobilisation of bias. Some issues are organised into politics while others are organised out."²

According to Bachrach and Baratz, the "primary method for sustaining a given mobilisation of bias is nondecision-making", where the concept of a nondecision is defined as:

"... a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision-maker. To be more explicit, nondecision-making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or, failing all these things, maimed or destroyed in the decision-implementing process."³

1 Polsby op.cit. p. 191

2 E.E. Schattschneider, 'The Semisovereign People' (The Dryden Press, Hinsdale: 1960) p. 69

3 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Poverty' (O.U.P., New York: 1970) p. 44

Bachrach and Baratz then provide a list of the different forms which nondecision-making can take. What all types of nondecisions have in common is that they result in 'non-challenges' to the status quo by those who are disfavoured by it. The first type of nondecision which Bachrach and Baratz mention involves the use of physical force (such as imprisonment or harassment) to prevent demands for change in the established order from emerging in the formal political arena. A second form of nondecision is the employment of negative or positive sanctions (the deprivation or distribution of valued goods) to dissuade potential challengers to the status quo from raising their challenge within the formal arena of decision-making. Thirdly, nondecision-making can be carried out by invoking an "existing bias of the political system - a norm, precedent, rule or procedure to squelch a threatening demand or incipient issue". For example, a demand for change could be denied legitimacy by being branded 'unpatriotic', 'immoral' or 'unreasonable' and could thus be destroyed altogether. Alternatively, procedures could be invoked to crush an issue, such as the referral of the issue to an endless string of committees which spend a sufficiently long time discussing the issue as to reduce its original impact or meaning. Fourthly, nondecision-making may involve reshaping or reinforcing the existing mobilisation of bias. This might entail the establishment of new rules or procedures which ensuing demands would have to comply with before they could reach the decision-making arena. The object here is to construct rules and procedures which would prevent threatening demands from ever reaching that arena. Finally, there is a situation which Bachrach and Baratz claim is "closely allied to, but actually is not nondecision-making in the strict sense". This involves those cases where potential challengers of the status quo refrain from raising their challenge because they

anticipate either failure or a hostile reaction from the decision-makers.¹

By their nature, most nondecisions are difficult to locate, not least because nondecision-makers often take steps to hide their nondecisions from the public eye, or else because they themselves may be unaware of their own nondecision-making practices.² Nevertheless, Bachrach and Baratz reject the pluralists' contention that because of this, nondecisions are impossible to identify. They concede that the 'quasi-nondecision' (which involves B's non-action in anticipation of A's reactions) may be impossible to verify empirically. However, they deny vigorously the allegation that all nondecisions are non-events and therefore unverifiable, as they claim that "although absence of conflict may be a non-event, a decision which results in prevention of conflict is very much an event - and an observable one to boot".³

In order to strengthen their defence of the 'second face' of power, Bachrach and Baratz outline a method by which nondecisions can be empirically identified.⁴ They suggest that the researcher should begin by studying the political decision-making process of a given community. By identifying "who participates, who wins and loses, and who prevails" within that process, the researcher is said to be able to ascertain the nature of the particular mobilisation of bias which operates within the given community's political system. More specifically, the observer will be able to find out which groups are disfavoured by the mobilisation of bias and whether those groups' interests are expressed in the political system.

1 Ibid. pp. 44-46

2 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Its Two Faces Revisited' A.P.S.R. Volume 69 1975 p. 904

3 Bachrach and Baratz 'Power and Poverty' p. 46

4 Ibid. p. 47-49

The researcher's next task is to uncover whether and how the existing mobilisation of bias is "buttressed by nondecisions".

"Armed with the leads picked up from his study of the decision-making process, he must determine if those persons and groups apparently disfavoured by the mobilisation of bias have grievances, overt or covert ... overt grievances are those that have already been expressed and have generated an issue within the political system, whereas covert ones are still outside the system."¹

If the researcher finds that no one in the community has grievances of either an overt or covert nature, then s/he must conclude that nondecisions have not been made. Alternatively, if grievances are uncovered, then the researcher must proceed to identify how and why these grievances have not been raised and/or resolved in the decision-making arena. This part of the inquiry must be carried out primarily through discussion with the aggrieved. The nondecision-makers themselves will be of little assistance because they may well be unaware of, or unwilling to discuss, their exercises of power through nondecision-making. By contrast, Bachrach and Baratz argue, the aggrieved are always aware that their inability to bring their grievances forward for resolution in the decision-making arena is the consequence of an exercise of power.²

* * *

By combining the 'pluralist' and the 'two faces' approaches to power, the researcher can in principle uncover a number of different forms of power. These are to be found at two levels.

The first level concerns those power relations which exist within the formal political decision-making arena, where political participants compete with one another in their attempts to prevail in the decision-making process. Power is exercised here by introducing resolutions to issues which are subsequently adopted, (and by ensuring their adoption),

1 Ibid. p. 49

2 Bachrach and Baratz 'Power and Its Two Faces Revisited' p. 904

and by vetoing alternative resolutions which are proposed by other participants in the decision-making process. As well as these 'direct' forms of prevailing in the decision-making process, there are the 'negative aspects of decision-making' which Bachrach and Baratz note: these include deciding formally not to act or not to decide on particular issues.¹

The second level at which political power can be exercised lies outside the formal arena; but the exercise of such power has significant consequences for what is debated and decided upon within the formal arena. This political power is sometimes referred to as agenda-setting. It can involve any of a number of different non-decisions, either singly or in combination, which prevent certain demands from becoming 'issues' while allowing others to emerge for formal resolution in the decision-making arena.

III. Power and Interests

Bachrach and Baratz's approach to the study of political power marks a significant advance on the pluralists' chiefly because instead of taking political issues as 'givens', they analyse the power relations involved in the (non-)transformation of some social demands into political issues. However, while Bachrach and Baratz represent a break from the pluralists' "one-dimensionalism" in this respect² they remain constrained

1 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Decisions and Nondecisions' A.P.S.R. Volume 57 1963 p. 641

2 A phrase coined by S. Lukes in 'Power: a radical view' (Macmillan, London 1974)

by the pluralists' insistence that any hypothesis concerning power must be based on observable phenomena if it is to be academically and socially useful.

It is this preoccupation with observability which leads Bachrach and Baratz to argue that if the researcher is unable to locate any actual conflict between those who gain and those who appear to lose from the prevailing mobilisation of bias - that is, if s/he can find no party claiming to harbour either overt or covert grievances - then "the presumption must be that there is consensus on the prevailing allocation of values, in which case nondecision-making is impossible".¹ Bachrach and Baratz recognise in principle that this presumed consensus may not be a genuine consensus at all, but rather the product of effective nondecision-making. However, they refuse to develop this point, agreeing instead with the behavioural precepts of the pluralists who insist that where a suspected case of 'false consensus' cannot be empirically verified through observation, its existence cannot be legitimately asserted by the researcher who might risk attributing grievances where none exist.²

In similar behaviouralist fashion, Bachrach and Baratz's definition of a 'power struggle' requires that the victim (although not necessarily the perpetrator) of such a struggle must be aware of its existence. This condition is laid down so as to prevent the researcher from imputing a power relationship where none exists. Bachrach and Baratz acknowledge that a power relationship could in principle exist without the victim being aware of it; but they argue that "for the purposes of analysis" a power struggle can be said to exist only when either A and B, or just B, are aware of its existence.³

1 Bachrach and Baratz 'Power and Poverty' p. 49

2 N. Polsby is a particularly strong defender of this thesis.

3 Bachrach and Baratz 'Power and Poverty' p. 50

The chief weaknesses in Bachrach and Baratz's approach to the study of power are contained in these methodological principles which, by limiting the researcher to studying only what is wholly observable, requires the researcher to overlook important forms of power and powerlessness. It is suggested here that the researcher's inability to induce B to articulate its grievances or to assert them in some other behavioural form does not justify the researcher's conclusion that B has no grievances. It may be the case that B is prevented from expressing its grievances by A's exercise of power – perhaps through the threat of sanctions or even by an exercise of power which results in B's own unawareness of its grievances as well as in B's unconsciousness of the very power relationship in which it is involved. The point here is that it can be as misleading and dangerous to deduce from the apparent absence of grievances the existence of a genuine consensus as it is to ascribe grievances where none exist.¹ It is, of course, more difficult to analyse those power relations which B is unable to acknowledge behaviourally as a result of the very power being exercised over B; but methodological difficulties do not entitle the researcher to define these power relationships out of existence.

Steven Lukes has developed a view of power in which 'A' exercises power over 'B' in such a way that B is made unaware of the conflict of interests which exist between itself and A. A is said to exercise this type of power "... by influencing, shaping or determining ... (B's) very wants"² so that B's wants will correspond with A's, but not B's interests. In such an event, whenever B pursues its wants it will

1 S. Lukes op.cit. p. 24

2 Ibid. p. 23

be acting in the interests of A and against its own interests. Yet the nature of this power exercise is such that B will not be aware that its wants conflict with its own (but not A's) interests. Nor will B be conscious of the power which A has exercised over it to create this lack of awareness on B's part. In fact, the extreme effectiveness of this form of power lies precisely in B's ignorance of its being exercised, for it is this ignorance which prevents B from struggling against A's power.

How could A possibly exercise power over B in such a way that B would unwittingly harm its own interests while serving A's? A can do this where it is able to withhold information from B which B would require if it were to recognise what its interests really were in a given situation. So long as B is deprived of this vital information, B will act in a way which promotes A's interests but not its own, while remaining unaware that it is being made to frustrate or harm its own interests. This kind of power relationship is a relatively common one in social and political life. For example, drug companies sometimes withhold information about the side effects of their products so that people will continue to purchase and use them; governments may withhold details about the build-up to a war so that soldiers will be willing to participate in the subsequent carnage in the interests of 'national defence'; 'behind the scenes' deals which corrupt politicians negotiate for personal gain may be kept secret so that the politician can be re-elected; the list of examples is a long one. What all of these examples illustrate is that A may exercise power over B by withholding or manipulating information in such a way that B is made to act against its own interests, but in the interests of A, without realising that it is doing so. (It should be noted that this form of power is less effective the more often it

is exercised by a given group or individual, for people develop cynical and critical responses to information which is released by groups or persons who were previously implicated in this form of power exercise.)

The examples listed above in which A withholds information from B so as to manipulate B's wants and actions in a way consistent with A's, rather than B's, interests contain certain assumptions about what 'really' or 'objectively' constitutes B's interests. In the drugs companies illustration, the assumption is that B would not take drugs with dangerous side effects if B were aware of their existence. In the case of the war, the assumption is that B would not take part in an aggressive (as opposed to defensive) war. And in the example involving political corruption the assumption is that B would not re-elect a politician if B had been told of that politician's corrupt practices. All or any of these assumptions may in fact be entirely misfounded: B may regard the ill side effects of a drug as an acceptable price to pay for its main effects; or B may be fully prepared to fight an aggressive war; or, finally, B may not think political corruption is a sufficiently good reason to refrain from re-electing a politician.

In spite of this, it can be useful to work on the initial assumption that B's objective interests lie in avoiding the ill side-effects of drugs, aggressive warfare or corrupt political leadership so as to discover whether or not B's actions have been carried out on the basis of A's exercise of power over B. This power can be exercised through the propagation of false information as well as by other means: the precise manner in which A controls B - if it does so at all - is a matter for empirical investigation.

Used in this fashion, the concept of 'objective interests' is an analytic device whose primary purpose is to facilitate the development

of empirically verifiable hypotheses about power relationships, rather than itself being an empirically verifiable concept.¹ Moreover, if the concept of objective interests is used heuristically rather than normatively, it need not lead the researcher into the attribution of 'false consciousness'. For example, the observer may posit that Q's objective interests are X, but research may reveal Q to be in pursuit of Y instead of X. The researcher's task is to determine whether any obstacles exist to prevent Q from pursuing and attaining X and, if any exist, what their nature is. At the same time, the researcher will be able to study Q's ability (or inability) to attain Y, and to study the nature of any obstacles which may be involved here. In this example, although Q's interests are identified as X, the observation that Q is pursuing Y does not entail an attribution of 'false consciousness' to Q. Instead, Y is regarded as constituting Q's more limited interests, given Q's apparent powerlessness to pursue and achieve X. The study can thus include an analysis of Q's possible powerlessness vis-a-vis X and Y, both of which are Q's interests, although one is posited as being of theoretically greater value to Q than the other.

If extensive research does not provide any evidence of power and powerlessness relating to Q's failure to pursue and attain X, then the researcher must re-assess his or her initial interpretation of Q's objective interests. It may be that Y constitutes Q's objective interests, rather than being Q's 'limited' interests, as had originally been thought.²

1 Isaac Balbus 'The Concept of Interest in Pluralist and Marxian Analysis' Politics and Society Volume 1, 1970/1971 pp. 168-169

2 J. Goldthorpe 'Social Structure, Interests and Political Partisanship' (xerox)

B. Hindess 'Power, Interests and the Outcomes of Struggles' S. Volume 16, No.4 1982 p. 509

In this way, although the researcher's initial assumption as to what constitutes Q's objective interests is necessarily a subjective judgement, such subjectivity will not impair his or her study. On the contrary, this approach can enhance a study of power and powerlessness for it enables the researcher to study those power relations which B may be unaware of, or may be unable to express in any behavioural, observable fashion.¹

Certain other benefits accrue to a study of power and powerlessness which is based upon a conception of what constitutes B's objective interests. In particular, it becomes possible to use two further ideas introduced by Steven Lukes. Firstly, there is the notion of power being exercised through inaction; and secondly there is the idea that power can be exercised unconsciously.

It may at first seem impossible to research into 'inaction' because this would involve studying the slippery notion of 'what has not happened'. However, if the researcher is equipped with a conception of B's objective interests, then s/he will be capable of studying the exercise of power through inaction. Once the researcher has put forward a view of B's interests and has found that these interests are not being satisfied, then it becomes necessary to uncover why B's interests are being frustrated. Where the failure to act by a given group or individual (A) in a certain

1 For further reading on the important debate on 'power and interests' see S. Lukes op.cit. pp. 46-50
 A. Bradshaw 'A Critique of S. Lukes' "Power: a radical view" S. Volume 10 1976 (And Lukes's reply)
 T. Benton 'Objective Interests and the Sociology of Power' S. Volume 15 1981
 B. Hindess 'On Three Dimensional Power' P.S. Volume 24, 1975 (especially comments on p. 330)
 M. Bloch et al 'Power in Social Theory' in S.C. Brown (ed) 'Philosophical Disputes in the Social Sciences' (Harvester, 1979)
 P. Saunders 'Urban Politics' (Hutchinson, London: 1979)
 M. Parenti 'Power and the Powerless' (St. Martins, New York: 1978)

way is found to have contributed significantly to the frustration of B's interests, and where acting in that way is a hypothetical (although not necessarily actual) possibility with determinate consequences, it can be said that A has exercised power over B.¹ Thus, for example, in Matthew Crenson's study, the objective interests of the citizens of Gary, Indiana (B) were assumed to be the ability to breath in clean air. When Crenson sought an explanation for the frustration of these interests and of efforts to protect them, what he found was that the very inaction of the U.S. Steel Company (A) was a major obstacle preventing Gary's citizens from campaigning against the Company's air polluting practices. As Crenson himself put it, "What U.S. Steel did not do was probably more important to the career of Gary's air pollution issue than what it did do".²

Similarly, the notion of an 'unconscious' exercise of power can be employed once the researcher has outlined what would constitute B's interests in a given context. Having hypothesised B's interests, the researcher can include as an exercise of power anything which A does (or does not do) which contributes significantly to the harming of B's interests, regardless of whether A intended to exercise that power, or was conscious of doing so.³

It is interesting to note that Steven Lukes does not link the idea of unconscious power exercises explicitly with the notion of B's interests.

1 S. Lukes op.cit. p. 51

2 M. Crenson 'The Un-politics of Air Pollution' (John Hopkins, Baltimore: 1971) p. 77

3 Cf. R.E. Flathman 'The Practice of Political Authority' (University of Chicago, Chicago/London: 1980) Chapter Seven.
D.H. Wrong op.cit. pp. 252-253

Instead, he contends that where A could not possibly have known that the consequences of its (in)action would be, then A cannot be held to have exercised power. This contrasts with those situations where A's ignorance is due to A's "... (remedial) failure to find out those consequences, in which case A is said to have exercised power over B".

It is in close connection with this point that Lukes introduces the notion of 'responsibility' to his study of power. According to Lukes, if it was not humanly possible for A to have anticipated the consequences of its (in)actions then A cannot be held responsible for these consequences - as a result of which, A cannot be said to have exercised power over B, even if A's (in)actions harmed B's interests. Similarly, where A could not have acted differently than it did and yet harmed B's interests one cannot hold A responsible for its actions - nor, therefore, can one say that A exercised power over B. Lukes makes his conceptual link between power and responsibility clear when he writes that:

"... the attribution of power is at the same time an attribution of (partial or total) responsibility for certain consequences. The point, in other words, of locating power is to fix responsibility for consequences held to flow from the action, or inaction, of certain specifiable agents."¹

It is evident that when Lukes links power with responsibility in this way he is concerned with moral, rather than causal, responsibility. It is true that where 'A could not have acted otherwise and yet harmed B's interests', A cannot be held morally responsible for its harming of B's interests. However, A can be held causally responsible for its harming of B's interests, even where A could not have acted otherwise;

1 S. Lukes op.cit. pp. 55-56

and, since there is no necessary or logical connection between power and moral responsibility, A can thus be said to have exercised power over B even where A could not have acted otherwise.¹

The attribution of A's moral responsibility should not be the overriding concern of a study of power. Instead, the 'point about locating power' is to fix causal responsibility for the 'consequences held to flow from the action, or inaction, of certain specifiable agents', so that the observer can locate which agents would have to be challenged for B to be able to restore and defend its interests. Thus, the criterion to be used for establishing the existence of a power relationship is not A's ability to do otherwise but rather A's harming of B's interests.

IV. The Study of Powerlessness

The foregoing observations on the nature of power can be employed usefully in the construction of a working definition of political powerlessness. It is proposed that:

Q is politically powerless to the extent that Q is unable to promote or defend its interests within authoritative processes of value allocation in a given community.

An empirical study of political powerlessness based on this definition would require research into whatever factors give rise to and perpetuate the inability of Q to promote or defend its political interests. For analytic purposes, these factors can be divided into two categories.

1 Cf. Connolly's contention that power and moral responsibility are integrally related concepts.
W.E. Connolly 'The Terms of Political Discourse' (Second Edition. Martin Robertson, Oxford: 1983) p. 131 and pp. 214-215

The first category consists of conscious and unconscious exercises of power over Q by other groups or individuals (T). These exercises of power can be carried out by action or inaction, their most important feature being that they contribute significantly to Q's inability to promote and defend its political interests. An exercise of power can take a variety of forms, many of which have been noted above. They include: T prevailing over Q in formal decision-making; T's nondecision-making against Q's interests through the use of force, the use of sanctions, the use of existing institutional biases and the creation of new rules and biases; and T's control of relevant information which prevents Q from recognising what its interests are, in which case T prohibits Q from even attempting to promote or defend its interests.

The second category involves structural or contextual factors, as well as obstacles internal to Q which bar Q from promoting or defending its interests.¹ What these obstacles have in common is that, while they may help to prohibit Q from pursuing its interests, they are not in themselves the outcome of power which has been exercised by any specifiable agents. On the other hand, for this category of obstacles to be effective, T must make use of them in its exercise of power over Q. (It is in this sense that the two categories are analytically, but not empirically, distinct.) This second category of obstacles includes resources of power and the way in which these resources have been socially distributed over time, as well as Q's own historical and structural location which may serve to deny Q those resources which are necessary for the satisfaction of certain of its interests.² Obstacles internal

1 S. Lukes 'Power and Structure' in S. Lukes 'Essays in Social Theory' (Columbia University, New York; 1977) pp. 9-13

2 P. Saunders op.cit. p. 23
 D. McEachern 'A Class Against Itself' (Cambridge University, Cambridge: 1980) p. 100
 G. Therborn 'What does the Ruling Class do when it Rules?' in Giddens and Held (eds) 'Classes, Power and Conflict' (Macmillan, Basingstoke: 1982) p. 230

to Q include Q's lack of skill or knowledge as to how to use the resources which are in principle available to it where this lack of skill or knowledge is not caused by the exercise of power by an agent.

A definition of political powerlessness which includes Q's inability both to promote and to defend its interests enables the researcher to study both levels of political power relationships which were noted earlier. That is, a study of Q's inability to defend its interests will involve an analysis of why Q is unable to prevail in the formal political decision-making process, while attention to Q's inability to promote its interests will entail an examination of the obstacles which prevent Q from setting the political agenda.

An empirical study of political powerlessness based on the proposed definition must begin with a conception of what constitutes Q's interests. The researcher may then seek to justify or explain his or her conception of Q's interests. The chief objective, however, is not to establish the epistemological or ontological superiority of a given set of interests, but rather to discover whether or not the interests in question have in practice been satisfied. Where they are not found to have been satisfied the researcher's task is to determine whether, and in what ways, this relates to Q's powerlessness.

As well as commencing with a conception of Q's interests, it may also be useful to locate at the outset those groups (Ti) whose interests conflict with Q's, as well as the social context in which Q interacts with Ti. It may well be that Ti has exercised power over Q in defence of its own interests. Moreover, by studying the social context in which Q and Ti operate, the observer will be able to understand which power resources are in principle available - or denied - to each side.

However, it must be remembered that Q's powerlessness may be due to the exercise of power by an agent altogether different from Ti, a possibility which can be tested through empirical investigation.

After noting Q's interests and discussing which agents' interests Q's interests conflict with, the researcher might look at what has taken place in those formal channels of decision-making which have a bearing on Q's interests. In particular, it would be important to establish whether Q has ever promoted its interests in these institutions. If Q is found to have promoted its interests then the question to be answered is: why has Q been unable to prevail (i.e. to defend its interests) in formal decision-making procedures? It may be that Q lacks the relevant resources for doing so. To find out whether this is the case would require some knowledge of what the 'relevant' resources are; this can be determined through a close analysis of the decision-making process, including discussions about that process with as many of its participants as possible.

However, the researcher may find that Q has not raised what are taken to be its interests in the relevant institutions; instead Q may be seen to have raised demands other than these interests. Rather than dismiss the raising of these demands as symptomatic of Q's 'false consciousness', the researcher must determine the extent to which Q has been able to defend its more limited interests in the formal institutions. As well as studying Q's relative ability to defend its limited interests, the researcher must tackle the question of why Q has been unable to promote what might be referred to as its 'objective', as opposed to its limited, interests in the institutions of formal decision-making. This would involve checking for past or on-going instances of nondecision-making and paying particular (although not exclusive) attention to the

actions and inactions of those actors who benefit from Q's failure to set the agenda. It can also be useful to discuss with Q whether it recognises any agents or factors which have prohibited it from raising its objective interests in the appropriate institution.

It may be the case that even lengthy and detailed discussion with Q fails to provide the researcher with an answer to the question of why Q has not raised or satisfied its objective interests in the formal arena. The researcher might then explore the possibility that Q has failed to raise these interests because it has not recognised what they are, due to the control of information. Locating power which has been exercised through information control is most easily done from a historical perspective - that is, once the withheld information has become available for Q's use. If Q is found to pursue its interests once the withheld information becomes available to Q, then it can be asserted that power had previously been exercised. Conversely, if the availability of information produces no clear changes in Q's behaviour in relation to Q's objective interests, then the researcher must recognise the inaccuracy of the original conception of Q's objective interests. While this counterfactual method of analysis can be used most successfully in a historical study, it is sometimes possible to uncover T's control of information before Q has made that discovery, by using a comparative, rather than historical, approach.

If after following all of the above guidelines the observer cannot identify any exercise of power or other obstacle to Q's promotion and defence of its assumed interests, then the observer must conclude that the original conception of Q's objective interests was mistaken. In this sense, the hypothesised existence of political powerlessness is falsifiable through empirical analysis.

V. Powerlessness, Interests and the Agricultural Workforce

If the method of studying powerlessness outlined in the previous section is to be followed here, then it will be necessary to begin the study with a clear view of what are regarded as being farmworkers' interests. For reasons which were noted in the preceding discussion concerning the study of power and powerlessness, the approach to interests which will be adopted must be one which enables the observer to identify Q's interests independently of Q's subjective judgements or behaviour. Briefly, this is because exercises of power may be such as to prevent Q from indicating or even recognising what its interests are.

In spite of the objections which the concept of 'objective interests' has raised among some scholars,¹ it is posited here that actors' objective interests can be identified successfully and usefully through what is known as a contextual approach. That is, the observer can identify an actor's interests by reference to the actor's location within a given social context. The possible problems involved in this approach will be considered in due course; here it should be noted that, because actors operate within a host of different contexts (the family unit, occupational groups, religious orders, clubs and so on), any meaningful identification of interests as derived from a contextual approach can only follow on from the prior specification of which context is under consideration.

The context which pertains to the present study of political powerlessness is that of a capitalist economy. In this particular context actors' interests are defined broadly according to the rules of profit maximisation which dictate that, ceteris paribus, it is in peoples' interests to maximise their economic returns and to minimise their costs.

¹ See note 1, page 36 above.

It should be noted that these interests are regarded as being objectively valid, irrespective of whether actors operating within a given capitalist economy appear to recognise or act upon them.¹

More specifically, the context which concerns the present study is that of capitalist agriculture and the actor under examination is the agricultural workforce. Farmworkers share a complex set of different interests all of which are determined by, and apply to, the capitalist context in which they operate. The interests which will be focussed on in the following chapters are: the earning of high wages for short hours of work; the enjoyment of occupational mobility and independence from their employers in all areas but the cash nexus; and the guarantee of an adequate standard of occupational health and safety. Underlining each of these interests is the principle of maximising economic benefits and minimising costs.

As with agricultural workers, so too the uppermost interests held by agricultural employers when viewed in the context of running a capitalist enterprise concerns their ability to maximise their economic returns and to minimise their costs. This places agricultural employers in conflict with their workers, for in order to ensure low production costs and high investment returns, employers are required to impinge on their workers' interests as outlined above. Because labour is a relatively costly factor of production, it is in farmers' interests to keep their employment levels, as well as their employees' wages, as low as possible, while still maintaining a productive labour force. Furthermore, it serves farmers' interests to house their workers in tied cottages, as this allows for the continued payment of low wages while also providing employers with a 'captive' labour force. Finally, the use of effective

1 H. Newby et al 'Property, Paternalism and Power' (Hutchinson, London: 1978) p. 244

pesticides has seen a dramatic increase in crop yields, as a consequence of which farmers are anxious to continue applying the pesticides to their crops. This practice harms the interests of agricultural workers in those cases where the pesticides injure the health of the workers who apply them. Regardless of how individual farmers and farmworkers interact with one another at a subjective level, in these three areas their relationship is characterised by an unyielding conflict of objective interests.

The advantages of identifying interests contextually in a study of power and powerlessness are two-fold. Firstly, it enables the researcher to overcome the limitations of the pluralist school and its 'second face of power' critics. The observer who uses a contextual approach can go beyond Q's subjective definition of its interests and can determine whether that subjective interpretation is itself the outcome of an exercise of power. This is possible only where the observer has a conception of Q's interests which exists independently of Q's subjective desires. At the same time, when Q's objective interests do not correspond with its subjective desires, the latter need not be brushed aside as invalid or irrelevant. On the contrary, subjective desires are of considerable significance, partly because they may be the product of power exercises; but also because Q's (in)ability to promote and defend its subjective desires is of interest in its own right in a study of powerlessness and power.

The second main advantage which accrues to a contextual approach is best explained by comparing this approach to one which ascribes a set of 'real' (in the sense of ontologically superior) interests to social actors. The problem with asserting the absolute superiority of one particular set of interests over and above all other is that it

conflicts with the notion, established earlier, that actors operate within numerous contexts and hold a number of different and sometimes contradictory interests, at both a subjective and objective level. In contrast to a monolithic view of interests which holds that one set of interests is objectively more significant or more 'real' than all others, the approach proposed here perceives one set of interests as being of overriding importance within a given context, but not as being superior to all other interests in an absolute, all-embracing sense.

In spite of the benefits which derive from a contextual approach, it is not without its internal problems. The chief objection which may be raised against this approach involves the observer's claimed ability to identify Q's interests where Q itself is allegedly unable to do so. How, if at all, can the observer justify or verify his or her conception of Q's objective interests?

Two points should be made in answer to this problem. The first is that, in the final analysis, any conception of interests will be contestable and will be derivative from the observer's own moral and political values. All that the observer can do is set out what are taken to be Q's interests within a specified context and allow others to judge whether his or her interpretation of Q's interests is plausible and acceptable.

Secondly, and more importantly, in the present study the concept of interests is being used heuristically and therefore does not warrant exhaustive analysis. Although it is held that in the context of capitalist agriculture farmworkers and their employers hold an objective interest in profit maximisation, whether this is in fact the case is of secondary importance. The primary objective of the study is to determine whether farmworkers have been powerless to promote and defend what are taken

to be their interests and, if so, to explore the nature of their powerlessness. Where the original conception of farmworkers' interests is mistaken, the attempt to study powerlessness will reveal this misconception, as no evidence of farmworkers pursuing these interests, or of power being exercised to prevent them from doing so will be forthcoming.

The relevance of the context of capitalist agriculture to a study of farmworkers' powerlessness rests upon the fact that farmworkers are studied here as employees of a capitalist enterprise - rather than, for example, as members of the Methodist Church, country clubs or of individual families. Moreover, the specific focus of the study is the relative powerlessness of the farmworkers' Union to promote and defend farmworkers' interests. A trade union is a specifically capitalist organisation in the sense that it is designed and concerned almost exclusively to influence the distribution of valued goods within capitalist society in such a way as to maximise workers' economic gains. It would seem appropriate therefore to define the interests of farmworkers and their Union in terms of the capitalist principle of profit maximisation.

Having established the context in which this study is set, it remains to explain the choice of farmworkers' interests which will be concentrated on in the study. Capitalism provides the agricultural labour force with a host of objective interests: here only three are examined. The three which were chosen were selected chiefly because they are areas on which the Union has campaigned for many years with relatively little success: it is posited that a study of these particular interests will reveal a great deal about the nature of the Union's powerlessness. In principle, other objective interests on which the Union has been entirely silent might have been examined instead; but constraints of time and of research facilities made the present course of study a preferable one to follow.

A review of farmworkers' conditions will reveal that in most cases their interests, as defined above, are not being satisfied, nor have they been for many years. Similarly, it will show that over the past forty years farmworkers and their political allies have rarely succeeded in pursuing these interests through the relevant decision-making channels. The objective of the following study is to determine what, if anything, is responsible for this failure to promote and defend farmworkers' hypothesised occupational interests within the relevant political institutions. To begin to understand this phenomenon it will be useful to consider the social and economic context in which farmworkers and their employers operate and interact with one another, and to outline the power resources which this context makes available to these two groups.

CHAPTER TWO: FARMING IN POST-WAR ENGLAND

I. Features of the Contemporary Agricultural Industry

(i) Patterns of farmland ownership

In England, where private property is a long-established and widely respected institution, the ownership of farmland displays a unique attraction. In one sense farmland is a highly flexible resource for, depending on how it is combined with other resources, it is capable of producing an impressive variety of marketable commodities. On the other hand, land contrasts with the two other chief factors of production, capital and labour, because of its physical immobility and the natural limits set on its availability. These two features of land as a resource - its versatility and natural fixity of supply - have together given rise to a fierce competition over its ownership, particularly among investors who are attracted by the security of a resource which cannot easily be stolen or destroyed.¹

In spite of the economic and social importance of land ownership patterns there is a dearth of information on this subject.² This factor creates obvious difficulties for any attempt to conduct informed debate on the issue, forcing most discussions to rely on conjecture and estimates. There is, however, at least one feature of contemporary farmland ownership which can be commented upon without reservation and that is its extreme concentration. Almost 80% of England's entire land space is given over to agricultural purposes and this entire area is owned by no more than 2% of the entire population. As much as 90% of this small minority

1 A. Edwards and A. Rogers (eds) 'Agricultural Resources' (Faber, London: 1974) pp. 82-83
H. Newby 'Green and Pleasant Land?' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 30

2 R. Norton-Taylor 'Whose Land is it Anyway?' (Turnston, Wellingborough: 1982) pp. 24-29

comprises private individuals or groups, with the remaining 10% being constituted by institutions which range from the Church and the Crown to more recent landed interests such as Insurance Companies and Pension Funds.¹

The Agricultural Revolution of the eighteenth century initiated a trend towards concentrated land ownership, as yeoman freeholders were gradually forced to sell their land to those who could afford the large-scale investment and technological innovation which marked the beginning of the commercialisation of England's agriculture. The enclosure movement, whose increased momentum in the eighteenth century was another by-product of the Agricultural Revolution and a symptom of agriculture's commercialisation, also influenced the pattern of farmland ownership as it caused the transfer of common land to the private ownership of established landowners. By the late eighteenth century, and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of England's farmland was owned by a handful of large landlords who rented it out to tenant farmers who, in turn, hired agricultural workers to work the land.²

The second half of the twentieth century has seen a marked movement away from this three-tiered structure of 'landlord-tenant farmer-worker' towards increased owner-occupation, as the large landowners have sold parts of their estates to new owners who often remain on the land to farm it themselves, sometimes with the help of hired labour. In 1950 only 36% of agricultural holdings in England and Wales were owner-occupied,

1 Ibid.

2 E. Hobsbawm 'Industry and Empire' (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London: 1968) Chapter Five
 J. Scott 'The Upper Classes: property and privilege in Britain' (Macmillan, Hong Kong: 1982) Chapter Three
 G.E. Mingay 'The Transformation of Agriculture' in R. Hartwell et al (eds) 'The Long Debate on Poverty' (Institute for Economic Affairs: 1972)

but by 1982 as much as 69% of Great Britain's holdings were wholly or partly owned by their occupiers.¹ Moreover, numerous studies have shown that the proportion of owner-occupation in Great Britain is considerably higher than the official figures indicate, standing today somewhere in the region of 75-80%. The explanation for this discrepancy is that in order to avoid high taxation and to enjoy maximum benefits from public grants to agricultural enterprise, farmers transfer on paper the ownership of their land to trusts, companies and partnerships which, unlike the private farmer, are eligible for grants and greater tax exemptions.²

Although owner-occupation has become increasingly widespread over the past 40 years, there are signs that the pattern of farmland ownership may return once again in favour of the tenant farmer and away from owner-occupation. The cause for this possible reversal lies in the recent increase in institutional landownership through which land is being leased by what are essentially non-agricultural farm owners to a new generation of tenant farmers. At present institutional land ownership is a relatively small-scale phenomenon with the only significantly growing trend being the steady purchase of top quality land by financial institutions: roughly half of all farmland which is placed on the market each year is bought by financial organisations. However, if present rates continue the re-emergence of tenant farming through increased institutional land ownership will be a slow development: financial institutions currently

1 Annual Review of Agriculture 1983 (MAFF)
'A Century of Agricultural Statistics: Great Britain 1866-1966'
 (MAFF: 1968)

2 Newby op.cit. p. 39
 Norton Taylor op.cit. p. 32
 D. Rose et al 'Land Tenure and Official Statistics' J.A.E. Volume 28
 No.1 1977

own only 2% of all farmland and their opportunities for increasing this share are limited, given that only 2% of farmland is put onto the open market each year.¹

A more immediate and tangible consequence of the City's incursion into the agricultural land market has been a rocketing of land prices and rents.² As increasing amounts of capital are pumped into the land by its new, wealthy owners, its price must rise accordingly as increased investment inflates the value and hence the price of the original resource. This price inflation is enhanced by the determination of the City institutions to buy more land, almost regardless of its cost. Prior to World War II the price of agricultural land sold with vacant possession was £25 per acre; by 1970 it was £250; thirteen years later the price per acre had almost reached the £2,000 mark. These steep farmland price rises are in turn passed on to farmland rents which affects the finances of the tenant farmer. Farmland rents doubled between 1970-1976 alone, and rose further each subsequent year to reach a peak in 1978-1979 when the average rent increase was 55%.³ Yet the social and economic attractions of a farming life have so far continued to guarantee to landowners a willing market of both tenants and buyers despite this soaring of rents and prices.

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- 1 Norton-Taylor op.cit. pp. 60-63
Farming News 16th March 1984 'Institutions seen as New Saviours'
 - 2 Financial Times 7 March 1984 'British farmland prices reach new highs'
Financial Times 6 June 1984 'Farmers' problems not reflected in buoyant land values'
 - 3 National Westminster Bank 'Agricultural Digest' Number Four April 1984 p. 7
R. Body 'Farming in the Clouds' (Temple Smith, London: 1984) pp. 39-40
R. Norton-Taylor op.cit. p. 107

(ii) Divisions of region, sector and farm size

The price of farmland varies to some extent according to its quality which is classified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) into five grades. The majority of the country's best quality land is to be found in the East, South-East and East Midlands, while poorer quality land predominates in the highland area. This division of the country in terms of land quality is paralleled by other regional differences which correspond similarly to the two areas on either side of a line drawn between the mouth of the Tees and the Exe in the South-West. For example, the lowland zone enjoys considerably more sunshine and less rainfall than the upland zone, a factor which combines with the properties of the area's soil to lend the region to lucrative arable farming. Its profitability has acted like a magnet, drawing large sums of capital investment which have brought in turn an increase in sophistication in the methods of husbandry employed by farmers and farmworkers in the region. Farms in this area tend to be larger than their highland counterparts and are generally more dependent upon hired labour and on modern methods of farm management.

Conversely, the highland farming zone is characterised predominantly by dairy farming which is less dependent than cropping on top quality soil, and for which the relatively high rainfall levels are less problematic. Farms in this area tend to be smaller and less mechanised than in the East and South-East and the absence of intensive capital investment here has seen the continued reliance upon family labour with non-family workers being hired to a large extent on a part-time or casual basis.

It would be misleading to portray England's agriculture as entirely classifiable along this geographical divide between the highlands and lowlands. One finds a sprinkling of dairy farms in the lowlands, just

as there are arable farms to be found in the West and North of the country. Moreover, there are variations between farms which cut across these differences of climate, region and farm-type: they include the farm's eligibility for grants, its proximity to towns and to food processing companies, and the wealth of its owner. Each of these variables can help to determine what will be grown on the farm, how profitable it will be and, most significantly for the purposes of this study, how much and what kind of labour will be employed. By and large, however, the agricultural pattern which prevailed 100 years ago continues today, with the line between the highlands and lowlands representing a multi-dimensional divide between these two areas.¹

Farms differ in what they produce as well as in their sizes and, as the above classification suggests, these two variables are to some extent inter-related. Specialist dairy farms, as well as cattle- and sheep-rearing farms are important among the country's small farms, while very few of the large farms would involve themselves with these enterprises. Conversely, farms with only one or two casual workers and with a relatively limited area of land would seldom engage in specialist cropping which is the stronghold of the large South-Eastern farms.² This relationship between farm-size and farm-type makes a nonsense of generalisations about the 'typical English farm' in terms either of size or of produce. Nevertheless certain overall trends in farm size can be distinguished, most notably the movement since the 1950s towards fewer, larger farms.³

1 T. Beresford 'We Plough the Fields' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1975) Chapter Eight

2 D.K. Britton 'Some Explanations in the Analysis of Long-term Changes in the Structure of Agriculture' J.A.E. Volume 28 No. 3 1988

3 'The Changing Structure of Agriculture' (MAFF 1970) Annual Reviews of Agriculture 1952-1984 (until 1973 these were entitled 'Annual Review and Determination of Guarantees') (MAFF)

The continuing reduction in the number of small farms has been matched by the growing size of those farms which remain, a trend to be explained by the fact that most farmland purchases are made by existing landowners who wish to expand their enterprises.¹

Farm amalgamation has gone hand-in-hand with a trend towards farm specialisation. The number of enterprises per farm has been reduced on virtually all types of farm, with the result that it is increasingly common to find a farmer interested equally in cropping and in livestock.² The mixed-farm enterprise is rapidly becoming a feature of the past, when farmers were forced to spread their risks. Today, the combination of machinery, technology, biological engineering and financial support from the state has enabled the farmer to concentrate his time, energy and capital on a single enterprise.³

Not surprisingly, large farm enterprises have become increasingly important in terms of output. In 1983, for example, the top 13% of farms in terms of size accounted for roughly half of the industry's entire output.⁴ This trend has given rise to speculation about what the most fitting future for the 'small farm' should be⁵ - a category

1 National Westminster Bank 'Agricultural Digest' (op.cit.) p. 9
Century of Statistics (MAFF) pp. 18-21

2 Britton op.cit.

3 H. Newby et al 'Property, Paternalism and Power' (Hutchinson, London: 1978) Chapter Two
D. Phillips and A. Williams 'Rural Britain' (Blackwell, London: 1984) pp. 31-32

4 Annual Review of Agriculture 1984 (MAFF)

5 A variety of criteria exist for defining the size of a farm, including the number of hectares which a farm occupies. A useful measure is MAFF's 'Standard Man Days' (SMD) in which 250 SMD is said to provide work for one full-time worker (whether hired or self-employed). According to MAFF: (Changing Structure of Agriculture, op.cit.)

599 SMD or less	= small farm
600 SMD - 1,999 SMD	= medium farm
2,000 SMD or more	= large farm

which still predominates numerically in the U.K.¹ (In 1981, 96,000 of the U.K.'s 235,000 agricultural holdings were smaller than 20 hectares whereas only 30,000 were larger than 100 hectares.) The small farm is often divided into two categories: the minority group of highly efficient, intensively run small farms and the more common small farms which make only a relatively minor contribution to the national production of food. For some commentators, the 'small farm problem' is based on the belief that these comparatively unprofitable enterprises constitute a waste of national resources. It is held that if these farms were amalgamated into fewer, larger farms there would be an overall higher volume of agricultural output at an overall lower cost in manpower and capital.² This argument assumes that maximum farm output and minimum expenditure of both labour and capital are in themselves desirable features of the production process. While these assumptions are valid in certain situations, in the context of surplus agricultural production and a shortage of alternative employment opportunities for displaced small farmers they are regarded as being mistaken by at least some participants in the debate. It is this question of interpretation which explains the wide range of proposed solutions to the small farm problem.³

One principle on which most people do agree, however, is the importance, for better or worse, of contemporary state intervention in determining the shape of the farming industry. This consensus over the role of the state in Britain's agricultural industry stems from the fact that ever since World War II the government of the day has been actively

1 Phillips and Williams op.cit. p. 31

2 J.G.S. and F. Donaldson 'Farming in Britain Today' (Allen Lane, London: 1969) Chapter Two.

3 R. Body 'Agriculture: the triumph and the shame' (Temple Smith, London: 1982) p. 4
R. Body 'Farming in the Clouds' pp. 64-69

involved in the development of the farming sector, not least through the provision of financial support in an attempt to induce maximum production levels.

II. The Political Economy of Agriculture

(i) Government Policies 1945-1973

The Second World War was highly instrumental in initiating Britain's present agricultural support system. The seige economy and food rationing which the war gave rise to forced the country over a short period of time to reverse its heavy dependency on food imports and to develop instead a greater capacity for self-sufficiency in food. This transition was made possible by the close cooperation which was forged between the government and the farmers. On the one hand, the government assumed far-reaching control over agricultural production to ensure the expansion of output and the satisfaction of needs which had developed out of the war situation. Self and Storing explain that:

"Compulsory cropping orders were issued, neglected and derelict land was reclaimed, inefficient farmers were evicted. Large numbers of pigs, poultry and cattle had to be slaughtered because feedingstuffs could not be spared to keep them, although milk production was maintained for nutritional reasons ... The whole pattern of farming was drastically changed, and unusual efforts and sacrifices demanded of farmers."¹

On the other hand, farmers benefited from the measures dictated by the war, particularly as these included the introduction of "fairly generous guaranteed prices" for whatever they could produce.

1 P. Self and H. Storing 'The State and the Farmer' (Allen & Unwin, London: 1962) pp. 19-20

The emergency measures taken during the war were successful, for the production of food was dramatically increased over a short period of time. (For example, the U.K. produced over 30% of its wheat in 1946-1947 as compared to only 21% in 1940-1941 and doubled its production of potatoes in the same period.¹) After the war the urgency of being self-sufficient was relaxed somewhat, although rations continued to be used until well into the 1950s. Yet the country's politicians continued to be haunted by the possibility that a major war or disaster could recur, bringing with it food shortages and the social and political upheaval which food rationing inevitably creates. Consequently, the newly elected Labour Government set itself the task of increasing Britain's long-term ability to feed itself. To this end it introduced a system of agricultural support which was in keeping with its more general commitment to the principle of market regulation.²

The Labour Government's chief objectives in the sphere of agricultural policy were embodied in the Agriculture Act 1947. This Act required the Minister of Agriculture to conduct an annual review of the economic conditions and prospects of agriculture together with representatives from the industry, on the basis of which the Ministry would set guaranteed fixed prices for a given list of commodities (which covered 80% of total output).³ The Act committed the Minister to provide:

"... a stable and efficient agricultural industry capable of producing such part of the nation's food and other agricultural produce as in the national interest it is desirable to produce in the United Kingdom, and of producing it at minimum prices consistently with proper remuneration and living conditions for farmers and workers in agriculture and an adequate return on capital invested in the industry."

1 Century of Agricultural Statistics (MAFF) (op.cit.)

2 J.R. Mackintosh 'The Problems of Agricultural Politics' J.A.E. Volume 21 No.1 1958 p. 25
P. Self and H. Storing 'The Farmers and the State' The Political Quarterly Volume 29 No.1 1958

3 T. Beresford op.cit. p. 18

The support system which the Agriculture Act 1947 inaugurated operated in such a way that agricultural produce was bought from the farmers by the State (through the Ministry of Food) at a guaranteed price, and then sold to the consumer at a controlled retail price. The ultimate purpose of this system was to encourage farmers to expand their production levels as far as possible, a task which was facilitated by the fact that farmers were now guaranteed by Government fixed prices for virtually whatever they produced. As well as being protected from sudden depressions in the market in this way, farmers were also shielded from drastic increases in production costs, through the annual review which was pledged to take such increases into account each year when it set the fixed price for agricultural commodities.

When the Conservative Party was elected to government in 1951 the comprehensive scheme of state support to agriculture which Labour had introduced came under attack. In a sense the 1947 Act had worked too well: the newly elected Conservative Government was disturbed by the rising levels of agricultural output which by the early 1950s had reached a point of excess in certain commodity areas. In response to this situation, the government introduced 'standard quantities', a device which limited the Exchequer's commitment to supporting only a pre-determined quantum of output of milk, eggs and potatoes. The system worked in such a way that if producers exceeded the specified quantum they were penalised by a reduction in the value of the guaranteed price payable to them.¹ This mechanism acted as an effective brake in production levels, which only a few years earlier farmers had been encouraged to expand.

Of even greater concern to the Conservative Government than the over-production of food was the burgeoning cost of agricultural support

1 Ibid. p. 33

to the tax payer. A movement towards de-control would be in keeping with the Government's ideological commitment to 'free' competition and, more significantly, it would help to reduce the rapidly growing financial burden of agricultural support which weighed down so heavily upon the Treasury. By 1953-1954 the cost of agricultural support to the taxpayer was in the order of £200 million and by 1954-1955 it was approaching £250 million.¹ The new programme of streamlining the State's relationship with the farming industry culminated in the Agriculture Act 1957 which provided a mechanism through which the Government could gradually reduce its commitment to farm support, without leaving the fate of the farmers entirely to the mercies of the free market. This compromise was made possible by a clause in the Act which stated that the determination of prices would be such "as to maintain the total value of the guarantees at not less than 97.5% of their total value in the preceding year after allowing for cost changes". In effect this meant that the cost of support could be reduced by up to 12% over a 5-year period, giving the government a certain release from its earlier total commitment to agricultural support.

The enormous cost which the taxpayer had incurred since the war through the agricultural support system should not overshadow the concomitant expansion in production which had been achieved. In 1938-1939 the value of total agricultural gross output in the U.K. was £295 million; by the end of the year it was £624.5 million; within six years it had risen to £1,071.5 million and by the year 1961-1962 the figure stood at £1,604 million.² Production continued to rise throughout the 1960s, which were years of mild turbulence in the farming community as governments

1 Annual Reviews of Agriculture 1954, 1955 (MAFF)
G. Sharp and C.W. Capstick 'The Place of Agriculture in the National Economy' J.A.E. Volume 17 No.1 p. 2

2 Century of Statistics (op.cit.) pp. 76-77

made repeated attempts at cutting the cost of the support system in the face of strenuous opposition from the farmers.¹ Apart from periodic disagreements over the appropriate level of support, however, there was broad agreement over the principle of agricultural support which, after 20 years, had become a largely welcomed fact of life for most agriculturalists. The deficiency payments system satisfied the non-farming public to a considerable extent, too, chiefly because it sustained a 'cheap food' policy. The difference between the market price and the guaranteed price of a commodity was paid to farmers by the Treasury rather than through artificially inflated prices, leaving the taxpayer, rather than the consumer, to bear the brunt of the agricultural support machine. In this way, the system had a less 'noticeable' effect on the average person's purse than other means of support might have had.²

By the mid-1960s, however, major drawbacks in the deficiency payments system had begun to surface. One problem which effected the farming industry directly related to the way in which deficiency payments had created a growing division between large, highly productive farms and the smaller, more marginal ones. The existing gulf between these two groups had been exacerbated by deficiency payments which favoured the large farms in that payments were made per unit produced and the large farms tended to produce more units than the small farms did. The imbalance of the system was evident by the early 1960s, when 3/5ths of deficiency payments (in terms of value) were being allocated to only 1/5th of farmers. In view of this trend, the 1960s saw piecemeal attempts by successive Ministers of Agriculture to restore a degree of equilibrium to the structure

1 Beresford op.cit. Chapter Four

2 G. Wilson 'Special Interests and Policy-making: Agricultural Policies and Politics in Britain and the U.S.A. 1956-1970' (Wiley, London: 1977) Chapter One

of the industry. In particular, subsidies were paid increasingly in the form of grants rather than deficiency payment, and the small farm became the focus of numerous policy reforms which attempted - without great success - to revive the small-scale end of the industry.

A second problem inherent in the system of deficiency payments to agriculture had significant repercussions on the wider, non-agricultural public. The only way in which the existing system could be maintained by the Treasury was for Britain to enforce some form of controls on the food which it imported from abroad. This was necessary because an influx of cheap foreign food would immediately depress market prices, causing the gap between market price and guaranteed price to widen, which in turn would place an increased strain upon Treasury funds. To prevent this sort of situation from arising, the government instituted a 'minimum import price' system which operated in a similar fashion to import tariffs - namely, by restricting Britain's trading policy in favour of domestic products. While this programme succeeded in its aim of avoiding a tremendous fall in the market price of food and a consequent squeeze on Treasury funds, it marked an end to the earlier commitment to supplying the consumer with the cheapest food available on the 'free' market.

The most significant development in British agricultural policy since the passing of the Agriculture Act 1947 occurred in 1973 when Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC). Yet, although Britain's membership of the EEC gave rise to substantial changes in the particular manner by which agriculture was supported, it never at any time threatened the widely held belief that agriculture must receive some form of far-reaching financial support from the state. The fact is that since 1947 the principle of state intervention in agriculture

has never been seriously challenged in governmental circles, regardless of which Party has formed the Government and which the Opposition. This continuity of policy and principle is remarkable not least because a commitment to large-scale agricultural support represents a contradiction to certain basic ideological principles of both main Parties. For the Conservatives, extensive state aid to agriculture conflicts with the Party's profound commitment to laissez-faire economics. For the Labour Party it constitutes a diversion of public money which might be better spent on nationalised industries and other common goods rather than on 'lining the pockets' of private entrepreneurs. Why, then, have successive governments continued to uphold the principle and practice of agricultural support? Part of the explanation lies in the role played by the National Farmers' Union, an organisation whose importance in the farming world merits some analysis.

(ii) The National Farmers' Union

The membership of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) covers 80% of all full-time farmers in England and Wales.¹ This is a high proportion of potential members for any voluntary organisation, but is particularly impressive in the NFU, given the great diversity of interests and outlooks which exists among farmers.² Unity is maintained within the Union through its democratic centralism in which full discussion is officially encouraged at the 866 Branches and 49 County Branches, but binding decisions are taken by the nationally elected Council once it has considered the

1 'The NFU of England and Wales' (NFU Publication, 4-982, undated)

2 See Bell and Newby's typology of British farmers for some idea of the diversity to be found, although as with all such classifications the complexity of farmers' variations is lost to some extent. C. Bell and H. Newby 'Capitalist Farmers in the British Class Structure' Sociologia Ruralis Volume 14 1974

resolutions sent in by the Branches.¹ Although signs of strain emerge periodically within the organisation, the NFU has so far maintained a cohesive front behind which its annually elected leadership can work for a better deal for 'Britain's farmer'.²

Overall, the NFU has achieved considerable gains for its members as well as providing them with a vast range of day-to-day services. It offers them legal advice on all matters relating to the agricultural industry; it monitors the town and country planning system as it affects members; in certain cases it pursues tax problems on behalf of its members; it publicises the 'farmers' case' via the mass media; it studies all legislation of relevance to agriculture, lobbying MPs for changes where they are deemed desirable; and it works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture on various agricultural issues.³ The NFU, with a staff of over 300, is able to pursue this diverse programme in part because of its financial strength. As well as members' subscriptions (in 1983 they were £28 p.a. plus 40 pence per acre), the NFU is provided with many generous donations from its wealthier members. Thus in 1983 its income was over £8 million, on top of which the NFU enjoys an income from its capital investments, such as a 75% stake in the Fatstock Marketing Corporation which in 1980-1981 had a turnover of £535 million.⁴

1 'The NFU in the 1980s' (NFU Publication Cyclo 259/83)

2 Two especially significant areas of conflict are between small and large farmers; and between 'corn and horn', with the two areas often overlapping.

3 M. Shoard 'The Theft of the Countryside' (Temple Smith, London: 1980) p. 105
'The NFU of England and Wales' (op.cit.)
'The NFU' (NFU Publication; un-numbered, undated)

4 W. Grant 'The National Farmers Union: the Classic Case of Incorporation?' in D. Marsh (ed) 'Pressure Politics' (Junction Books, London: 1983) p. 129

The NFU's successful pursuit of its members' interests in high economic gain has drawn a host of comments from observers of the agricultural scene. Graham Wilson views the NFU as "... arguably the best and organisationally strongest of western agricultural interest groups"¹ and Howard Newby confirms this image of strength when he refers to the NFU as "... undoubtedly one of the most successful pressure groups in Britain".² A similar view is put forward by Wyn Grant who suggests that: "The measurement of pressure group effectiveness is a notoriously difficult task, but if one was to abandon academic caution and draw up a short-list of the most effective pressure groups in Britain, the National Farmers' Union would surely be at the top of that list".³

Virtually all commentators attribute the NFU's political and economic success to its close relationship with MAFF.⁴ This relationship is of undoubted importance if for no other reason than that the NFU has concentrated so much of its energy and resources on its cultivation. Over the years the NFU's links with MAFF have developed into a virtually symbiotic relationship between the two institutions in which the NFU expects MAFF to initiate and implement favourable policies in return for which the NFU cooperates and assists the Ministry in their execution. The strength of this corporatist relationship derives to a considerable extent from its legal and historical foundations.

1 G. Wilson 'Farmers Organisations in Advanced Societies' in H. Newby (ed) 'International Perspectives in Rural Sociology' (Wiley, Chichester: 1978)

2 Newby 'Green and Pleasant Lane?' p. 112

3 Grant op.cit. p. 129

4 G. Wilson 'Special Interests and Policy-making' p. 45
Newby op.cit. p. 113
Self and Storing 'Farmers and the State' pp. 21-23
Self and Storing 'State and the Farmer' p. 46

The Agriculture Act 1947 is central to contemporary agricultural politics because it established obligatory annual negotiations over price support levels between the Minister of Agriculture and representatives of the country's farmers. The fact that the NFU was (and remains) the sole representative of farmers provided the NFU with regular and legally sanctioned access to the corridors of Whitehall, a privilege which it retains to this day.¹ The Ministry benefitted too from the NFU's role as the farmers' sole recognised representative. Once the Ministry had obtained the NFU's endorsement for its proposed policies it could be assured of the cooperation of virtually all farmers in their implementation, since the NFU represented and advised the great bulk of the country's farmers. Thus, both the NFU and MAFF drew advantages from the provisions of the Agriculture Act 1947 which had paved the way for a close relationship between the two parties. The failure of any government to repeal the 1947 legislation has given the NFU the opportunity to cement its relations with MAFF so that they are no longer confined to the annual review meetings. As Marion Shoard suggests, "The Union now has a hand in almost every step the Ministry takes".²

1 Break-away groups such as the Farmers' Union of Wales and the Smallholders' Association are as yet too small to threaten the NFU's position.

2 M. Shoard 'Theft of the Countryside' (op.cit.) p. 105
Some observers underestimated the durability of the NFU's links with MAFF and predicted a demise in the NFU's power once Britain joined the EEC. This was because EEC membership entailed an end to the traditional annual review procedure. In practice the NFU has been able to ensure that little of its influence has been lost through EEC membership. It regularly pressurises Government and the Ministry to secure favourable EEC policies for agriculture; and it has its own office in Brussels from which to monitor and influence policy-making by the Council of Ministers.

The importance attached by most observers to the NFU's links with MAFF in explaining the continual servicing of farmers' demands by Government has often obscured other important sources of political influence which are available to the NFU. For example, although the NFU aims generally to remain 'above party political divisions', it nevertheless becomes involved in pressure politics whenever legislation pertaining to its interests passes through parliament. The NFU lobbies all MPs (and Lords) but concentrates naturally on those who appear to be most sympathetic to its case. Although this tends to be primarily Conservative politicians this is not always the case, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate. At the national level the NFU has a sophisticated lobbying machine which circulates information sheets to all MPs, putting across the NFU's views on particular issues in clear and forceful terms. The NFU also promotes its interests by discussing them with MPs over lunches and dinners, and in 'Gentlemen's Clubs' where the atmosphere is usually more congenial than it is in the corridors of Westminster (see Chapter Five). In particular the NFU enjoys strong links with its 'natural' allies - those MPs and Lords who are themselves farmers. In 1981 there were as many as 92 MPs with declared interests in farming and the vast majority of them were farmers and/or landowners.¹

Just as significant as these links at the national level are the ties which the NFU County and Branch Officials have established with their (mainly Conservative) local MPs (see Chapter Five for details). The use of these ties in securing farmers' interests has proven to be so efficient (as illustrated in Chapter Four) that the Confederation of British Industries has adopted in recent years many of the NFU's

1 A. Roth 'The Business Background of MPs: 1981' (Parliamentary Profiles, London: 1981)
 S.J. Rogers 'Farmers as a Pressure Group' New Society 5th February 1970, p. 216
 Phillips and Williams op.cit.

pressure politics tactics.¹ It comes as something of a surprise then to find that most commentators have neglected the local dimension of the NFU's activities.

While the NFU has proven to be an undeniably adept force in the field of pressure politics, none of the points made so far can explain why MPs and Lords of all political persuasions, both rural and urban, have voted so often in favour of policies which are clearly designed to serve farmers' interests, often at the cost of more electorally significant groups. Indeed, in terms of electoral strength, the farmers are a fairly insignificant sector whose support is at best of marginal importance to the main political parties. A perusal of the 1981 Census confirms the downward trend in farmers' voting power which was noted by various writers in 1959, 1962 and 1969. The Census reveals that by the early 1980s only 28 constituencies in England and Wales had over 10% of their normally resident population over the age of 16 employed (or self-employed) in agriculture, forestry or fishing. In spite of this, farmers' political successes in the 1980s have remained in general at their consistently high level of the 1950s, '60s and '70s, suggesting that their political influence is not related in any meaningful sense to their electoral clout.²

Although the NFU's relationship with MAFF and its competence in pressure politics have proven to be important resources of power, the NFU's record of political successes is inexplicable until one considers

1 Wyn Grant notes that the CBI has been impressed by a variety of the NFU's pressure politicking tactics. p. 132

2 For analyses of farmers' electoral clout at various times in the post-war period see:
 J.R. Pennock 'The Political Power of British Agriculture' P.S. Volume 7 1959
 R. Howarth 'The Political Strength of British Agriculture' P.S. Volume 17 1969
 Self and Storing 'State and Farmer'

the economic significance of agriculture and the implications which this has had for the NFU's ability to promote and defend its interests.

(iii) The role of agriculture in the post-war economy

Ever since the Second World War successive British governments have been anxious to maintain a prosperous agricultural industry. They have shown themselves to be willing to do this by continuing the increasingly expensive policy of agricultural support which was laid down by the Agriculture Act 1947. The original impetus behind the introduction of agricultural support was removed in the 1950s and '60s by the development of new methods of waging war, which made a conventional international war involving a blockade of the British Isles a relic of the past. While the proliferation of nuclear weapons removed the urgency of agricultural self-sufficiency in terms of military considerations, state support for agriculture nonetheless continued without serious interruption.

The new justification for agricultural support is based entirely upon economic arguments. Both main political parties recognise that a high level of domestic food production can provide a significant contribution to Britain's balance of payments, and both parties concur that this is a valuable asset which can and should be exploited. The argument is that as long as Britain's agricultural industry is properly supported, it will continue to produce ever-increasing quantities of the nation's food requirements, thereby saving on imports as well as being capable of providing commodities for export purposes. This fiscal boon assists the national economy by protecting it from what is perhaps the single greatest post-war economic bogey - a balance of payments crisis.¹

¹ Sharp and Capstick op.cit. pp. 14-15 typify the virtually unquestioned belief that agricultural support, providing that it is kept within reasonable bounds, is justifiable on the grounds that it assists the maintenance of a healthy balance of payments.

Few politicians have challenged the logic or principles which underlie this argument, as a result of which there has been little debate since the war between rival policy-makers over the principle of agricultural support.¹

What is interesting for the purposes of the present study is that this virtually unanimous and unwavering dedication to the goal of maximum agricultural production has provided the NFU with tremendous political leverage. On the one hand, the NFU is able to influence Government policy by putting forward proposals which it regards as conducive to increased production. The Government may well accept such proposals, given that it shares the NFU's interests in increasing agricultural production. More commonly, the NFU has been able to force governments to withdraw or reform their own policy proposals when these proposals are regarded by the NFU as threatening to the interests of farmers. This has been done by arguing against the given proposals in terms of their threat to production levels, to the balance of payments and, ultimately, to the national interest. Few governments have withstood such criticism and warning; instead they have usually bowed to what they presume is the NFU's superior knowledge of agricultural matters and withdrawn or reformed their proposed policies accordingly. It is by using their political and economic resources in this way that the NFU has been able to defend and promote its members' interests in maximum profit-making so successfully.²

In return for the State's fidelity and its cooperation over farmers' interest the agricultural industry has fulfilled its obligation to produce

1 Richard Body, a farmer and Conservative MP since 1966, is a notable exception, but his apparently eccentric arguments have so far failed to gain significant support. See 'Triumph and Shame' Chapter Eight.

2 R. Dahl 'Who Governs' (Yale University, New Haven 1961) pp. 226-228

an ever-expanding volume of output. From a self-sufficiency level of 30% in the pre-war years, there was an increase to almost double that amount (54%) by 1972, despite the fact that there was also a 20% increase in the number of people to be fed over that period. By 1982 home-produced food represented over 60% of all food consumed in the U.K. as well as providing £7,583 million worth of exports.¹

In a sense a degree of state aid is essential for maintaining these impressive production levels. Despite technological and scientific advancement, the vagaries of the weather still determine to some extent the level of agricultural output. Without strong government support to cover for the possible and actual years of poor harvest (and, to a lesser degree, the periodic outbreaks of epidemics among livestock) farmers would be unwilling to invest their own capital and labour in high input/high output enterprises. As it is, the continuity and reliability of government support provides a stability to the industry which encourages farmers to invest their own resources, to plan ahead, and so to produce commodities on a large scale.

The support which farmers enjoy comes in a wide variety of forms which include tax concessions, rates relief, grants, government subsidies and the free research, advice and training services which are provided by MAFF.² These perks and benefits add up to a total value of £4 billion per year, a hefty sum which helps to explain why agriculture has acted as a magnet for some of the country's wealthiest investors. Capital tends to accumulate where other capital is already available to finance

1 Beresford op.cit.
Annual Review 1984 Table One p. 82 (MAFF)

2 M. Shoard 'Public Money and Private Vandalism' New Statesman
10 October 1980
R. Body 'Triumph and Shame'
Annual Review 1984 (MAFF)

innovations and, as Clutterbuck and Lang note, agriculture provides precisely this sort of investment opportunity.¹ Most notable are the large and numerous bank loans made available to agriculture, usually in preference to other industrial enterprises. In 1983, for example, MAFF reported that the level of bank loans to the farming industry had reached £4,670 million.² Farmers, especially those who run large farms, experience few difficulties in securing these bank loans to pay for increasingly expensive land, machinery and farm supplies because their creditors are virtually guaranteed repayment due to the state's protective attitude towards the industry.

(iv) The Common Agricultural Policy 1973-1984

The most substantial support which governments have provided to agriculture has been in the form of state intervention in the agricultural market. Until 1973 this was carried out by the deficiency payments system, as explained above. After Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC) deficiency payments were replaced by a support system in which the Community 'buys' from farmers all agricultural produce whose price on the 'open' market falls below a pre-determined intervention level. Once the market restores the price of the commodity to above that level the stored produce which the EEC has 'bought' is released back on to the market for sale at or above the intervention level. To support this method of price control the EEC enforces a system of high tariffs on non-EEC imports into EEC countries.³ In effect, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EEC provides farmers in Great

1 C. Clutterbuck and T. Lang 'More than We Can Chew' (Pluto, London: 1982) p. 72

2 R. Body op.cit. p. 34
Annual Review 1984 (MAFF)
Guardian 20 June 1984 'Farm loans to rise'

3 'The Agricultural Policy of the European Community' (European Documentation, Periodical 6/1982) p. 16

Britain with higher prices than those which the Treasury had previously guaranteed to them. The old system had overloaded the Treasury which had subsidised Britain's farmers through tax revenue; conversely, the new system has shifted the burden of agricultural support from the tax payer onto the consumer who now pays higher prices for food than previously.¹

A full two thirds of the EEC's budget is spent on sustaining the CAP, an allocation of Community resources which has relatively favourable consequences for the national populations of countries such as Greece, Italy and France which have 28.8, 14.9 and 8.9% of their respective populations engaged in agriculture.² By contrast, the policy appears to be less than rational for Britain to pursue, given that only 2.6% of the U.K. population is employed directly in agriculture (including hired farmworkers as well as self-employed farmers). Even if the 5.4% of the population which is employed in the allied industries are included,³ then still only 8% of the entire U.K. population can be said to benefit from the £1,300 million spent annually by the EEC on British agriculture in the form of subsidies and grants. Meanwhile the rest of the population, far from benefiting from the CAP, are paying more for their food than prior to 1973. It is this imbalance of cost and benefit relating to the CAP which has led some commentators to argue that the CAP is contrary to all British interests except for the farmers', and that a policy more in line with Britain's industrial structure is required.⁴

1 Clutterbuck and Lang op.cit. pp. 56-57

2 D. Blake 'Land of Milk and ...' New Statesman 18 May 1984
Norton-Taylor op.cit. p. 127
'The Common Agricultural Policy' (Commission of the European Communities November 1981) p. 6

3 'The National Importance of British Agriculture' (NFU Publication: undated)

4 'Sold down the farm' New Statesman 13 April 1984

In practice, not all of Britain's farmers benefit equally from the CAP's extensive funding because, like the deficiency payments system before it, the CAP works primarily to the advantage of the large agricultural producers. Although EEC farm prices are set at a relatively high level so as to help both small and large producers, since all prices are the same for each commodity and all producers receive the same aid per unit produced, the system ends up paying most to the farmers who produce most.¹

The most controversial feature of the CAP is its creation of food surpluses - the notorious butter mountains and wine lakes, the stockpiles of cheese, beef, wheat, milk and pigmeat.² These surpluses are inherent in the present CAP support system which, in order to maintain high food prices in the context of abundant and ever-increasing food production, operates by taking growing quantities of food off of the market and putting it into storage so as to raise artificially the market price of the food. The stored food is then withheld from the market until the prices have risen to above the intervention level. However, because this level is not always reached the surplus food is often either destroyed or exported to non-EEC countries at 'knock-down' prices so as to prevent it from rotting away altogether in the EEC's storage buildings. The very process of making these food surpluses affordable to non-EEC countries has proven to be a costly operation, costing the EEC £6 billion in 1980 alone. By 1984 the point had been reached where the promise of a good harvest and high output presented a serious problem for EEC Agriculture Ministers. The absurdity of the situation was underlined by one observer

1 Norton Taylor op.cit. p. 129
EEC Periodical 6/1982 (op.cit.) p. 60

2 M. Shoard 'Public Money ...' (op.cit.)
Financial times 13 April 1984 'EEC butter mountain may reach 1m. tonnes'

who advised the CAP Ministers that they "should not consider bankruptcy too soon. Almost anything could happen in the way of drought, flood or disease to reduce the problem to manageable proportions."¹

It may be that 1984-1985 marks a turning-point in the CAP's costly system of overproduction which has so far benefited ostensibly only the Community's farmers. In April 1984 the EEC took its first major step towards reducing the Community's surpluses, when it announced that the Community's production of milk would have to be reduced in each member state by a specified amount. In Britain the quota required a 6.5% reduction on 1983 milk production levels, a stipulation which provoked predictably angry responses from most dairy farmers. Their hostility to the measure failed, however, to prevent the national government from enforcing it.

The question which all agriculturalists are asking themselves is whether the milk quota scheme has marked a beginning to a wider-ranging programme whose aim would be to 'rationalise' the EEC's food production policy. The National Farmers' Union has clearly anticipated such a programme, and indeed pre-empted it in an unprecedented public recognition that:

"...increasing output through the European Community has made it harder to find commercial outlets and the need to dispose of surpluses of some commodities has put a heavy cost on the Community's budget. The pressure to control spending on the Common Agricultural Policy calls for a reappraisal of the expansionist approach."²

Although the NFU made this concession in principle, it joined other European farmers' organisations in expressing its outrage at the EEC's new proposals in 1985 for reforming the CAP. These proposals

1 Financial Times 9 March 1984 'Ploughing ahead with crop expansion'

2 'The Way Forward: New Directions for Agricultural Policy' NFU Policy Document 1984 p. 3

included a shift in the use of cash resources from price supports to aiding poorer farmers; price cuts in the cereal sector; and changes in the EEC's protectionist policies. The overall aim is clear: a large-scale reduction in the Community's output of food and in the enormous amount of capital which has been spent on creating and then destroying that output. Such a reform, if passed, would lead to other changes which could include a fall in land prices and a possible return to a more labour- rather than capital-intensive farming industry.¹

However, there is no guarantee that the EEC's radical proposals will be adopted in the near future. On the contrary, most observers doubt whether it will win the support of farm ministers, let alone the farmers' lobby. Moreover, if such changes were to be implemented, that in itself would be a costly operation, as the milk quotas of 1984 have shown. The quotas were enforced in Britain only with the aid of £50 million which had been set aside specifically for paying compensation to dairy farmers who had had to leave the industry as a result of the new regulations. Meanwhile, many hired dairy farmworkers who lost their jobs as a result of the milk quotas received no financial compensation from the EEC, suggesting that farmworkers, unlike farmers, enjoy little political clout in Brussels.²

1 Financial Times 2 July 1985 'Radical reform of EEC farm policy proposed'
The Economist 6 July 1985 'No cash crops now'
Observer 15 September 1985 'Bitter harvest for farmers as prices are blighted'

2 Liverpool Daily Post 24 August 1984
 This point was repeatedly emphasised by Joan Maynard, the farmworkers' sponsored MP, during parliamentary debates over the milk quotas.
Guardian 5 July 1984 'No cash for farmworkers'
Daily Telegraph 5 July 1984 'Harsh Treatment of sacked farmworkers'

III. Modern Farming: a summary and analysis

There is little doubt that the tremendous increase in agricultural output achieved by Britain since World War II is attributable in large part to the state support which has been given to the industry since that time.¹ In 1947 a virtually infinite market was created for the country's farmers to fill with their produce and for the following 40 years successive governments have worked to keep that market open. When existing mechanisms for doing so threatened to collapse, governments responded by reforming the support system in order to preserve it: the Agriculture Act 1957 and entry into the EEC were two such occasions. As long as government provided agricultural producers with a guarantee that they would 'purchase' everything which farmers could produce, farmers had the necessary motivation to expand their production levels as far as possible. In this way the desired result was brought about, with the volume of agricultural output breaking records almost every year. Yet the methods of achieving this advancement generated a new set of problems, most of which continue unabated today.

Chief among these problems – of which the EEC's food surpluses are merely a symptom – is the unending spiral of production in which farmers find themselves. Agricultural support, whether it is provided through deficiency payments or through direct intervention in the market, seduces farmers into producing the maximum possible amount of commodities. To perform in this way, farmers require vast sums of capital in order to pay for more land, better machines, new fertilisers, bigger farm buildings, and other such supplies. One way of paying for these increasingly expensive instruments of production is by borrowing from

1 Beresford op.cit. Chapter Six
 Body 'Triumph and Shame' p. 24
 Donaldson and Donaldson op.cit. Introduction
 C. Selly 'Ill Fares the Land' (Andre Deutsch, London: 1972)
 'Farming and the Nation' (MAFF February 1979)

banks and other private funds. These funds are sometimes insufficient for maintaining maximum levels of output and so farmers put pressure on the authorities for increased concessions and grants to help to pay for their necessary inputs. As the cost of the inputs rise, farmers attempt to stretch their output levels still further so as to pay for their costs while also making a profitable living from their enterprise. However, to expand output further may prove to be impossible without changing basic techniques of production. At this point farmers often bow to the pressures which are upon them to 'cut corners': they bulldoze hedgerows, they burn straw, they rear livestock in intensive conditions and they exploit the labour force as far as possible.

These measures are taken with a view to their implications for production levels rather than with any meaningful regard for their cost to the environment and to other social groups. This is why, for example, farmers have continued to burn straw and to 'factory farm' their animals in the face of widespread public criticism which these practices have drawn. In their exploitation of the hired workforce, farmers have often paid their workers the lowest wage possible, supplementing it frequently with 'free' housing. However, having found that they cannot pay below a certain level without losing their most skilled workers to other farms or other industries, farmers have turned to alternative measures in their efforts to lower the cost of labour. These include the use of casual and contract workers, the growing reliance upon machinery rather than human labour, the 'cutting of corners' in health and safety provisions and the requirement of workers that they work overtime instead of employing extra labour. In all of these areas the farmer's priority is to maximise production at a minimal cost.¹

¹ Clutterbuck and Lang op.cit. p. 62

The rocketing of land prices and rents noted earlier forms an integral part of this cycle of high output/high input production. As agricultural output and capital investment in the industry increase, so too does the value of land, with increasing numbers of people eager to have a stake in a uniquely protected industry which boasts exceptional levels of output and profit. As a consequence of this attractiveness of farmland, its owners are virtual masters of the land market, able to charge high prices and rents from profit-seekers. High land prices in turn attract only such clients who have access to large capital resources, which usually means financial institutions or those existing farmers who are prospering under the present system. This in turn makes for greater investment in the industry, higher output, and on and on ...

The demise of the small farmer noted earlier also becomes more understandable in the light of the above discussion. The main beneficiary of the current support system is the large agricultural producer, since each farmer is subsidised per unit produced. If the small farmer is to benefit from the protection afforded to agriculture then he must increase his output - which in turn requires high inputs such as complex machinery and chemicals. Yet these agricultural inputs have become increasingly expensive as their producers have carried out their own production processes with the rising wealth of the large farmers in mind.¹ Thus, the small farmer is forced to borrow increasing amounts of capital to pay for the costly inputs which all of his larger neighbours seem to use. Yet his own comparatively low rate of output diminishes his attractiveness to the banks and other sources of credit which prefer

1 Annual Reviews of Agriculture 1960-1980 (MAFF)

generally to invest in the larger, more secure farmers who are more extensively supported by the state.¹ As a result of this, the small farmer is unable to afford the inputs which other farmers use: it is a matter of time before he is compelled to sell his farm to a larger concern, as it no longer provides an adequate revenue as an independent economic unit. It is the frequency with which this scenario has been acted out in the post-war era which explains the trend towards fewer, larger farms in Britain.

Given the above pressures on the small farmer one might reasonably expect to find a movement within the community of small farmers towards alternative farming methods which would not require the extensive inputs of mainstream farming. The absence of any such trend is due to the exclusive concentration by all large-scale agricultural research institutions on dominant farming methods (i.e. high input farming). The experience of the organic Farming lobby illustrates that alternative farming practices cannot make significant inroads in the industry unless there is first a widespread departure from the current 'maximum output' approach to husbandry and a concomitant change in MAFF-funded research.²

A further and related consequence of the current mode of agricultural production is the transformation of farming into Big Business, or agribusiness as it is commonly referred to. Agribusiness constitutes a tripartite structure of (i) the agricultural supplying operations; (b) the grower-producer (farmer) and (iii) the storage, processing and distributing operations.³ Both the producers of agricultural inputs

1 Body 'Triumph and Shame' p. 34

2 BBC Radio Four Programme 'On Your Farm' transmitted 11 August 1984

3 L. Taylor and A.R. Jones 'Professionals and Specialists in Agribusiness' Sociologia Ruralis Volume 5 1965 p. 340

and the processors of its outputs have benefited from the existing system of agricultural protection and its related cycle of high agricultural production because they bring rising amounts of capital to these respective operations. As farming has become increasingly capitalised and large-scale in its outputs these two related sectors have expanded accordingly.

On the input side the main interests are the drug companies, agro-chemical companies and agricultural machinery companies.¹ The drug companies have profited greatly from factory farming techniques. Anti-stress sedatives, energy boosters, hormones to increase the fattening of animals and to regulate their birth rate, and antibiotics to combat the disease which is easily spread in factory farm conditions are just some of the drug products on which the agricultural livestock sector spent £80 million in 1980. Chemical companies have made even greater inroads through their provision of herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and fertilisers. In 1946 farmers spent a few million pounds on these products; by 1982 the value of such sales by ICI alone was no less than £1,350 million.² The sale of agricultural machinery has soared to equally impressive levels. In 1983 Britain's tractor and farm machinery industry sold roughly £5 billion worth of goods to British farmers, with machines costing up to £80,000 a piece.³

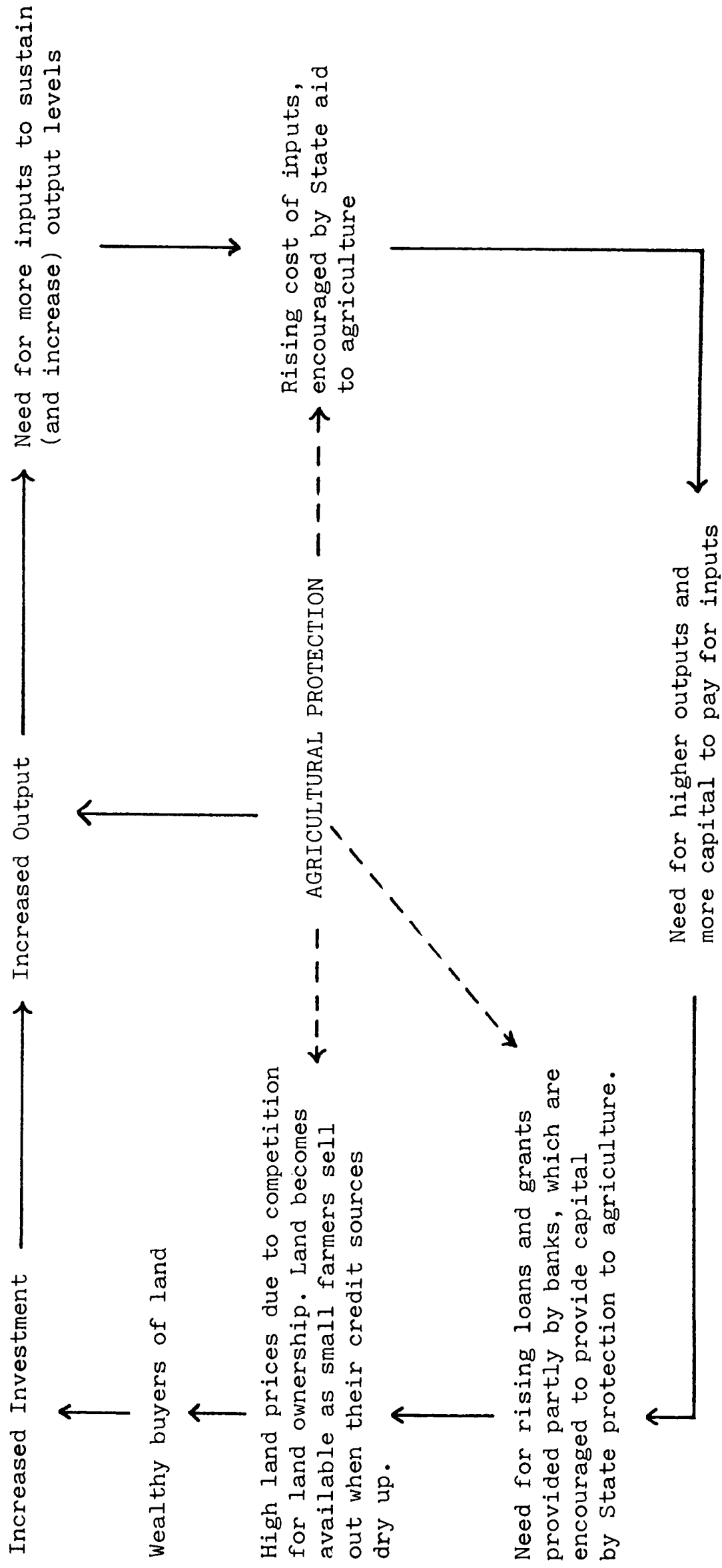
On the output side there is a network of food processing companies, as well as packagers, storers and distributors of food who have all benefited from the post-war boom in agricultural production. The develop-

1 M. Gold 'Assault and Battery' (Pluto, London: 1983) Chapter Four
Body 'Farming in the Clouds' pp. 22-23
Farming News 6 April 1984 'Sales booming - but will it last?'

2 Body 'Farming in the Clouds' p. 20

3 Financial Times 13 April 1984 'Tractor industry achieves turnover of £1.2 bn.'
Farming News 16 March 1984 'Berks. takes second look at big bales'
Farming News 9 March 1984 'Big boys boost sales of Combines'
Farming News 6 April 1984 'Sales Booming'

MAXIMUM OUTPUT/HIGH INPUT PRODUCTION CYCLE



ment of the food companies has paralleled that of the farms in that there has been a trend towards fewer, larger companies which each specialise in certain foods. Three companies account for nearly half of all frozen food sales (Unilever, Nestle and Kraftco); two companies cover two-thirds of the bread market (Rank Hovis McDougal); and one group sells 60% of all cold breakfast cereals (Kelloggs).¹ Another relatively recent development has been the rise of contractual relationships between these large companies and the large farmers. The food company agrees to buy a certain quantity of food from the farmer who is thus ensured of an uncomplicated and profitable outlet for his produce; the food company, on the other hand, is assured of a regular supply of raw materials. Their preference for contracts with large farmers rather than with thousands of small farmers is due to the greater reliability of supplies which such an arrangement allows for, as well as the relative ease of communication and transport.²

Clutterbuck and Lang have observed that modern farming is:

"... a far cry from orthodox agricultural economics which would suggest that farmers are in perfect competition with themselves, not dominated by outside interests. Rather, they are sandwiched between huge companies on both the input and the output side."³

On the one hand, farmers are forced to pay ever-rising prices for the goods provided by chemical and machinery companies, for without them the farm's output would fall and so too would the farmer's income. On the other hand, farmers are in many cases committed to producing food as and when required by the food companies. Howard Newby reveals that:

1 Clutterbuck and Lang op.cit. p. 64

2 H. Newby 'Green and Pleasant Land?' p. 64

3 Clutterbuck and Lang op.cit. p. 64

"Most food producers like to retain strict control over the quality of the produce which they purchase and the rate and timing of production. In the case of Bird's Eye peas, for example, the company employes fieldsmen who tell farmers when to sow the crop, who then inspect it, supervise spraying and direct the harvesting operation. Walls also retains considerable control over pig farmers in order to safeguard the quality of their pork pies and sausages. On occasions farmers can be reduced to almost the function of caretakers with most of their major entrepreneurial decisions removed from their hands."¹

Newby suggests that this relatively new arrangement has so far not seriously disturbed farmers, largely because it has proven to be a highly lucrative method of food production. The point here is that farmers do not have any choice over food production methods, as they must bend increasingly to the demands and strictures of their agribusiness partners.

* * *

It is through these tightening bonds between farming and its allied industries, and above all through the agricultural support system which underpins this relationship, that British agriculture has transformed itself from a tradition-bound 'way of life' into Big Business. The many pressures which have helped to bring about this transformation - chief among which has been the escalating need among farmers to maximise their production at minimal costs - have had particularly important ramifications for the hired agricultural workforce. Since the cost of inputs such as machinery and chemical cannot be controlled directly by farmers, economies have instead been made increasingly in the labour sector of farm inputs, in ways which have been noted above.

In the context of the manifold pressures under which farmers have been shown to operate, agricultural employers may be absolved from any moral responsibility for the poor standard of their employees' working conditions. However, employers must be held causally responsible for these conditions, insofar as they perpetuate and uphold the existing

¹ H. Newby 'Green and Pleasant Land' p. 117

system of production which has determined the quality of the agricultural workers' life. The way in which farmworkers have responded to their conditions is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ORGANISATION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

I. Agricultural Labour

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the English agricultural labour force has been its dramatic numerical decline since the mid-19th century. In 1851 there were 1.48 million agricultural workers employed in England and Wales; one century later only 0.7 million remained;¹ and by 1983 there were only 122,000 regular full-time hired male workers, 11,000 full-time female workers, and 138,000 male and female part-time, seasonal and casual workers employed in the U.K. agricultural industry.² This radical fall in the number of hired farmworkers is attributable to numerous factors, one of the most important of which has been the increased use, particularly since World War II, of labour-saving machinery and work-practices on the farm. The employment of sophisticated machinery has also affected those farmworkers who have remained in the industry. It has seen the increasing demand for skill from these workers, and has placed a growing amount of responsibility on their shoulders. Farmworkers today use complex machinery worth tens of thousands of pounds, often without a work-mate with whom to share the job and the responsibility attached to it.

Although overall trends indicate a dramatic fall in the number of farmworkers as well as increasing levels of skill among those who remain in the industry,³ not all farms have shed their labour to the

1 'A Century of Agricultural Statistics: Great Britain 1866-1966' (MAFF, 1968)
NB. These figures include farmers' working (unpaid) relatives as well as hired farmworkers.

2 Annual Review of Agriculture 1984 (MAFF)

3 H. Newby 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 297
R. Pierson 'What About the Farmworker? A trade union view' J.A.E.
Volume 29 No.3 1978 p. 237

same degree. While some farms employ one full-time worker or only casual or part-time labour, others may depend on the labour of as many as twenty full-time workers. At present this latter category of farms forms a clear minority, as the table shows:

DISTRIBUTION OF HIRED REGULAR WHOLE-TIME WORKERS
BY LABOUR SIZE-GROUPS: ENGLAND AND WALES June 1982
(N = 2,629)

Labour Size-Group	% of holdings
1 hired regular whole-time worker	26.8
2-4	44.8
5-9	20.0
10-14	4.3
15-19	1.8
20 or more	2.3
	100.0

(Source: MAFF Wages & Employment Enquiry 1982)

Just as farmworkers are unevenly distributed in terms of their labour size-group, so too they are found to be concentrated in certain regions of the country. For example, just over 20% of all workers employed in agriculture in the U.K. in 1982 were in the cereal-growing regions of the South-East, whereas the North accounted for fewer than 4% of the total workforce.¹

1 Regional Trends (HMSO 1984)
N.B. These figures include farmers and hired farmworkers.

TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKERS (family & hired) ON AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS
IN ENGLAND AND WALES June 1982

Region	Regular whole-time workers			All workers (i.e. regular whole- & part-time and seasonal - male & female)
	Men	Women	All	
North	6.8	0.5	7.3	12.5
Yorks & Humberside	13.0	1.1	14.1	26.1
E.Midlands	15.7	1.3	17.1	31.7
E.Anglia	17.6	1.2	18.8	35.0
S.E.	29.4	4.1	33.5	67.3
S.W.	20.5	2.0	22.5	44.0
W.Midlands	12.0	1.1	13.1	28.8
N.W.	7.1	0.9	8.0	15.7
England	122.1	12.3	134.4	261.1
Wales	7.1	1.1	8.2	20.9

(Source: MAFF Wages & Employment Enquiry 1982)

A third way of viewing the agricultural labour force is in terms of its age structure. Lund et al provide figures for the hired regular full-time male agricultural work force which reveal a trend between 1960-1980 towards a younger labour force. In 1968, 11.2% of the work- force were between 20-25 years of age; 19.2% were between 25-35; 47.2% were between 35-55; and 20.5% were between 55-65. The corresponding figures for 1980 were 16.6%; 22.5%; 42.6%; and 17.0%.¹

Finally, one might consider the distribution of the workforce according to their occupation. In 1982 the occupational divisions among regular full-time hired men were as follows:

¹ P.J. Lund et al 'Wages and Employment in Agriculture: England and Wales 1960-1980' (MAFF 1982)

OCCUPATIONAL DIVISIONS AMONG REGULAR FULL-TIME
MALE WORKERS IN AGRICULTURE: 1982

Foremen	8.0%
Dairy Cowmen	7.1%
Other Stockmen	11.3%
Tractor Drivers	22.3%
General Farmworkers	43.5%
Horticultural Workers	6.2%
Other Farmworkers	1.6%

(Source: MAFF Wages & Employment Enquiry 1982)

These classifications shed light on certain sociological trends which characterise the contemporary labour force in agriculture. For example, occupational divisions are important variables for explaining agricultural labour mobility. Overall, farmworkers are not a very mobile group within their industry, as shown by the NEDO survey which Ruth Gasson has drawn upon in her study.¹ Over 40% of the sample were found to have always worked on the same farm and 20% had served the same employer or holding for over 20 years. However, Gasson shows that dairy cowmen and other stockmen form the most mobile occupational group within the industry, while foremen, tractor drivers and general farmworkers remain the longest at the same place of work.² Stockmen are also among the most skilled and best paid workers in agriculture, and are the main group to occupy the tied cottage. These factors relate to their occupational mobility for, unlike the numerically preponderant general farmworker, the skilled livestock worker is sufficiently in demand on the

1 R. Gasson 'Resources in Agriculture: Labour' in A. Edwards and A. Rogers (eds) 'Agricultural Resources' (Faber, London: 1974) p. 123

2 R. Gasson 'Mobility of Farmworkers' (University of Cambridge, Dept. of Land Economy, Occasional Paper No.2 1974) Chapter Two

agricultural labour market to be earning relatively good wages and 'perks' (such as tied accommodation), as employers have to compete for their relatively scarce skilled labour in this specialist field.

A view of farmworkers' outward mobility presents a rather different picture. Gasson found that between 50-60% of all occupational moves in agriculture are to occupations in other industries - most frequently in the transport, building and construction trades and to a lesser extent, to unskilled jobs such as retailing.¹ Seasonal and casual workers are found to be less inclined to leave the land than are regular workers, and of the latter category it is workers on arable farms rather than livestock workers who are most likely to move to non-agricultural employment.

The overall outflow of agricultural labour rose to sufficiently high proportions in the 1950s to arouse the interest of a number of agricultural economists and rural sociologists. The most notable study which this trend prompted was that by W.J.G. Cowie and A.K. Giles who sought an explanation for the farmworkers' 'drift from the land'. From a survey of over 500 farmworkers and ex-farmworkers in the Gloucestershire area, Cowie and Giles found that "Outstanding among the causes of the movement of workers from agriculture is the level of wages ..."² However, Cowie and Giles's conclusion that farmworkers had left their industry 'voluntarily' (i.e. in pursuit of better-paid work) would seem to contradict the notion that farmworkers have been forced to leave the land by the replacement of their labour by new agricultural machinery. Or, to phrase the issue in the terms of the agricultural economist: has the drift from the land been caused by 'pull' or by 'push' factors?

1 Ibid. Chapter Seven

2 W.J.G. Cowie and A.K. Giles 'An Inquiry into Reasons for the "Drift from the Land"' in Selected Papers in Agricultural Economics, Volume 5 1956 University of Bristol

This question can only be answered if the period of time and the locality to which it is applied are specified. Farmworkers can only be 'pulled', or drawn, out of their industry if the non-agricultural labour market can offer them preferable employment opportunities, a factor which depends on the country's economic climate at a given time. More significant perhaps is the state of the local labour market, since farmworkers are unlikely to have the opportunity to travel widely in search of new employment. The relevance of alternative employment opportunities in the explanation of 'pull' is highlighted by Ruth Gasson who found that:

"While the causes of dissatisfaction would be likely to operate continuously, actual migration of workers depends on there being other jobs. A close association has been demonstrated at regional levels between rates of movement of labour off farms and employment opportunities in industry ... In other words, workers are ready to leave the land when industry is booming but understandably cautious when unemployment is rising."¹

Push factors can include incidents such as the imposition of the milk quotas in 1984, or the increased use of family labour. Historically, the most outstanding push factor has been the growing reliance by farmers upon labour-saving work practices (e.g. specialisation) and machinery. Insofar as farmers have transferred gradually to the use of machines as a substitute for human labour, the 'voluntary' drift of farmworkers into towns and cities in search of improved work conditions (i.e. pull) has not seriously disrupted the level of agricultural production. There have been only rare and usually short-lived periods of concern over the past 50 years among agriculturalists over the existence of an apparent scarcity of skilled labour.² More commonly, the reverse trend has prevailed;

1 R. Gasson 'Resources in Agriculture' pp. 124-125

2 R. Blythe 'Akenfield' (Allen Lane, London: 1969) p. 80
Cowie and Giles op.cit.

push has outweighed pull, as employers have shed their hired labour at a faster rate than the farmworkers have found preferable alternative employment. This situation has become increasingly marked since World War II, as farmers have been compelled to cut their costs of production in every possible way in response to an increasingly intensive high input/maximum output production cycle.

As the number of hired farmworkers has thus declined primarily through the influence of push in the agricultural labour market, the number of workers in allied industries has increased. This trend has prompted some commentators to suggest that today's 'farmworker' is the worker who is employed to help in the manufacture of agricultural machinery as much as it is the 'traditional' worker who works in the fields. Our concern here, however, is with the implications of labour market trends for those workers who have remained on the land.

II. Agricultural Trade Unionism

Farmworkers have a long history of trade unionism, indeed longer than have most other groups of workers, for it began as early as 1834 with the 'martyrdom' of the Tolpuddle Seven. The vicissitudes of agricultural trade unionism since that time have been well-documented by labour historians, many of whom have stressed in particular the obstacles which have confronted the agricultural labour movement since its inception.¹ It has been their inability so far to overcome some of these difficulties

1 The most notable account is found in Reg Groves 'Sharpen the Sickle' (Merlin Press, London: 1981). See also:
 O.J. Dunlop 'The Farm Labourer' (Fisher Unwin, London: 1913)
 G.E. Fussel 'From Tolpuddle to T.U.C.' (Windsor Press, Slough: 1948)
 E. Hobsbawm and G. Rude 'Captain Swing' (Lawrence & Wishart, London: 1969)
 J.P.D. Dunbabin 'Rural Discontent in 19th Century Britain' (Faber, London: 1969)

which explains why, despite its longevity, the farmworkers' history is marked as much by set-backs and disappointments as by the courage and dedication of its protagonists.

The first spate of organised trade unionism among agricultural workers surfaced in the early 1870s when Joseph Arch led the well-known 'Revolt of the Fields'. The farmers' effective lock-out of their workers in 1874 in the Eastern Counties saw the quick collapse of the union movement which was not resurrected in any cohesive form until 1906. In that year farmworkers organised themselves under the leadership of George Edwards, originally to protest and to protect themselves against a series of tied cottage evictions in Norfolk which had been the employers' retaliation for farmworkers' electoral support for the Liberals, rather than for the Tory Party. A brief boom in Union membership during the First World War lasted only until 1920 - the year the Union adopted the name of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW) - when wages began to fall dramatically and unemployment soared. In September 1921 the government abolished the recently established Central Wages Board, and the statutory agricultural minimum wage went with it. Thereafter agricultural wages plummeted until in 1923 real wage levels in agriculture fell to below their 1914 level.

1923 marks a watershed year for the NUAW, for it was the year of the great Norfolk Strike. The Union was compelled to take strike action at this time to end the employers' repeated cuts in wage rates and extensions of working hours. The strike took place in Norfolk where the Union was relatively well-organised, and it lasted for five weeks. With the help of urban workers (chiefly financial), the farmworkers secured some of the gains for which they had fought: most importantly, the farmers' unending movement to cut wages and lengthen the work-day was halted,

and farmworkers' wages were held at their existing levels. This victory had to be set against the losses incurred by the strike, however, which included a depletion of Union funds, a great fall in membership and morale, and the job losses of many of those who had taken part in the strike (in spite of the 'no victimisation' agreement made by employers). On balance, the strike was a costly show of the Union's strength which left a cautious reluctance among many members and officials to attempt industrial action again.

The late 1920s and early 1930s are best described by Reg Groves's chapter heading - 'the lean years'. Lower wages and longer hours were imposed regularly upon the workers and unemployment remained high, both in the towns and the countryside. The mid-1930s saw the start of a slow change in both the farmworkers' conditions and in the Union's fortunes as wages were increased, hours reduced and Union membership rose. However, it was World War II which saw the largest improvement in farmworkers' conditions and simultaneously in their Union's membership figures. War-time inflation, labour scarcity and wage regulation helped to raise farmworkers' wages considerably (although they remained well below industrial earnings) and these developments were accompanied by a great increase in Union membership: by 1947 the NUAW had 162,000 members, which was over three times the 1938 figure.¹

Although information on NUAW membership levels is based upon estimates, certain trends can be identified.² A peak was reached in 1948, after

1 G.E. Mingay 'The Transformation of Agriculture' in R. Hartwell et al 'The Long Debate on Poverty' (Institute of Economic Affairs 1972) p. 52

The Transport and General Workers' Union also organised agricultural workers at this time, accounting for some 15,000 in 1939. While the TGWU was strongest in Scotland, the NUA(A)W organised most unionised farmworkers in England and Wales.

2 Newby op.cit. p. 228

which membership fell slightly, remaining between 124,000 and 129,000 throughout the 1950s. In 1961 the figure fell to 113,646 and although there were some increases during the 1960s, they were followed by falls in the membership level such that the decade closed with only 105,000 members in the NUAW. By 1970 the figure was 94,497 and the 1970s are marked by a continuing drop in the number of Union members. The Union's profound concern over this trend is evident in its Annual Reports. Almost every Report provides details of new schemes devised to boost membership levels, but few of these schemes achieved their purpose. In 1971, for example, cash prizes were awarded for the best recruiting efforts by members on both a monthly and county basis; yet in 1973 the Organising Sub-committee was reporting an average annual drop of 10% in the number of Union members.

Because the exact number of agricultural workers belonging to the NUAAW is unknown, it is impossible to quote what proportion of the potential membership belong to the Union. Estimates have varied from between 30-35% of the total potential membership,¹ to 40% of the total regular full-time hired labour force in England and Wales,² to over 50%.³ One clear feature is the regional concentration of Union members: while Wales only accounted for 2% of total members in the 1970s, 40% were to be found in just three counties: Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Yorkshire.⁴

1 F.D. Mills 'The NUAW' J.A.E. Volume 16 No. 2 1964 p. 231
P. Self and H. Storing 'The State and the Farmer' (Allen & Unwin, London: 1962) p. 160

2 Newby op.cit. p. 254

3 This was the estimate of Joan Maynard, the farmworkers' sponsored M.P., in the mid-1970s. Hansard Vol.910 4 May 1976, Column 1092

4 Newby op.cit. p. 254

Overall membership remains low in the farmworkers' Union and this has had serious implications for the Union's finances. Unlike the National Farmers' Union, the farmworkers' Union has relied almost entirely upon members' subscriptions for its income. A small membership, which is generally too poor to make generous donations, has meant that the Union has had to struggle with a seriously low income ever since its inception. At the same time, this lack of financial resources has prevented the Union from pursuing a large-scale and effective recruitment campaign. In the 1970s financial pressures forced the Union to shed many of its personnel and facilities for reasons of economy. Between 1970-1972 the Union's full-time staff was reduced by 20 (including four full-time recruitment officers), its computer system was abandoned and replaced by a manual system of auditing, and contributions to the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress were decreased. These economy measures were followed by a predictable, but regretted, failure to increase significantly the declining level of membership.¹

Moreover, the reduction in staff and services also failed to improve the Union's finances. Consequently, the leadership continued to spend considerable energy in search of a solution to the twin problems of low income and low membership. It was obliged frequently to raise members' contributions as a 'last resort' for raising a viable income, but even this strategy could not succeed indefinitely in keeping income in line with expenditure.²

The periodic subscription increases were announced in the Union's monthly journal, the *Landworker*, accompanied by regretful apologies from Union officials who made clear their awareness of members' personal

1 Landworker March 1972

2 NUAW Annual Report 1967

financial straits.¹ Each time an increase was announced the journal also reminded members of the many services which the Union provided them with. These have ranged from conventional Union functions such as wage negotiation, legal aid on work-related problems, the provision of a lively monthly journal and the representation of farmworkers on various organisations and committees - to services more in line with a 'friendly society' than a modern trade union. The latter services have included dealing with members' personal and domestic problems - including winning £6 compensation for a coat lost at a cleaners and £2 compensation for cauliflowers eaten by a neighbour's sheep.²

By the mid-1970s these 'friendly' services had become considerably less prominent in the Union's agenda relative to its 'trade union' concerns. Nevertheless, although the pursuit of the miscellaneous and personal problems of members was a costly and time-consuming task, in the view of the Head Office, it was a valuable 'secondary' service whose importance lay in the fact that it "reflects the traditional 'family' relationship that exists within the Union".³ The dependency of many farmworkers upon the Union to solve their non-work related problems may, however, have less to do with their familial feelings towards the Union than with their isolation. The relative scarcity of Citizens' Advice Bureaux and similar public advice agencies in rural areas often means that the Union is the only agency available to farmworkers to turn to for legal advice and assistance.

1 E.g. Landworker October 1957, December 1965, November 1967, and March 1972. By 1981 subscriptions were £24 p.a.

2 NUAW Annual Report 1957

3 NUAAW Annual Report 1975

The Union has not had a high political profile in the sense that virtually all of its time and resources have been devoted to the 'bread and butter' issues of gaining better wages and conditions for its members rather than to conducting more overtly political campaigns. However, the Union has taken a public stand on certain issues and in particular those which are directly concerned with the agricultural industry. It has long championed land nationalisation (although with diminishing vigour over the years), it opposed Britain's entry into the Common Market and it has supported the Labour Party in every election since World War II. Its commitment to the Labour Party was cemented in 1974 when the NUAAW sponsored the Labour Member of Parliament for Sheffield Brightside, Joan Maynard, a policy which it has upheld ever since that time.

The Union's sponsored M.P. is arguably one of its most important power resources in the parliamentary arena. As with farmers, the numerical decline of farmworkers over the past hundred years has reduced the potential attractiveness of their vote to most politicians. The number of farmworkers in any given constituency at any time in the post-war period has never been sufficiently high to command any meaningful 'indirect influence',¹ over prospective and existing Members of Parliament (who in any case tend to hold safe Conservative seats in the rural areas). At the same time, and in contrast to farmers, farmworkers have no 'natural allies' in parliament to compensate for their electoral marginality. Nor has the Union developed strong links with local M.Ps. as the National Farmers' Union has done so effectively. It is for these reasons that the Union's sponsored M.P. has been forced to take on the responsibility of being the farmworkers' chief source of influence and power in parliament. The validity - and the implications - of this observation will be examined in Chapter Five.

1 R. Dahl 'Who Governs?' (Yale University, New Haven: 1961) pp. 163-165

The political colouring of the Union's leadership has fluctuated over the years, as a comparison of the Landworker's stance in the 1920s and 1960s and 1970s shows. In 1927 the Landworker suggested the following as a topic for discussion at Branch meetings across the country:

"... there is a real difference which does divide the workers from the employing class and the wealthy unemployed. The workers are exploited - that is to say, they produce wealth as a result of their labour, but only a part - sometimes a small part - of that wealth is given back to them in the form of wages. The rest is kept by the employers. The employers think this is right and fair - they want it to continue. The workers know that a better arrangement is possible; an arrangement under which all industry shall be carried on by the community for the general good, just as the postal services are, or broadcasting, for instance. The workers want to abolish private profit making."¹

By the 1960s the Landworker was publicly disassociating itself from socialist politics, and sought repeatedly to distance itself in particular from the Communist Party. When the journal printed an article in December 1971 by a self-proclaimed member of the Communist Party, the Landworker staff apologised and promised its readers a balance in the next edition by printing an article by the Conservative Minister of Agriculture, James Prior.²

However, in spite of these political contrasts throughout the Union's history and the limited degree of tension to be found between the Union's 'radical' and 'reformist' wings, there has been a broad continuity underpinning its policy objectives which is based upon an overriding concern with winning improvements in members' wages; seeing the abolition of the tied cottage and its associated problems; gaining public recognition of the farmworker's skill; and more recently, securing a reasonable standard of health and safety on the farm. A further preoccupation

1 Landworker February 1927

2 Landworker December 1971

noted earlier in the chapter has been with improving the Union's membership figures and thereby improving the Union's finances and services.

This concern over recruitment and finances became increasingly prominent in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, when it was finally recognised that raising members' subscriptions was an inadequate response to the problem. Two more far-reaching steps were taken in an attempt to solve the Union's difficulties in these spheres. The first of these was in 1968 when the Union's Biennial Conference in Aberystwyth voted to change the Union's name from the National Union of Agricultural Workers to the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers (NUAAW). The new title in fact merely formalised the trend which had developed over previous years, namely the Union's increased recruitment of allied workers into its ranks. (These included forestry workers, roadmen, drainage workers, and workers in food processing companies.) The falling number of agricultural workers in the agricultural industry was reflected in the Union membership figures, where the ratio of allied workers to farmworkers had been rising steadily.¹ By changing the Union's name the Conference gave its recognition to these increasingly important allied workers who were in the Union while at the same time attempting to attract those who remained outside its ranks.²

As subsequent Annual Reports indicate, the formally closer relationship with allied workers did not significantly improve the Union's finances. In 1968 the Union's total funds stood at £682,041 and its expenditure at £366,275; by 1974 the funds had fallen to £575,520 and expenditure had climbed to £551,494; and in 1979 the Union's expenditure had outstripped its funds by almost 2 to 1. The Union could no longer afford to run

1 According to F.D. Mills (op.cit.) by 1964 30-35% of NUAW members were employed in the allied trades.

2 Landworker June 1968
NUAAW Annual Report 1968

its services: a crisis loomed which the leadership recognised could not be solved by repeatedly raising contributions. Consequently, it held a special conference in 1980 to consider possible solutions to the continuing decline in the Union's financial situation. The most promising solution appeared to be the joining of forces with another Union. Negotiations were subsequently held with three different Unions, and eventually the NUAAW leadership recommended to its members a merger with the country's largest Union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU). In January 1982 a postal ballot of the whole NUAAW membership saw six to one support in favour of the merger among the 52% of the membership who had cast their votes. Thus, ever since 1982 the organised agricultural workforce has belonged to the Agricultural and Allied Workers' National Trade Group (AAWNTG) of the TGWU.

The merger demanded certain structural changes from the old NUAAW. (At the time of writing some of these transformations are still in the process of being implemented.) The Branch remains the Union's basic unit, but unlike in the NUAAW, all members of the AAWNTG must belong to branches of 50 or more members. Many old NUAAW branches were amalgamated in order to reach the TGWU's minimum of 50 members per branch, with the result that today there are fewer but larger branches than there were prior to the merger.

The NUAAW's District Committees and County Committees have been replaced by new District Committees and Regional Trade Group Committees. In some instances Composite District Committees take the place of District Committees, in which case the District Organiser concerned must deal with workers not only from agriculture but also from numerous other TGWU sectors. Sometimes the Organiser concerned may not have an agricultural background, and will have little if any experience of agri-

cultural workers' problems. This lack of experience and understanding of the farmworker's circumstances at the district level has placed a greater onus upon the AAWNTG's Head Office which, however, lost many of its officers and staff through the merger. Although Landworker is still produced and there is still a Legal/Health and Safety Department catering solely for farmworkers' problems in these areas, there is a general movement towards a greater integration of the AAWNTG's staff and members with the TGWU's other sectors. Among other things, this integration is aimed at reducing the pressure from the districts on the AAWNTG Head Office while offering members a net gain in the number of services made available to them by the merger. Further organisational changes have included the replacement of the National Executive Committee by the National Trade Group Committee; of the post of General Secretary by National Trade Group Secretary; and of the week-long Biennial Conference with the 2-day Annual Conference which continues to decide Union (Trade Group) policy and to place mandates on the full-time officers.

Few members or officials have been willing to pass unreserved judgement on the merger, largely because it is still a relatively new arrangement whose full effects remain to be seen. Problems of communication are clear, however, for example between officials with a life-time of agricultural experience and those with none. There is also a sense of having been 'swallowed-up' by a large and anonymous Union which has no real understanding of rural conditions, attitudes and needs - for example, 'friendly society' services will almost certainly decline as the merger becomes more and more established. In the long term, however, there can be few regrets over the merger which successfully prevented the financial ruin and ultimate collapse of the farmworkers' union organisation. Lay members and officials recognise that other, more positive

benefits of the merger may be slow to surface, particularly because of the financial and membership problems which arose within the TGWU itself in the early 1980s. From the AAWNTG's point of view, the enjoyment of the potential benefits of the merger - financial security, a greater variety of services, more industrial muscle and stronger links with allied workers - will depend upon the successful integration of the AAWNTG with the rest of the TGWU, a process which has only just begun.

III. Agricultural Labour Relations

The last organised strike among agricultural workers in England took place over 60 years ago, since which time there has been only one further attempt at taking large-scale industrial action (see Chapter Four). Apart from its periodic lobbies of parliament and rallies in London (usually in support of the Union's annual wage claim) the NUAAW (and, since 1982, the AAWNTG) has been a relatively quiet Union.¹ However, on the basis of the definition of farmworkers' interests outlined in Chapter One (high wages, non-tied housing and occupational safety) the quiescence of the Union - and more particularly of the 60% of farmworkers who do not belong to it - cannot be attributed to the satisfaction of farmworkers' interests by prevailing conditions. How then is the farmworkers' apparent silence to be explained?

It should be noted at the outset that the absence of large-scale and organised opposition to existing conditions is not equivalent to

1 The Conservative Minister of Agriculture in 1981, Peter Walker, singled out farmworkers for praise because of their quiet industrial behaviour and for being a group which 'does not strike, has no restrictive practices and does not watch the clock'. Guardian 27 October 1981

an absence of protest altogether. This point is stressed by labour historians who have shown that in the 19th century, for example, prior to the development of trade unionism, workers expressed their dissatisfaction with their conditions of work in subtle and relatively inconspicuous ways. It is true that at times the action taken was fairly widespread and organised as, for instance, in the mid-1830s when the New Poor Law aroused their hostility.¹ But more often than not, farmworkers' protests were less obvious to the onlooker – but nonetheless effective. For a considerable period of time, social protest took highly individualistic forms such as arson, theft from employers' stocks accompanied by hostile letters, the destruction of fences and the deliberate and violent maiming of animals. Whether opposition was carried out collectively or individually, however, there was a clear expression of dissatisfaction to be gleaned among farmworkers with their work conditions and with the prevailing distribution of rewards between landlords, farmers and workers.²

The second half of the 19th century saw a decline in the use of isolated and violent methods of protest among agricultural workers. At the same time, farmworkers were often prevented from using newly developed forms of opposition, such as the withdrawal of their labour, which industrial workers had begun to use successfully. The barriers to the farmworkers' use of the strike weapon, many of which persist today, will be considered later; what is of interest here is the response of farmworkers to their constrained situation.

1 Hobsbawm and Rude op.cit. Chapter Fifteen

2 The chapter by A.J. Peacock in J.P.D. Dunbabin's book (op.cit.) identifies specifically social (as opposed to individual) protest in the behaviour of many farmworkers. See also Mingay (op.cit.)

The Union's largely unsuccessful attempts at taking strike action in the late 19th and early 20th centuries led it to adopt a different strategy for improving conditions, namely the provision of encouragement and assistance to Union members for their emigration. Between 1871-1881 a total of 200,000 farmworkers left the country with the Union's help in search of better fortunes in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.¹ This policy of emigration (and to a lesser degree migration) served two purposes simultaneously. On the one hand it provided members with an escape route from a situation which they clearly found intolerable, offering them an opportunity to find improved conditions in a different industry or in another country. On the other hand the emigration of substantial numbers of farmworkers placed those who remained in England's farming industry in a stronger labour market position, thus enabling them to put forward their demands to their employers more effectively.

Although the farmworkers' drift from the land was a successful, albeit negative, form of protest from the emigres point of view, there were three important problems involved in its useage. First, it deprived the Union of many potential members, often the more ambitious and adventurous ones who might have become the Union's much-needed leaders had they remained in England.² Secondly, farmworkers were able to use this form of protest only as long as there were alternative jobs which they would be able to emigrate or migrate to. The loss of Britain's colonies saw the severe contraction of farmworkers' opportunities for changing their employment through emigration. In the post-war period migration to non-agricultural employment has also become an unreliable and intermittent

1 Dunbabin op.cit. p. 79
Groves op.cit. pp. 66-67

2 Groves op.cit. p. 67
Self and Storing op.cit. Chapter Seven

form of protest which is wholly dependent on the national employment situation and, more specifically, on the state of the local labour market. Finally, the operation of pull factors, insofar as they exist, no longer strengthens the bargaining power of the remaining agricultural workers: push factors have been operating at a rate which has left farmers generally satisfied with having an ever-smaller labour force.

Although historical evidence thus indicates that farmworkers have not accepted passively the conditions imposed on them by their industry, it also reveals that their opposition to these conditions has rarely been vociferous. Moreover, while many farmworkers have protested against their conditions of work by leaving the industry in search of alternative employment, the fact remains that many more have remained tied to the land throughout their working lives. However, the underlying explanation for this continued service to agriculture suggests that neither farmworkers' quiescence nor their loyalty to the industry can be interpreted as a positive endorsement of their conditions.

In his study of East Anglian farmworkers Howard Newby found that "the extremely low voluntary quit rate can be attributed in no small measure to a substantial proportion of workers who have lacked the opportunity to move rather than made a choice to stay".¹ The absence of sufficient opportunities to leave the industry explains not only the "low voluntary quit rate" among farmworkers but also, as Newby shows,

1 Newby op.cit. p. 162

2 Newby op.cit.; Mingay op.cit.

See also T. Giles and M. Stansfield 'The Farmer as Manager' (Allen Unwin, London: 1980) p. 144

'Good labour relations' have been emphasised by virtually all N.F.U. members and officials with whom I have spoken, and by almost all agricultural commentators.

the peaceful labour relations which have characterised their industry so strongly. Farmworkers' quiescence - and the resulting industrial peace - exist because farmworkers are prevented from using a threatened 'drift for the land' as an effective bargaining tool by their employers' recognition of the emptiness of such a threat.¹

Some observers have remarked that during those intermittent periods when alternative employment was an option for many farmworkers (as in the 1950s) relatively few farmworkers actually made use of the opportunities for leaving the industry which were in principle available to them. This observation has been used to argue that the constraints which operate on the farm workforce may not be as severe as Newby suggests.

It is difficult to explain with precision why more farmworkers did not leave agriculture 'when the opportunity to do so was there', but some factors which almost certainly came into play can be identified. Firstly, the isolation of many farmworkers may have prevented them from taking advantage of potential opportunities to leave the industry. That is, even when the labour market was objectively favourable, it may have been difficult for a farmworker living in a rural area to locate specific job openings in urban centres. Secondly, even if the farmworker did find suitable alternative employment, he may have been unable to accept it because of his housing situation. Where the worker had lived for many years in a tied cottage, he would not have been able to pay for a new house, while the ability to find suitable rented accommodation - in particular where an entire family required housing - could not be guaranteed. (This contrasts with many urban workers who can often remain in their existing accommodation even if they decide to change jobs.)

1 Newby op.cit. Chapter Three

A further consideration may have been the farmworker's 'job satisfaction'. Although he may have resented the pay and other conditions of agricultural employment, the farmworker may have derived some satisfaction from the outdoor nature of farmwork, in which the worker is more independent than he would be in a factory or in most other areas of work which farmworkers could hope to transfer to.

What all of this points to is that even when the labour market has been relatively loose, many farmworkers have been prevented from changing their employment. It might be argued, however, that insofar as 'job satisfaction' has prevented these farmworkers from leaving agriculture (a distinctly unimportant factor according to Newby)¹ it has been a voluntary, not enforced, decision to remain in the industry. This argument rests upon a definition of 'voluntary' in which the decision to stay in agriculture, where the alternative is perceived as being unacceptable, is regarded as a 'voluntary' decision. Conversely, if the choice between an unattractive option and an unacceptable one is regarded as a 'non-choice', then one can continue to argue that farmworkers have been compelled to remain in agriculture, and to remain there without expressing their grievances effectively.

Regardless of whether one interprets the 'job satisfaction' element in voluntarist or determinist terms, the important point is that insofar as it exists, job satisfaction among farmworkers has enabled many of them to tolerate conditions of work (such as low pay) which they might otherwise have rebelled against. This factor has strengthened the employers' bargaining position - in that they know that the workforce will accept to some extent relatively poor conditions of employment in return for the 'privilege' of working on the land.

1 Ibid.

There have been rather more significant factors than job satisfaction which have prevented farmworkers from expressing their grievances loudly and successfully. The most important of these has been the generally tight labour market, although this is not the only one: the very structure of the industry has been a further barrier to protest.

In 1982 over 70% of regular full-time hired workers in a MAFF sample of 2629 holdings were employed in groups of four or less.¹ Where the hired workforce is this small it is common to find the employer working side-by-side with the workers in the fields. This constant physical proximity often develops into an accompanying social closeness between farmers and their employees which makes militant protest by the workers over their pay and conditions difficult to carry out.² As Joan Maynard explains:

"Farmworkers have always faced special difficulties ... In many cases they work in very small numbers and in close relationship with their employers. Farm workers therefore lack the feeling of strength, solidarity and confidence which numbers bring. The boss is not some remote figure it is easy to dislike, he is the man who works beside you most days of the week."³

Although farmworkers are aware that it would be in their interests to enjoy improved conditions of work, what is less clear to them is what the most effective means are for pursuing these interests. Whom or what is to be challenged - and how - in order to secure higher wages or better health and safety provisions? The notion of challenging

1 'Earning, Hours and Numbers of Persons, including the Report on the Wages and Employment Enquiry 1982' (MAFF March 1983)

2 Newby op.cit. p. 301

3 J. Maynard 'A Hundred Years of Farmworkers' Struggle' (Institute for Workers' Control, Nottingham: 1974)
H. Newby 'Agricultural Workers in the Class Structure' S.R. Volume 20 1972

individual employers on these issues is often unacceptable to farmworkers in part because of the friendships which have developed with them over time.

Newby's research shows that the relationship between many farmworkers and their employers has become closer over the past 50 years.¹ He attributes this largely to the falling number of farmworkers which has served to lower the ratio of employee to employer on some farms which in turn enables friendly personal relationships to develop between them to an even greater extent than previously. Furthermore, the close personal relations which exist between farmers and hired farmworkers have become more widespread in recent years. According to Bell and Newby this trend is due to changes in the nature of the rural village community. The influx of middle class commuters and second-home-owners into scenic rural villages has pushed the traditional 'locals' together in solidarity against this intrusion. This defensive movement towards one another by farmers and farmworkers is not only a social phenomenon; it is also a physical one. The presence of wealthy people in rural areas has pushed up prices and rents well beyond the farmworker's means and this is sometimes accompanied by the effective opposition of the 'newcomers' to the building of new council houses. As a result of these trends farmworkers are forced increasingly to accept tied accommodation where it is available. This is significant, for it invariably means that the worker occupying the tied cottage and the farmer who owns it become neighbours in a situation where other neighbours live often a considerable distance away. The ensuing out-of-work-hours contact

1 H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 241, Chapter Five
 H. Newby 'Green and Pleasant Land?' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 130
 H. Newby 'The Changing Sociological Environment of the Farm' Farm Management Volume 2 No. 9 1974

between farmer and farmworker which can develop may reinforce the friendly relationship which is seen to have evolved during their working hours.¹

Although friendly relationships thus exist between some farmworkers and their employers, certain qualifications must be added to this portrayal of agricultural labour relations. It is the close working relationship on the farm which underpins existing 'friendships' and which also distinguishes farmworkers from most industrial workers, whose remoteness from management facilitates the expression of hostility against their employers and their conditions of work. Although farmworkers at present work in what are often small units, the trend towards farm amalgamation and agribusiness enterprises may see a concomitant concentration of labour on large farms, resulting in overall fewer but larger units of hired farmworkers. Some of the country's large farms, mainly those in the South East and East Anglia regions, have come to resemble industrial workplaces, insofar as the workforce - in groups of eight, nine, ten or more - works separately from the employer who is often occupied full-time with the 'paperwork' aspects of the enterprise.² Where the workforce reaches this size the farm is usually a complex, large-scale enterprise, where a foreman and/or manager is often employed to oversee the day-to-day husbandry of the farm. There is consequently little contact between farmworkers and the farmer, and 'friendly' relationships do not, as a consequence, prevail. Instead,

1 C. Bell and H. Newby 'The Sources of Variation in Agricultural Workers' Images of Society' in M. Bulmer (ed.) 'Working Class Images of Society' (Routledge Kegan Paul 1975)

H. Newby et al 'Property, Paternalism and Power' (Hutchinson, London: 1978) p. 193

H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 362

2 H. Newby 'Agricultural Trade Unionism and Structural Change' in J. Maynard (ed.) (op.cit.)

"... relationships become more universalistic and instrumentally specific and the mode of control is more by reference to impersonal mechanisms operated through a set of formalised procedural rules."¹

It would, however, be misleading to place a great deal of emphasis on the implications of farm amalgamation for agricultural labour relations. Although as much as one-sixth of the hired regular full-time male work-force is currently employed on only 2% of all holdings, the vast majority remain fairly widely dispersed and isolated.²

A second point relating to the allegedly 'close' agricultural labour relations involves the question of how far 'friendly' labour relations represent a pragmatic response by farmworkers to their labour market weakness. Although close personal relationships with the employer are not a guarantee of secure housing or employment³ there is a clear temptation to use friendships as far as possible towards this end. Thus, just as the personal 'friendship' between a farmer and farmworker may be a useful device from the farmer's point of view (in that it helps to maintain a cooperative work force), it may be equally pragmatic from the farmworker's perspective to continue friendly relations in the interests of job security. It is interesting to note in this connection that agricultural labour relations are much closer in the country's more rural and remote areas than in relatively industrialised areas where alternative employment is more readily available.⁴ More research would

1 H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 303

2 Lund et al op.cit.

3 See H. Newby op.cit. pp. 421-422 on the particular significance of tied cottages in this context.

4 H. Newby 'Changing Sociological Environment' p. 475

be necessary, however, before the possible instrumentalism of farmworkers in their relations with their employers could be firmly established.¹

A further issue to note in connection with the close labour relations which characterise farming is raised by Cowie and Giles:

"The existence of direct employer-employee relationships is not an unmixed benefit: although vast concentrations of workers in industry give rise to difficult problems in this field, the agricultural employer-employee relationship contains its own peculiar problems. The very closeness of the relationship, which extends outside working hours, necessitates a degree of tolerance, tact and understanding obviously lacking in quite a few instances."²

Apart from the possible 'personality clashes' which may arise between employer and worker on the farm, there is also the problem that farmworkers may become frustrated by their lack of diversion, where their only workmate and neighbour is their employer. Ruth Gasson found that labour turnover is much higher on small farms where farmworkers are in closer contact with their employers than on large farms. She suggests that the explanation for this may lie in the farmworkers' dissatisfaction with their excessively close relations with the farmer and the absence of fellow workers with whom to socialise.³ Yet another problem in the close relations which are said to exist between farmers and farmworkers relates to what Newby refers to as the 'deferential dialectic'. This places the farmer in a contradictory situation in which he must remain close and friendly with his employees and yet retain their respect for

1 See M. Mann 'The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy' A.S.R. Volume 35 1970

R. Martin 'The Sociology of Power' (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London: 1977) Chapter Five

N. Abercrombie and B.S. Turner 'The Dominant Ideology Thesis' in Giddens & Held (eds.) 'Classes, Power and Conflict' (Macmillan, Basingstoke: 1982)

2 Cowie and Giles op.cit. pp. 106-107

3 R. Gasson 'Turnover and Size of Labour Force on Farms' J.A.E. Volume 25 No. 2 1974

his authority: the farmer must, in other words, balance an element of 'differentiation' from his workers with one of 'identification' with them. The difficulties in achieving this balance are not easily overcome, and agricultural labour relations are consequently often in a less than harmonious state.¹

It should be noted also that insofar as agriculture's peaceful labour relations can be attributed to the physical proximity between the farm-worker and his employer, this is not only due to the 'friendly relationship' which may develop between them. Their physical closeness also facilitates the victimisation of employees if they 'step out of line', whether by voting Liberal instead of Tory as in the early 20th century, or by joining the Union, participating in its activities or organising the local work force, as in later years. It is true that in some cases farmers positively encourage their workers to join the Union because of the financial (chiefly insurance) benefits which it provides. At the same time, cases of victimisation or of feared victimisation cannot be overlooked. More than one agricultural worker attending Union rallies in London has avoided the television cameras for fear of being identified by employers, and many have explained the low turn-out for these rallies by referring to similar fears among the members who failed to attend.

The peaceful and friendly labour relations which can be found on many farms in England cannot easily be attributed to a blindness on the part of the majority of farmworkers as to what their occupational

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- 1 D.H. Lloyd 'The Leadership Function in Agricultural Management' (Agricultural Manpower Studies No. 4 1982)
 - H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' pp. 417-435
 - H. Newby 'Paternalism and Capitalism' in R. Scase (ed.) 'Industrial Society' (Allen & Unwin, London: 1977) p. 70
 - R. Goffe and R. Scase '"Fraternalism" and "Paternalism" as Employer Strategies in Small Firms' in G. Day (ed.) 'Diversity and Decomposition in the Labour Market' (Gower, Aldershot: 1982)
 - G.M. Norris 'Industrial Paternalist Capitalism and Local Labour Markets' S. Volume 12 No. 3 1978

interests constitute. Instead, the situation suggests a clear recognition of their powerlessness to pursue these interests through direct action under prevailing conditions. Given the objective obstacles to farmworkers' expression of grievances and the pursuit of their interests, their silence is neither surprising, nor can it be attributed to their employers' 'hegemonic control' over their outlooks or ideologies.¹ Except in the most rural and isolated of cases, farmworkers come into contact with people other than their employers. Thus, even if the latter emphasise the values of friendship, cooperation and subordination there are alternative influences, sources of information and ideas which compete with those of the employers. The decline of the farmworkers' occupational community over the past fifty years has seen the disappearance of one source of a 'counter-culture'; but alternative influences still exist - one example being the workers in allied industries with whom farmworkers have intermittent but increasing contact. Equally important is the role of the mass media which have 'nationalised' the previously local cultures of many communities and occupational groups.² Television highlights the deprivation of farmworkers relative to other social groups in England and this can

1 S. Lukes 'Power: a radical view' (Macmillan, London: 1974) p. 23
Lukes is ambiguous in this area. At times he appears to argue that thoughts can be controlled not simply through the withholding or manipulation of information, but also through 'ideological hegemony'. See S. Barry 'The Obscurities of Power' Government and Opposition Volume 20 1975 p. 251

2 See J. Westergaard 'Sociology: the myth of classlessness' in R. Blackburn (ed.) 'Ideology in Social Science' (Fontana, Glasgow: 1972) on the potentially radical implications of a national, rather than localised, working class culture.

provide them with a potentially 'disruptive influence'.¹ What Newby, Bell, Rose and Saunders found in their study of Suffolk farmers was that:

"Most farmers implicitly recognise, however, that the extension of ... a complete ideological hegemony in the work situation is a difficult, and even an impossible, matter. The farm worker, even when living on the farm, is never completely isolated from disruptive influences outside. Indeed, the 'greedy institution' which many employers would like to create of their farm and locality has been successively undermined as the twentieth century has proceeded."²

The 'friendship' which is found to exist between some farmworkers and their employers may therefore prevent the workers concerned from actively pursuing their occupational interests; but it will not blind them to the existence of these interests, nor to the fact that they are not being satisfied by the prevailing conditions.

Rather than the 'ideological hegemony' of employers, Newby found that foremost among the obstacles to farmworkers' expression and pursuit of their interests was their dual weakness in the labour and housing markets.

"The objective deprivation of the agricultural worker compared with other sections of British society is probably as great today as it has ever been, yet the farm worker displays few outwards signs of dissatisfaction: he rarely complains,

1 The issue of 'media influence' is a complex and controversial one which is beyond the scope of this study. While some commentators argue that the media simply reinforces the values of the ruling class to the 'receptacles' which watch/listen to it, others regard it as having at least a potentially 'disruptive' impact. The point here is that farmworkers can see clearly through the radio and television that their lot is worse than others'. This will at some stage prompt them to reflect upon the causes and implications of this inequality.

2 Newby et al 'Property, Paternalism and Power' p. 176

does not go on strike and does not indulge in absenteeism. It is easy to regard him as 'deferential'. Yet perhaps the most important facet of his overall situation is his relative powerlessness to obtain higher rewards for his labour owing to the still quite rigid constraints that operate in both the labour and housing markets."¹

This argument is supported by Dunbabin's historical evidence which reveals that in the late 19th century the two main periods of agricultural labour unrest (1872-1874 and 1890-1892) were years when labour was in relatively high demand. This point is corroborated by O. Jocelyn Dunlop who found that farmworkers' best chances for improving their conditions in the 19th century always arose when their labour was scarce. In these situations even a threatened withdrawal of labour could at times force farmers to concede to farmworkers' demands, because there was no alternative labour with which to replace the rebellious farmworkers.²

The extensive dependency of 20th century farmworkers upon their employers for their livelihoods not only explains the loud silence which accompanies most farmworkers' deprivation; it also sheds light on the discrepant effects which isolation and scatteredness have had on the organisation of farmers and farmworkers. The fact that farmers are extremely well-organised while only some 40% of farmworkers are unionised is, of course, partially due to the greater material resources of farmers. The access to cars, telephones and money which far more farmers than farmworkers enjoy is a clear advantage for union organisers, both in recruiting new members and in maintaining a certain degree of communication and activity among existing ones. What is also significant is the fact that, unlike the farmer, the farmworker cannot always afford to challenge

1 Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 366

2 Dunbabin op.cit. Chapter Four
Dunlop op.cit. p. 157

the existing 'amicable' labour relations by joining a union and suggesting thereby the existence of a conflict of interests between worker and employer. Consequently, rather than bargaining for better conditions through the Union, the individual farmworker often remains outside the Union, attempting instead to secure the most favourable conditions possible through direct and 'friendly' negotiations.

The consequences of farmworkers' low Union membership are far-reaching. Those who remain outside the Union's ranks are unable to press their demands beyond the point where relations with the employer would be seriously threatened: in the final analysis, they are obliged to accept the terms offered by their employers. At the same time, these non-members deprive the Union of badly needed income. Non-members pay nothing towards the Union's costs and yet in many cases they derive great benefit from the Union's activities. Indeed, according to F.D. Mills this is a major reason why many farmworkers do not join the Union; there are no obvious benefits of paying the cost for doing so since many of the fruits of the Union's work can be enjoyed by non-members.¹ However, by free-riding in this way these farmworkers constrain the Union significantly, for they prevent its leadership from being able to claim to speak for all farmworkers in its campaigns: it cannot even claim to represent a majority of farmworkers according to most estimates of Union membership. Furthermore, the large presence of non-members inhibits the Union from developing plans for taking industrial action. The withdrawal of Union labour from the country's farms would leave many farm enterprises working as normal, since many farmers employ only non-Union labour; meanwhile, those farmers who usually employ unionised workers could replace any strikers with contract and casual non-Union labour - as they did during

1 Mills op.cit. p. 231

the Norfolk Strike of 1923. Unlike many other groups of workers, farm-workers have been unable to institute a 'closed shop' to prevent this situation from persisting.¹

Not all non-members have declined to join the Union on the basis of the material costs and benefits which membership involves. A small minority in Newby's sample expressed 'ideological' objections to trade unions and strikes per se. Most prevalent among the responses to Newby's questions, however, were "apathy and the failure of the union organisation to penetrate to their situation",² an answer which points again to the web of problems relating to the Union's poor financial state and consequent lack of staff, facilities, organisation and membership. Newby illuminates the complexity and circularity of the Union's powerlessness in this context:

"The problem of recruitment and organisation have inhibited the use of the strike weapon, yet without it the NUAAW renders itself unable to raise the standard of living of its members beyond the level determined by a free labour market. This in turn threatens to make unionisation irrelevant for the individual agricultural worker, who has less incentive to join. In many cases the union can hardly be said to give him a better deal than a friendly chat with the boss. Hence the NUAAW has become trapped within a vicious circle - its lack of power is based ultimately upon a low level of organisation which in turn stems partly from its weakness in wage bargaining."³

Over the past century, and particularly in the last 50 years, the labour market position of the agricultural labour force has been deteriorating both in response to the increasing mechanisation of farming and to the relative decline of agriculture in the national economy. But in recent years, certain groups of manual workers in England's manufacturing industries have been confronted by a situation similar to that with

1 This was pointed out by most NFU officers with whom I spoke.

2 Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 262

3 Ibid. p. 256

which farmworkers are by now familiar. A constant threat of unemployment hovers over many of them, as the demand for their labour has been reduced by the use of new labour-saving machinery and by the growing importance of new industries in the national economy (primarily the high technology and service industries). The consequences of this situation for industrial labour relations may be that they will come to resemble those which are found in agriculture, an industry which is notable for the quiescence of its labour force which is too powerless to pursue its interests through strike action. The likelihood of this condition developing in Britain's manufacturing industries was raised by the current leader of the Labour Party who claimed that the existing high level of unemployment in the country was being used "to create a nation of order takers, an obedient nation, a compliant nation".¹

The already long duration of this situation among the agricultural labour force is a significant factor in itself for explaining the great reluctance among farmworkers to withdraw their labour relative to other groups of workers. The absence of a recent history of protest combines with the structure of their industry to deprive farmworkers of the solidarity and group confidence which still enable other workers to pursue their interests collectively.² Farmworkers' traditions of large-scale rebellion lie too far back in time to provide them with pertinent lessons on how action might be taken effectively in the modern agricultural industry. To decide to take industrial action now would commit virtually

1 Guardian 23 July 1984 'Mass Unemployment "used to create a compliant nation"'

2 J. Gaventa emphasises the importance of historical traditions in the development of a rebellious workforce. J. Gaventa 'Power and Powerlessness' (University of Illinois, Chicago: 1980)
See also: P. Wellstone 'How the Rural Poor Got Power' (University of Massachusetts, Amherst: 1978)

all of England's (unionised) farmworkers to taking a step into an unknown and apparently hazardous territory. This issue was drawn out by a delegate to the AAWNTG's Annual Conference in 1984. During a debate over whether the Trade Group should undertake industrial action in support of its new wage claim he remarked on how farmworkers have discussed taking action for over 60 years without ever translating their words into deeds. But once a decision to strike is made, he continued, there will have to be a long period of training and organisational preparation before the action could be truly effective. As he put it, 'You can't go into battle without trained troops'.

* * *

It follows from the above analysis that there must be an improvement in farmworkers' labour market position before they can pursue their occupational interests through mass industrial action. Such a development is not likely to emerge in the immediate future, for new farming methods which facilitate the shedding of hired labour continue to be developed, sold and used.¹ The very possibility or threat that farmers will replace their hired workers with new machines or with contract labour remains an effective barrier to direct action among most farmworkers (see Chapter Four). What then are the implications of this situation for farmworkers and their Union?

The Union has responded to the workplace powerlessness of its members in two ways. Firstly, the Union leadership and Head Office staff have often taken upon themselves the task of improving members' conditions of work,

1 R. Norton Taylor 'Whose Land is it Anyway?' (Turnstone, Wellingborough: 1982) p. 283
C. Clutterbuck and T. Lang 'More than We Can Chew' (Pluto, London: 1982) Chapter Five

rather than demanding active participation from the membership towards this end.¹ Instead of waiting for the troops to become sufficiently well-trained for going into battle, the Union's full time officers have pursued farmworkers' interests on their behalf through a variety of formal organisations and committees which are authorised to allocate goods relating to the industry.

Secondly, the Union has often looked to external groups for support and assistance in its efforts to promote and defend its members' interests. As Peter Self and Herbert Storing noted in 1962, the farmworkers' "intrinsic economic and organisational weakness requires them to seek allies". Self and Storing suggest that farmworkers might benefit from an alliance with their employers' organisation, the National Farmers' Union, for not only is the NFU a powerful organisation, but also the two Unions share certain goals. However, insofar as farmworkers' interests and goals conflict with those of their employers, it would be irrational for them to depend on such an alliance for the satisfaction of their interests. Self and Storing concede this point:

"As long as they concern themselves primarily with employer-employee issues, such as wages and the tied cottage, they can find the necessary allies only in the Labour Movement, however unsatisfactory the results."²

This has indeed been the path which the Union has followed in many of its pursuits: it has sought the assistance of the Labour Party and of other trades unions in its efforts to improve the farmworker's lot.

1 Numerous commentators have remarked upon the NUAAW's centralist organisation, but all have also noted the Union's essentially democratic nature.

H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 250

Mills op.cit. p. 234

Self and Storing op.cit. pp. 159-165

2 Self and Storing op.cit. pp. 175-176

The NUAAW's merger with the Transport and General Workers' Union is symptomatic of this trend.

The question which the following chapters set out to answer is whether, given the current absence of an effective strike weapon among farmworkers, their Union leaders can achieve substantial improvements in the farmworkers' conditions of work through their involvement in political (value allocating) institutions and with the assistance of external allies. It is by attempting to answer this empirical question that one is best able to test the validity and the utility of the definitions of political powerlessness and power which were proposed in Chapter One.

PART TWOCHAPTER FOUR: POWER AND POWERLESSNESS IN THE DETERMINATION
OF AGRICULTURAL WAGES

In Chapter One a broad guideline as to how one might study political powerlessness was proposed. It began with a definition of political powerlessness as: 'Q's inability to promote and defend its interests within authoritative value allocating institutions', and went on to suggest that in order to determine the extent of Q's powerlessness it would be necessary to have a conception of both Q's objective interests and its subjective desires. It was posited further that a study of political powerlessness would have to be concerned with two levels of political power relationships. Firstly, it would have to take account of the processes involved in 'prevailing' in formal decision-making. Secondly, it would have to consider whether the issues decided upon formally represented Q's objective interests. Where they did not represent these interests, but represented Q's subjective desires (i.e. Q's limited interests) instead, the observer is called upon to determine what processes have been involved in preventing discussion and decision-making over Q's objective interests from emerging on the given institution's agenda. These 'processes', insofar as they are (in)actions which result in the harming of Q's interests, are defined as power exercises, whose diverse forms were explored in detail in Chapter One.

Chapter One was followed by two descriptive chapters which sought to place the empirical case study within its wider context. Chapter Two looked at how capitalist agriculture has developed since 1945, noting the economic pressures which have been placed upon agricultural employers and passed on to their workers. It pointed also to the resources which

have become available to farmers for securing the satisfaction of their occupational interests. Chapter Three then reviewed the state of contemporary agricultural labour relations, and suggested that farmworkers' labour market weakness has been the main barrier to their successful pursuit of their occupational interests at the workplace level.

Having set the case study in a social, economic and historical context, the thesis now moves on to its primary objective. The purpose of this second part is to test the utility of the research guidelines put forward in Chapter One, by applying them to the empirical case study.

* * *

In this chapter attention is focussed on the process of agricultural wage negotiation. This subject is pertinent to the present study not only because it represents the greatest and most enduring concern of the farmworkers' Union, but also because it demonstrates the validity and the utility of including the 'second face' of power in a study of political powerlessness. By using the concepts of nondecision-making and agenda-setting which were noted in Chapter One, the present study of agricultural wage negotiation shows that, contrary to pluralist precepts, power relations external to formal decision-making can be more decisive for the (non)satisfaction of Q's interests than the formal process of decision-making itself, because of the profound influence which the former has upon the latter.

For example, certain cases are identified in which farmworkers have attempted to promote their objective interests in earning high wages within the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB), but have been unable to do so with any success. Their powerlessness to set the Board's agenda in some of these cases can only be explained if one recognises how the mobilisation of values (part of the 'second face' of power) can be used

outside the formal processes of decision-making to force a group to withdraw its demands altogether from formal consideration by a given institution. Another power mechanism found to have been used to prevent farmworkers from promoting their interests beyond the initial stages of wage negotiation is the mobilisation of procedural routines. This second form of nondecision-making is, like the first, capable of explaining at least in part why farmworkers' wages have not been significantly increased by the Agricultural Wages Board.

What are perhaps more interesting than these individual examples of institutional bias are the more explicitly 'extra-institutional' power exercises involved in preventing farmworkers from promoting their objective interests by setting the AWB's agenda. In order to appreciate the significance of these power exercises it is necessary to supercede the pluralist approach to studying power, insofar as that approach concentrates exclusively on the power which is exercised overtly within decision-making institutions, relegating all extra-institutional relations and processes to the status of a 'background context'. The evidence of this chapter is that the formal decision-making process of a given value-allocating body is not the sole locus of political power: the case of agricultural wage negotiation suggests the necessity of considering how power may be exercised altogether beyond the formal value-allocating institution in ways which can influence the power which is then exercised, and the powerlessness which is experienced, within that institution.

* * *

Section I outlines the extent of low pay among farmworkers and establishes that the continued payment of low wages to farmworkers satisfies the objective interests of agricultural employers while contravening those of their workers.

The aim of Sections II, III and IV is to demonstrate how closely power relationships outside a decision-making institution can be related to the institution's formal decision-making process. For example, Section II shows how farmworkers' labour market powerlessness is such as to inhibit the AWB's decision-makers from upholding, and often even discussing, farmworkers' objective interests - a factor which renders meaningless the farmworkers' formally equal representation on the AWB with their employers. This section argues further that the influence of farmworkers' powerlessness outside the Board upon the AWB's members is so long-established and far-reaching that, although it is never acknowledged explicitly, it remains the overriding factor in determining the Board's agenda.

Sections III and IV explore in greater detail how T might exercise power outside a decision-making institution in such a way as to enable T to then set that institution's agenda. Section III looks at a particular instance of agricultural employers drawing on their parliamentary power resources in order to secure the removal of what they regarded as an unfavourable AWB Chairman. By exercising power outside of the Board in this way the employers were able to 're-establish' their control over the AWB's agenda. Section IV highlights the extent and importance of employers' labour market strength for the operation of the AWB. This section considers the minimal impact which the farmworkers' overtime ban in 1984 had on employers' interests and concludes that this failed attempt at taking industrial action served to reinforce the employers' superior influence in the wages conflict at all levels, including the institutional one.

It was argued in Chapter One that, although the concept of objective interests is valuable in social analysis, a study of powerlessness which

dismisses as irrelevant Q's pursuit of its limited interests would risk the omission of interesting discoveries concerning the nature of powerlessness. This belief is upheld by the present chapter which inquires into farmworkers' inability often to win even 9% or 10% wage increases through the AWB. An investigation into the formal wage bargaining process shows that this powerlessness to defend their limited interests is attributable largely to farmworkers' deficiency in what is evidently a crucial power resource: access to relevant information.

A study of the AWB from a pluralist standpoint would suggest that farmworkers and farmers exercise similar amounts of power within the wage bargaining process, for they are seen to have prevailed in the AWB's voting process roughly the same number of times over the past two decades. By utilising an approach which incorporates the notion of nondecision-making, however, and which looks further at the impact of power which is exercised altogether beyond the Board upon the AWB's agenda, this chapter suggests that the pluralist approach, in contrast to the one advocated in Chapter One, explains relatively little about the experience of political powerlessness and the exercise of power.

I. Agricultural Wages: a conflict of interests

Agricultural workers have been one of the most poorly paid groups of workers in England for over a century.¹ This continuity does not mean that they live today as they did in 1914, namely on the "same amount of nourishment which they could obtain in a workhouse or prison". On the contrary, in absolute terms the agricultural worker's standard of living has improved beyond any doubt, partly because of the Welfare

1 J.G.S. and F. Donaldson 'Farming in Britain Today' (Allen Lane, London: 1969) p. 29

State's provision of health care, education and social security. Yet in relative terms agricultural workers remain poorly paid: as in 1914, so too in 1984, "... they are the worst paid workers in Britain".¹

Ten years after the end of the Second World War farmworkers found that their hourly earnings would have to be increased by nearly a third to match those of transport workers; by over 40% to match building workers'; and by just over half as much to catch up with the average worker in manufacturing industries.² In spite of agriculture's increasing prosperity over the following decades, farmworkers' earnings remained low throughout the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s. By 1984 average gross weekly earnings among full-time male adult workers in agriculture and horticulture were £115, compared to average earnings in manufacturing industries of £158.90. In the same year, general farmworkers found themselves at the very bottom of a list of 178 occupations which the Department of Employment had ranked according to average earnings: they were in the same position which B.S. Rowntree had attributed to them 70 years earlier, namely at the very foot of the occupational earnings ladder.³

These low earnings can not be attributed to a comparatively short working week. In 1946 the farmworker's standard working week (not inclusive of overtime) was 48 hours. It fell to 47 hours in 1947 and remained at this level until 1960, whereas by 1955 the standard working week in almost all other industries had reached 44 or 45 hours.⁴ Between 1960-1975 the farmworkers' standard week was reduced in six steps to

1 B.S. Rowntree 'The Labourer and the Land' with an Introduction by D. Lloyd George (J.M. Dent & Sons, London: 1914) pp. 3 and 10

2 Landworker November 1955

3 New Earnings Survey Part A 1984 Department of Employment (HMSO London)

4 Landworker November 1955

40 hours, where it remains at the time of writing (1984). By contrast, the Trades Union Congress reported in 1983 that:

"With more than 7 million manual workers covered by agreements giving a 39 hour week or less, any employer still clinging to the 40 hour week is in a small and shrinking minority".¹

Thus, farmworkers' low wages are accompanied by a relatively long, not short, standard working week.

In 1971 a Wages Structure was introduced in the agricultural industry in an attempt to recognise and remunerate the differential skills among farmworkers and thus to alleviate to some extent the high concentration of low pay in the industry. So far, however, it has failed to produce the intended uplift in farmworkers' earnings: 85% of farmworkers still earn less than the average manual worker. Under the Wages Structure scheme craftsmen are entitled to a 10% premium above the statutory minimum for 'ordinary workers', Appointment Grade II Workers are entitled to 20%, and Appointment Grade I Workers are entitled to a 30% premium. Following an initially low take-up rate among farmworkers, the Wages Structure became somewhat more popular by the late 1970s, as more workers began to take the necessary proficiency tests to qualify as a 'skilled' worker.² Between 1979-1982 the average number of craft certificates issued per year in England was 2153 which suggests, however, that the Wages Structure has yet to make significant inroads in the pattern of agricultural workers' earnings.³

The main method by which farmworkers have attempted to improve their earnings has been by working as much overtime as is available to them.

1 Quoted from the Agricultural and Allied Workers' National Trade Group's Submission to the AWB April 1983

2 Report on Wages in Agriculture 1972 p. 8 (MAFF)

3 Report on Wages in Agriculture 1982 Appendix VI (MAFF)

AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS: Full-time males (April 1984)

	Total hours p.w.	Overtime p.w.
All manual workers	44.3	5.1
Stockmen	49.2	8.2
Agricultural machine operators/ drivers	46.6	6.5
General farmworkers	45.6	5.4

(Source: New Earnings Survey 1984)

As the table suggests, the availability of overtime work in different agricultural occupations helps to explain the existing earnings differentials between agricultural employees. Dairy cowmen are commonly regarded as the 'labour aristocracy' of the farm labour force because their earnings fall well above the minimum rates of pay. In 1982, for example, they were earning an average of £129.21 per week, as compared to £98.49 earned by general farmworkers. Yet, close inspection reveals that dairy cowmen were working 52.5 hours in order to earn these higher takings as compared, for example, to general farmworkers who worked an average of 45.5 hours per week.¹

It is sometimes argued that farmworkers' low cash wages conceal their enjoyment of important non-cash benefits. This argument has lost much of its validity over the past 25 years. The first type of 'benefit in kind' which farmworkers are said to enjoy is the cheap or free food which they receive from their employers. However, in the year ended December 1982, only 21% of all hired men had received milk and/or potatoes from the farmers whom they worked for. Even if other benefits in kind are added to these (such as cheap or free fuel), the total amount received

1 'Earnings, Hours and Numbers of Persons Including the Report on the Wages and Employment Enquiry 1982' (MAFF: March 1983)

by farmworkers remains of low cash value: in 1982 the average value of payments in kind received by all hired men was just £2.64 per worker.¹ Over 15 years ago the National Board for Prices and Incomes recognised that one consequence of farm specialisation would be a significant decrease in payments in kind to hired workers. It concluded its report by stating that not only were such payments "insufficient to require any serious modification to the conclusion reached on the basis of figures for earnings", but also that their value would decline even further over the coming years.²

The other main type of 'fringe benefit' which is held to compensate for farmworkers' low cash earnings is the tied cottage. This benefit will be considered in detail in Chapter Five; suffice it to say here that only 50% of farmworkers live in tied cottages (where the maximum payable rent is currently £1.50), while the rest have to pay private or council rents and mortgages. For those who do live in tied accommodation, any financial gains must be set against what are often longer hours of work, greater isolation and more acute occupational immobility compared to their non-tied fellow workers.

It cannot be disputed that relative to most other occupational groups, farmworkers are low paid and have been so for many years. What is important for the present study is that this continuous payment of low wages in agriculture represents a contravention of farmworkers' objective interests as they were defined in Chapter One - namely, the receipt of high wages for short hours of work. The earning of high wages for short hours of work has been not only in the objective interests of farmworkers, but has also formed their Union's explicit, albeit elusive,

1 Ibid.

2 National Board for Prices and Incomes 'Pay of Workers in Agriculture in England and Wales' (HMSO 1967) p. 17

goal ever since its inception (with 'high' wages and 'short' hours being defined as parity with the average industrial worker). The Union's loud proclamation of this goal has transformed what might have been a latent or covert conflict of interests between agricultural workers and their employers into an overt one. This is particularly the case at the national level where the Union has expressed farmworkers' interests repeatedly and openly and where it has been challenged equally often by representatives of agricultural employers.

In Chapter One it was also noted that in the context of capitalist agriculture, the basic interests of agricultural employers are the maximisation of economic returns and the minimising of their costs. For farmers this means more specifically producing maximum profits at the lowest possible cost of production. The conflict between farmers and their workers derives from the fact that in order to satisfy their own interests, employers must pay as low a wage as possible to their workers.¹

Although each side in this conflict has attempted to pursue and to justify its interests through a mixture of polemic and theoretical arguments, the conflict is in practice resolved ultimately by the impersonal forces of the labour market, rather than by the persuasiveness of their respective arguments. It is the relative power of the two sides within the labour market which has determined that the 'lowest possible wage' has until now been a low one.

The farmworkers' Union has generally resorted to using moral claims in support of its demand for high wages. In particular, the Union has pointed to the skill, dedication and high productivity of farmworkers and has insisted that these virtues ought to be rewarded with better

1 R. Martin 'The Sociology of Power' (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London: 1977) p. 100
 P. Saunders 'Urban Politics' (Hutchinson, London: 1979) pp. 45-47

wages than have so far been paid to most farmworkers. Not only do farmworkers 'deserve' higher wages, the Union has often remarked also that they require higher wages if farmworkers are to keep up with the high cost of living in rural areas.

In reply to the farmworkers' case for high wages agricultural employers have rarely disputed the claim that farmworkers are a skilled and dedicated group who deserve high wages. On the contrary, farmers and their representatives in the National Farmers' Union (NFU) seem often anxious to let it be known that they hold their workers in high esteem. How, then, do they explain and justify the payment of low wages to these workers? Most frequently, farmers argue that however much they would like to, they cannot afford to pay high wages. This argument was put to me when I interviewed the Chair of the NFU's Employment and Education Committee:

"There is nothing we would like to do more in this industry than pay our farmworkers in line with industrial earnings. But as it is at the moment, the majority of farmers in the livestock categories and a lot of the horticultural categories are paying money to farmworkers ... the majority of which is coming straight from the banks, in the form of bank loans ... What I'm saying is that there's no point to keep on and on paying astronomical amounts of money, which we'd like to pay for sympathetic reasons, and just slowly completely bankrupt the industry."

For farmworkers' interests to be satisfied, where their interests are defined as parity with industrial earnings, they would require roughly a 50% increase in their existing wage levels. When I discussed this proposition with other NFU representatives they replied:

"... if these demands were met the industry would collapse and so would the complete structure of employed labour as we know it."

"... In reply to the workers' claim for £120 I say 'Fine, as long as you don't mind that I won't employ as many workers ...'"

"... We've tried to explain to them (the workers) that if we're forced to raise wages too much then we'll have to keep shedding labour."

"... At least in my part of the country, the costs of employing labour is making employers cut their labour and cut corners."

The employers' main argument against raising agricultural wages to bring them in line with other workers' wages is shown here to be that they cannot afford to do this without cutting back significantly on the number of workers they employ. At the same time, the farmers claim, they would be forced to reduce production levels which would harm the industry and, by implication, the nation.

The question of whether 'high' pay increases for low paid workers would in fact result in increased unemployment among these workers is at the centre of a wider contemporary debate which has been triggered by the present Government's plans to abolish the Wages Councils. Although the details of this important debate cannot be entered into here, a few observations which are pertinent to the case study can be made.¹

Firstly, there is little doubt that on certain farms wage increases of 50% would represent a great increase in overall production costs. This would be the case especially on small farms and on labour intensive ones (which are chiefly horticultural), where farmers would be compelled to cut back on their hired labour force at a faster rate than they are currently doing. On these farms it would not be in farmworkers' interests to demand 50% wage increases insofar as this would entail the loss of their livelihoods altogether. (Having noted this, however, it must also be pointed out that if farmworkers' wages were to reach such a low point as to be equal to, or even less than, the level of state unemployment benefit levels, then their primary interest would cease to be the protection of their jobs.)

Conversely, on other farms where the majority of farmworkers are employed, employers have sufficient capital to increase their workers'

¹ For brief reviews of this debate see:

W. Beckerman 'Pay: Lawson's Faulty Thesis' The Times 3 June 1985

C. Huhne 'The Rich push the Poor out of Work' Guardian 11 April 1985

wages by as much as 50%. In principle this could be done without cutting back on employment levels if, for example, the employers were willing to cut instead to a limited degree their capital investment and production levels. Indeed, on some of the larger farms, particularly on cereal growing ones, labour costs represent a small enough proportion of total costs to enable farmers to raise wages by up to 50% without even requiring a compensating cut in investment and production.¹ Insofar as it is theoretically possible to win higher wage increases without suffering job losses - as it would be in these theoretical cases - it is in farmworkers' objective interests to demand and to earn high wages for short hours. (This study is, by necessity, concerned with this latter group of farmworkers whose interests can reasonably be presented as a 50% wage increase. This majority group seems to be that with which the farmworkers' Union is mainly concerned with, too, judging by the nature of its pay claims.)

Nevertheless, even if it could be established firmly that some farmers could afford in principle to pay 50% more to their employees, in practice this is relatively insignificant. The theoretical ability to pay more does not mean that farmers will pay more, for to do so unless they were coerced to would be irrational, given that their interests are in maintaining maximum production levels and minimum costs of production. Moreover, if farmers were coerced to pay 50% more to their hired workers, at least some of them would respond with labour cut-backs and higher capital investment in labour-saving machinery - although in principle they would not need to respond in this way.

1 See: J. Nix 'Farm Management Pocketbook' (Wye College, Farm Business Unit: September 1984)

The conflict between farmers and farmworkers over the payment of wages is settled in practice neither by the social justice nor by the theoretical validity of their respective claims, but rather by their relative power in the labour market. It is their power in the market place which enables agricultural employers to continue serving their objective interests by paying low wages to their workers; and which enables them to prevent changes to this situation by threatening the workforce with mechanisation and labour cuts if wages are increased by any significant amount.

The crucial role of the labour market in determining agricultural wages is seen in Howard Newby's study of East Anglia. Newby found that although the farmers of that region were among the most prosperous in the entire country, the earnings of East Anglian farmworkers were among the lowest.¹ After examining the situation in further detail, Newby concluded that:

"... what renders the agricultural worker among the most poorly paid in the region is not the inability of farmers to pay higher wages, compared with farmers in the rest of the country, but the lack of competition for labour in what is a predominantly rural area, which in turn enables a sufficient quantity and quality of labour to be obtained at a lower price than elsewhere. Powerlessness in the market situation therefore seems a better predictor of low wage levels than an inability of farmers to 'afford' higher wages."²

Similar conclusions can be drawn from more recent evidence concerning the relationship between farm incomes and wages. A study of farm incomes carried out in 1985 by Manchester University's Department of Agricultural Economics found that the highest paid farmers in the country live in

1 H. Newby, 'The Low Earnings of Agricultural Workers: a sociological approach' J.A.E. Volume 23 No. 1 1972

2 H. Newby 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) pp. 175-176.

Northumberland and Cumbria, where average net farm incomes were £25,439. Meanwhile, a separate report published by the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) in 1983 shows that agricultural workers in these very counties were among the country's lowest paid agricultural workers.¹

It has evidently not been the formal arguments of either of the two sides in the wages conflict which has determined the continued payment of low wages and earnings to farmworkers. Instead, the structural location of farmworkers in national and local economies – that is, their peculiar labour market weakness (as depicted in Chapter Three) – is what has ensured the perpetuation of low pay in agriculture. It was this powerlessness to bargain effectively for high wages in the 'free' market which led farmworkers to welcome the formal regulation of their wages by the Agricultural Wages Board.²

II. The Agricultural Wages Board 1948-1981

i. The Constitution of the Agricultural Wages Board

Just as measures of agricultural protection were introduced when Britain was faced with military threat during World War II, so too the agricultural statutory minimum wage originated as a war-time measure. It was during World War I that, confronted by a shortage of skilled labour and an increasing need for food production, the Government introduced

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- 1 N.P. Russell 'An Analysis of the Distribution of Farm Incomes in England and Wales' (Manchester University, Department of Agricultural Economics, Bulletin No. 200, April 1985)
'Earning, Hours and Numbers of Persons ...' MAFF 1983 (op.cit.)
 - 2 M. Madden 'The N.U.A.W. 1906-1956' (Oxford University B.Litt. Thesis 1956) p. 208

for the first time a legally enforceable minimum wage in agriculture.¹ The Corn Production Act 1917 prescribed a national minimum wage for the agricultural industry to be set by the newly established Central Wages Board and District Wages Committees, while also providing guaranteed cereal prices for farmers. Both measures were intended as responses to the food shortages which had been produced by the military situation, and they gave rise successfully to the expected improvements in both agricultural production and living standards.

Once war-time conditions appeared to be safely over the Government repealed the Corn Production Act, thereby abolishing guaranteed prices and the minimum wage control. Cheap U.S. grain had become available and the Government was no longer prepared to spend the considerable amount of capital which would have been necessary for maintaining a system of price controls. The return in 1921 to a 'free market' agriculture had an immediate impact on wages which were once again determined through 'voluntary bargaining'. The sharp fall in cereal prices saw an increased shedding of labour coupled with repeated cuts in agricultural wages so that by late 1922 wages were lower in real terms than they had been in 1914. The Norfolk Strike halted this process of wage reductions temporarily, but the severe hardship which the strike incurred upon the workers compelled the newly-elected Labour Government to take measures to pre-empt a recurrence of the situation which had led to the strike. It was in this context that in 1924 the Government established a Central Wages Board, in spite of Conservative opposition, to prevent agricultural wages from returning to their depths of 1921-1924. Under the Board's aegis, newly-formed County Wages Committees were authorised

1 R. Groves 'Sharpen the Sickle!' (Merlin Press, London: 1981) pp. 150-151

to fix minimum wages in the counties. In 1940 this arrangement was modified in the interests of control and uniformity, as the Central Wages Board became empowered to set a national minimum wage which was to be binding in all counties. This power of the Central Wages Board was re-affirmed by the Agricultural Wages Act 1948 which established the Agricultural Wages Board of England and Wales (AWB) whose main features remain intact at the time of writing.¹

The functions of the post-World War II AWB go beyond the fixing of minimum wages for whole-time, part-time and seasonal workers in England and Wales to include the defining and fixing of rates of pay for overtime work; making directives on holiday entitlement and holiday pay; and evaluating the benefits which it regards as part payment of wages in lieu of cash ('payments in kind').²

The Board's wide-ranging directives have statutory effect, so that an employer found to be contravening AWB regulations is liable, upon conviction, to be fined and in the case of underpayment of wages ordered to pay arrears of up to two years. The number of employers found to be paying less than the minimum rate has fallen dramatically since World War II. In 1950, for example, there were over 1,000 farmworkers found to have been underpaid, whereas by 1982 the number had fallen to just over 100 (although allowance should be made for the overall drop in the number of farmworkers employed during that time).³

1 A separate Wages Board exists for Scotland.
See S. Winyard 'Cold Comfort Farm' (Low Pay Unit, London: 1982) for a brief history of the AWB.

2 The functions of Agricultural Wages Committees, of which there are 24 in England, are comparatively limited. They are: to consider applications for the revaluation of individual tied houses; to issue craft certificates; and to consider applications for permits to pay employees less than the statutory minimum rate where the employee in question is physically and/or mentally disabled.

3 Report of Proceedings under the Agricultural Wages Acts for the period 1 October 1937 to 30 September 1950 (MAFF) Report on Wages in Agriculture 1982 (MAFF)

Payment below the statutory minimum is thus no longer a major problem in agriculture. On the contrary, the vast majority of employers pay over the minimum rate: in 1976 94% of full-time male adult farmworkers were being paid over the statutory minimum. (It should be noted, however, that only 43% were paid more than £5 per week over the minimum.) Yet, although most employers are thus found to be paying over the statutory minimum rate, nevertheless the AWB's decisions are of great importance to these employers and their employees. This is because of the common practice in agriculture of increasing all workers' wages by whatever percentage the AWB has applied to the minimum rate. However, while this practice is widespread it is not legally enforceable, unlike the minimum rate of pay.¹

Under the Agricultural Wages Act 1948 the AWB membership comprises

- (i) Five 'Independent Members' appointed by the Minister of Agriculture, one of whom is appointed as Chair of the AWB. These appointments are for three-year terms, normally renewable by the Minister until the Member retires from the Board;
- (ii) Eight representatives of the Employers, nominated by the National Farmers' Union (NFU);
- (iii) Eight representatives of the Workers, five of whom were nominated by the NUAAW and three by the TGWU until the two Unions merged in 1982 since which time all eight representatives have been nominated by the TGWU.

The AWB's formal procedures remained largely unchanged between 1948-1981. Each year around September or October, the Workers' Side submitted to the Board a written wage claim, following which the AWB

¹ D. Phillips and A. Williams 'Rural Britain' (Blackwell, Oxford: 1984) pp. 68-69

met to receive the claim formally and to discuss it briefly. A further meeting was then called, roughly a month later, to hold a lengthier discussion of the claim as well as to receive and discuss the Employers' Side's written reply to the Workers. Shortly afterwards negotiation took place at a third meeting which usually lasted for two to three days. At this meeting the Employers would make an offer to the Workers which would invariably fall well below the amount demanded in the Workers' Claim. The task of the Independent Members was to narrow the gap between what the Workers' Side demanded and what the Employers' Side was willing to concede. The Independents would begin their task of conciliation by agreeing between themselves on a reasonable target to aim for, following which they would try and move each side towards this target by attempting to persuade the Employers to increase their offer and the Workers to reduce their claim. (The manner in which the Independents decided upon their target will be considered in due course.) The Independents carried this out by negotiating with two or three leading figures from each side in the absence of representatives from the other side. Thus, for example, the Independents met first with the leaders of the Workers' Side, then with the Employers' leading members, then the Workers' leaders, and so on, at each meeting asking the representatives whether they would accept the other Side's revised offer and, if not, how close to it they would be willing to move. In this fashion, direct confrontation between the Employers and the Workers' representatives was avoided during the most decisive of AWB deliberations, when the actual bargaining took place. Indeed, the two Sides rarely saw one another during these critical meetings of the AWB - except perhaps when they passed each other silently by on their ways to and from the Independents' chamber.

(ii) Power and Powerlessness in the Agricultural Wages Board

Despite their elaborate approach to conciliation, the Independents were rarely able to find a figure upon which both Sides would agree. (Between 1963-1983 there was only one pay award which was decided upon unanimously.) As a result of this repeated impasse, the Independents were forced into the role of arbitrators. That is, once they felt unable to bring the two Sides any closer together, the Independents pushed through the annual wage increase by voting together with one Side to defeat the other. For example, after two or three days of talks with the Independents each Side would be made aware by the Independents that the Independent members were intent upon an agreement in the region of 5-10%. If, for argument's sake, the Employers' Side acted upon this recognition by raising its offer to 5.5% before the Workers' Side climbed down to 9.5%, the Independents would vote with the Employers against the Workers and the new minimum wage increase would be 5.5%.

This built-in process of 'calling the other Side's bluff' has placed a constant pressure upon each Side of the AWB to compromise their position so as to avoid incurring further losses than are necessary by having awards imposed on them. On those occasions that neither Side appears willing to modify its stance sufficiently to win the Independents' support, the Independents put forward more openly their proposed figure and then attempt to win support for it from at least one Side, by suggesting that otherwise the award is likely to be even less favourable to the Side in question. In this situation the representatives of at least one Side are eventually compelled to vote with the Independents. But, as Michael Madden notes:

"The compliance of either Side in supporting the proposals of the appointed members should not be taken as indications of unqualified approval. As a rule these manifestations are induced through realisation that the appointed members are not to be moved by argument or manoeuvre into a decision more favourable to their interests."¹

The discussions held in the AWB have been based upon the Written Submissions of each Side, but there is some debate among outside observers over the extent to which AWB decisions are based upon these submissions. According to some, the Written Submissions and the discussions which they generate are of limited significance in terms of the Board's final decisions because the Independent Members possess their own criteria by which to judge what constitutes a satisfactory minimum wage level. These criteria are held to derive from the original legislation establishing agricultural minimum wage machinery in non-war conditions, which laid down in 1924 that Agricultural Wages Committees would award:

"... so far as practicable for able-bodied men such wages as in the opinion of the Committee are adequate to promote efficiency and to enable a man in an ordinary case to maintain himself and his family."²

Regardless of whatever facts and figures each Side might procur in support of its claims, the Independents are alleged to be preoccupied with the implications of a given award upon the 'efficiency of agriculture' and the 'living standards of its workforce'.³

Conversely, there are those who argue that the substance of the Written Submissions is the decisive factor in AWB decisions and that the quality of each Side's submissions has determined in the past the ways in which the Independents have voted.

1 M. Madden op.cit. p. 261

2 The 1948 legislation does not in fact reiterate these 1924 guidelines.

3 M. Madden op.cit. pp. 262 and 275
B. Wootton 'The Social Foundations of Wage Policy' (George Allen & Unwin, London: 1955) pp. 84-87

The truth lies somewhere between these two positions. The Independents employ certain key principles in making their judgements as to what constitutes a 'desirable' minimum wage level in any given year, and these principles apply broadly to the well-being of the two Sides. In this sense, the 'efficiency of agriculture' and the 'workers' standards of living' constitute the Independents' main criteria for deciding which figure to aim for in the negotiation processs. This has less to do with the prescriptions of the 1924 legislation, however, than with the Independents' aim to maintain their 'independence' by serving the interests of both Sides.

At the same time, the Independents are not oblivious to the two Sides' written submissions - perhaps because these submissions are invariably addressed to the issues of agricultural efficiency and farmworkers' living standards. A perusal of previous submissions reveals that the Workers have placed most emphasis on the farmworker's alleged need for and right to a higher standard of living; and on the belief that agricultural efficiency is being threatened by the 'drift from the land' for which low wages are allegedly to blame. The Workers' Side has always supported these claims with the argument that farmers are fully able to pay higher wages without risking the industry's efficiency.

The Employers' Side has responded to these assertions by insisting that high wages will threaten the efficiency and profitability of agriculture because of the already high costs of production. Furthermore, they point to the farmworker's enjoyment of tied accommodation, fringe benefits and 'job satisfaction' in support of their claim that farmworkers' living standards are not in need of major improvements. The two Sides' arguments, and the statistical information with which they have been supported, have played a part in determining the Independents'

decisions, particularly given the Independents' non-agricultural backgrounds and their resulting relative ignorance as to the industry's changing profitability from year to year.

Assuming then that the Independents make their judgements about 'satisfactory' awards according to the broad criteria of 'efficiency' and 'material well-being', and that they employ the statistics provided by the Written Submissions to adjust their views on desirable settlements according to the conditions which prevail in agriculture during any given year, the remaining question is: how do they define 'efficiency' and 'material well-being'? In other words, how do the Independents decide upon the target which they attempt to move both Sides towards during negotiations?

This is best answered by studying the manner in which the Independents have performed their duties over the past 40 years. They have evidently not viewed their task in terms of having to choose the case put forward by one Side (for example, a 50% increase) over that presented by the other Side (a 2% increase). Instead, they have been concerned to reach a settlement involving compromise and agreement from both Sides. It is this aim for compromise which has determined the Independents' approach to 'efficiency' and 'material well-being'. These principles are defined according to a sense of balance in which 'efficiency' (the farmers' interests in low wages) is to be satisfied as far as possible without harming 'living standards' (the workers' interests in high wages), and vice versa.

It is in the construction and advancement of this notion of 'balance' that exercises of power and experiences of powerlessness come so forcefully into play. There are evidently no objective criteria by which the Independents might determine the 'correct' point at which to balance

the demands and interests of one Side against those of the other, and past awards reveal that the Independents have not approached this problem by splitting the difference between the Workers' original demand and the Employers' initial offer. What influences the Independents most of all in this context is a sense of 'realism' which is shaped by an accurate assessment of the differential power resources available to agricultural employers and workers outside the immediate parameters of the AWB.

The employers have access to what Robert Dahl refers to as a "primary resource of great potential importance", namely the control over jobs.¹ In the context of the agricultural job market this resource is a very real and particularly effective one, for reasons which have been outlined in Chapter Three. The Independents recognise that farmers would never pay 50% or 60% wage increases because this is counter to their interests and because they have the power to avoid doing so, whether by employing contract, casual or part-time labour or by investing more capital in machinery. The Independents also can see that farmworkers do not have available to them a defensive (strike) weapon with which to prevent their employers from taking steps such as these. Given this imbalance of power resources between agricultural employers and workers in the labour market, the Independents, when determining their 'target' figure, are compelled to use criteria of 'acceptability' which fit those held by the Employers' Side. This is the only perceived way of maintaining the operation of the AWB and preserving the existing structure of the agricultural industry. Thus, although the Independents impose compromise settlements upon both Sides every year, these compromises are invariably

1 R. Dahl 'Who Governs?' (Yale Univ., New Haven: 1961) p. 250
M. Crenson 'The Unpolitics of Air Pollution' (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore: 1971) Chapter Two

more in the Employers' Side's favour than in the Workers': this explains the continuing trend of low wages and earnings in agriculture.¹

In contrast to the Independents' emphasis on 'compromise', the two Sides have generally gone into negotiation with an uncompromising stance. One consequence of this incongruity has been that instead of aiming to satisfy each Side equally, the Independents have come to view their objective in terms of being able to dissatisfy them to a similar extent. This dissatisfaction is based on how far short of each Side's claim the award actually falls. But how does this aim for 'balanced dissatisfaction' correspond with the fact that the AWB's awards have in practice continued to serve Employers' interests to a far greater extent than those of the Workers' Side?

Firstly, the employers have responded to the AWB's annual settlements with a shower of rhetoric to match that of the Workers' Side: just as the NUAAW (and latterly the AAWNTG) has complained each year about their 'paltry' pay increases, so too the NFU has condemned each year's award as being 'too high' and 'unaffordable'. The continuing prosperity of agriculture casts an histrionic light upon the NFU's behaviour, but their rhetoric serves a clear purpose: it makes for an equivalence of public displeasure between the two Sides and so maintains a semblance of balanced dissatisfaction.

Secondly, and more significantly, it is important to notice that every time the Workers' Side submits their claim for a 30, 40 or 50% pay increase, they are compelled to reduce their claim almost immediately during the first round of discussions. The Independent members make clear to the Workers' Side that it will not under any circumstances achieve an award in the region of its Written Claim. The Independents

1 T. Westergaard and H. Resler 'Class in a Capitalist Society' (Heinemann, London: 1975) p. 147

do this by drawing attention to historical precedents which show the Workers' Side to have failed repeatedly to win pay increases of 30% or more; and by drawing attention to norms which define wage claims such as those put forward by the Workers' Side as unrealistic and irresponsible. This 'first stage' of negotiations during which the Workers are forced by the Independents' nondecision-making to reduce their claims substantially has become so much a formality that the Independent members have come to judge the Workers' dissatisfaction with the final award according to the Workers' modified claim, rather than their original one. The chief importance of this first stage, however, is that during this stage, farmworkers' objective interests are mobilised off of the agenda. The subsequent discussions and voting do not concern the Workers' objective interests (i.e. 50% pay increases), but rather their enforced and far more limited demands.¹

It is these two factors - the Employers' almost ritual complaints and the systematic modification of the Workers' demands - which enabled the ex-Chairs of the AWB with whom I spoke to refer to their personal satisfaction with their past records of disappointing each Side to equal degrees. This claimed capacity for (dis)-serving both Sides equally was presented as evidence of the ex-Chairs' impartiality and of their ability always to arrive at fair wage settlements.

Attributing each Side's Written Submission with a degree of credibility combined with an element of hyperbole, the Independents have aimed primarily at drawing concessions from each Side in the hopes of arriving at a settlement which appears to be equally (dis)agreeable to both. This proclivity for compromise settlements has had different

1 J. Gaventa 'Power & Powerlessness' (Univ. of Illinois, Chicago: 1980) pp. 137-138
 M. Crenson op.cit. Chapter Seven
 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Poverty' (O.U.P. New York: 1970) p. 45

implications for the two Sides of the AWB. The Employers' Side is, at least in theory, more able to compromise with the Independents than is the Workers' Side because it is empowered to use its discretion throughout AWB talks by the NFU membership. Although the Employers' Side is made aware of what the NFU membership anticipates from AWB discussions each year via the Employment and Education Committee which draws its delegates from across the country, it is not bound by that Committee to achieve a set figure through the AWB. This flexibility is useful for the Employers' Side, for in a sense every wage increase marks a compromise on the Employers' part. As one of their representatives told me, "... we're always in a position of responding to a claim (from the Workers) because I suppose if we had our way, we'd never make any offers at all".

By contrast, the Workers' Side is mandated by the Union's Conference to achieve a specified goal. As one might expect, the Conference's role in deciding the Union's annual pay claim has provided it with some of its most lively, and sometimes most heated, debates. The main point of disagreement has been over whether the AWB representatives should be mandated to pursue a 'substantial increase' in farmworkers' minimum wages, or whether instead the Conference should attach a specific figure to the Union's wage claim. In general, it is the Union leadership which argues in favour of the 'substantial increase' option, while the Union's 'purists' insist upon a precise target. This division can be explained by the leadership's anticipation of certain defeat if they enter AWB negotiations with the target decided upon by Conference delegates.

Conversely, the delegates who prefer a specified target figure want to prevent their AWB representatives from claiming a victory when the given increase in fact falls short of what the delegates believe

would constitute a genuinely 'substantial' increase. More importantly, the delegates do not want to enable the NFU to claim that the Workers' Side has been victorious in the AWB. Firstly, the NFU could use this to their own advantage during the following year's negotiations. Secondly, if the Workers' claims are rejected year after year (which they will be if the claims continue to be in the region of 50% or more), this could destroy the credibility of the AWB and lead to the establishment of a more favourable institution for wage bargaining. Whether these calculations will be borne out in the future remains to be seen. It is unlikely that they will, not least because the Workers' claims for 50% increases are mobilised off of the AWB's agenda covertly and almost immediately at the outset of each year's wage negotiations. Nevertheless, it remains true that the task of reaching apparently 'equitable' solutions would be facilitated considerably if the Workers' Side did not enter into negotiations with such high demands; and that the final settlements which the AWB reached would be more easily construed as compromises from both Sides if the Workers' asked for a 'substantial increase'. In either case, however, - whether the Union decides to demand a substantial increase or a 50% pay increase - it is clear that the Union is fully aware of what its objective interests are, in spite of its enduring powerlessness to place these interests on the AWB's agenda.

The Employers' Side in particular, but also certain Independent members, have been outspoken in the past over their displeasure with the relatively high demands raised by the Workers' Side at the outset of most years' negotiations. In their efforts to prevent farmworkers from promoting their interests via the Board, the Employers have often drawn upon dominant values and biases so as to discredit, and ultimately

destroy, the Workers' Side's case.¹ Instances of this 'second face' of power were hinted at during discussions which I held with a number of AWB members. Their unanimous preference for a more moderate claim from the Workers reveals a desire to make their exercise of power over the Workers less overt than it currently is. If the Workers' Side can be swayed by dominant values relating to realism and sensibility not to raise their high demands in the first place, then the Employers and Independents will not have to oppose these demands overtly within the Board. The Employers would thus not be seen to be exercising power over the workers' Side and the Board would appear altogether more balanced and legitimate.

One Employers' representative told me:

"... it really is totally unrealistic. Most Unions demand something like 15% ... whereas our chaps ask for something like 115%."

This was reiterated by another Employers' representative:

"Three years ago they (the Workers' Side) put forward a claim for, I think, 100%. Well, I think no matter who you are, how independent or how biased you are, I don't think anybody could accept a claim for a 100% increase is sensible." (sic)

When asked whether a 100% increase would be unjustified regardless of the base rate to which that increase would be applied, the representative replied "Yes, that's right". One NFU official paid particular tribute to the Scottish farmworkers for their "sensible approach" to wage bargaining:

"... all three Sides around the table agreed, and all voted together for a 5% increase. (This) was a reflection on the Workers' sensible approach in Scotland, coming forward and saying they wanted a 6% increase and in fact they got a 5% increase."

1 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and its Two Faces Revisited' A.P.S.R. Volume 69 1975

All of these attitudes are summed up by an ex-Chairperson with whom I spoke:

"Quite obviously, the demand made by the workers was pitched way above what they could ever expect to get. And this, I always felt, constrained the Workers' Side in their negotiations because at the very beginning of any negotiation they had to cut their demand by 50% before they could start talking ... Occasionally they were mandated by their conference to demand a 'substantial increase' - well, that's fine, that's flexible. But on other occasions they were mandated to demand £120 per week when the basic wage was £60 - well, that's clearly ridiculous."

(iii) Voting in the AWB

Between 1963-1983 the AWB's voting pattern took the following shape:

On seven occasions Independents voted with Employers vs the Workers

On seven occasions Independents voted with Workers vs the Employers

On three occasions Independents imposed an award upon both Sides

On one occasion the AWB reached a unanimous agreement

No information available for three occasions.

Contrary to pluralist precepts, however, prevailing in the AWB's decision-making is not a good index of power and powerlessness.¹ The voting patterns outlined above obscure the considerable amount of compromise demanded from the 'winning' side, which often agrees to vote for the Independents' proposed figure only in anticipation of even greater defeat if it continues instead to insist on its original claim or offer. Moreover, the Workers' Side in particular is compelled to compromise extensively each year, because of the sway which the Employers' superior labour market strength has over the Independents. Given the AWB's procedural bias which is buttressed by the Independents' (and Employers') nondecision-

1 N. Polsby 'Community Power and Political theory' (2nd edition: Yale University, London: 1980) pp. 3-5

making, and which precludes any discussion - let alone voting - over farmworkers' objective interests, can the support of the Independents be referred to as a 'victory'?

This question is best approached by looking at concrete examples of the negotiation processes which have preceded AWB decisions. Unfortunately the AWB's own published accounts of its proceedings provide sparse details on the negotiation process, and the Board's Secretary was unwilling to provide me with access to the verbatim reports of the Board's meetings. In any case, however, a degree of conjecture would have been necessary for deciding how far the two Sides were compelled to compromise by the Independents. This is because the verbatim reports cover only the full sessions of the Board, and not the private talks between the Independents and leaders of each Side - which is where the substantive negotiations have always taken place.

In August 1970 the Workers' Side presented the AWB with a claim for the adult male minimum rate to be increased to £18 (from the existing £13.35) and for the standard working week to be reduced to 40 hours (from 43) on the basis of a five-day week to be worked from Monday to Friday. The AWB's account of negotiations does not reveal what the Employers' Side offered, it merely states that "The Employers' representatives replied to the claim on 22 September 1970". The report continues:

"The matter was further considered ... on 20 October when the Independent Members moved that, with effect from 4 January 1971, the minimum adult male rate be increased by £1.13s to £14.16s and that the standard hours be reduced from 43 to 42 but not on the basis of a five-day week. This was carried on the votes of the Independent Members and the Workers' representatives, the Employers' representatives opposing ..."¹

1 Report on Wages in Agriculture 1970 (MAFF)

Could this award be deemed a victory for the Workers' Side simply on the grounds that they voted for it along with the Independents? The *Landworker* gives some indication of the Union's mixed reactions to the award:

"Disappointed as we all must be that we did not secure in the recent Wages Board negotiations our full claim for £18 for a 40 hour five-day week, nevertheless it is generally recognised that the award of 33s. and a further reduction of one hour in the standard week represents the highest award ever 'squeezed out' of the Agricultural Wages Board."¹

The journal divulges some of the procedures which were followed before the award was agreed upon:

"Step by step the Farmers' Representatives ... improved their offer of cash on the clear understanding that there should be no reduction in hours, and that the award should not operate until twelve months from the date of the last wages increase.

"Towards the end of the day, it became clear that there could be no agreement reached between the Employers' and the Workers' representatives. The Independent Members were, therefore, obliged to assume their role as arbitrators. They told us that they were prepared to propose an increase of 40s. with no reduction in hours, but that the Farmers' Representatives would certainly oppose an increase of that size, and that, to secure it, the Independent Members would need the support of the Workers' Side.

"In private consultation the Workers' Side reached the unanimous conclusion that to withdraw from our insistence on a reduction in hours would be a betrayal of the best long-term interests of our members. So we informed the Independent Members that we were only prepared to be parties to a compromise settlement that day, provided this included a further reduction in hours. Finally, the Independent Members proposed that we support them in an increase of 33s. and a reduction of one hour in the standard week, the changes to be effective from the first Monday in January 1971, eleven months after the date upon which the last award took effect."²

Believing this to be the best possible settlement the AWB could achieve that year, the Workers' Side voted with the Independents for an award which fell far short of their original claim.³

1 Landworker December 1970

2 Ibid.

3 Report on Wages in Agriculture 1970 (MAFF)

The AWB's account of the decisions taken in 1973 is introduced by more patently evaluative comments than usual:

"1973 was again a year of some significance for the Wages Board. Decisions were taken leading to an award which was something of a watershed - a 40-hour five-day week and a rate for the ordinary adult male worker in excess of £20 per week."¹

However large these awards may have appeared to the Civil Servants who compiled the Report, they were decided upon in spite of the Workers' Side's opposition (apart from the 40-hour per week clause). This might at first appear irrational, given that the award was heralded as an apparent 'breakthrough'. However, the Workers had gone into negotiations with a claim for £25 per week for the ordinary adult male worker, and for a five-day week from Monday to Friday. The AWB's award was thus considerably lower than the Workers' claims - from the Workers' Side's perspective it did not mark a significant watershed in their standard of living, making their opposition to it a wholly understandable response.

The AWB's meetings in 1974 diverged somewhat from usual practice. After a proposal which fell well short of the Workers' claim for £35 per week had been agreed upon by the Independents and the Employers, the Workers' Side withdrew from the subsequent discussion as a gesture of contempt for the proposed award. The meeting was then adjourned without the proposals being confirmed. At a new meeting the Independents put forward an amended proposal which was carried by the Independents' votes with both Sides abstaining. Landworker described the 13-hour non-stop negotiations as "... the longest, toughest and most complex negotiations in which we have been involved". This was primarily because, for the first time, neither side was willing to follow the AWB's 'normal' practice of compromising with the Independents.²

1 Report on Wages in Agriculture 1973 (MAFF)

2 Landworker December 1974

The following year was also a departure from conventional practice insofar as the AWB reached a 'unanimous' decision over the following year's wage increase. The Workers' claim in September 1975 was for a £40 weekly minimum basic rate. The Employers' reply to this was to offer, according to the Landworker, a £3.89 weekly increase which would have brought the minimum up to £34.39. At the next meeting the Workers' representatives repeated their claim for £40, which was defeated by the Employers' and Independents' combined votes. Another proposal by the Employers' side was defeated, following which the Employers offered a £6 weekly increase: this was eventually accepted unanimously. However, the term 'unanimous' may conceal the fact that the £6 increase was over £2 higher than the Employers had wanted to pay and £3.50 less than the Workers' demand. Furthermore, it was not wholly coincidental that the Government of the day had provided for a £6 per week upper limit on all pay increases in that year, as part of its campaign to curb inflation. This externally imposed guideline introduced a new point around which AWB members could focus their attention and towards which they could compromise.

The AWB met in September 1977 to discuss the Workers' new demand for a £60 per week minimum wage for a 35-hour week. The Employers replied negatively to this in October and a few days later negotiation got under way. The AWB report explains that:

"The negotiations were unique in that, for the first time, the Employers' Side and the Workers' Side were invited to have discussions together, without the Independent Members being present. These discussions continued for about an hour but broke up when no progress could be made. Thereupon the normal pattern of negotiations, whereby the Independent Members consulted with each Side in turn, was resumed."¹

¹ Report on Wages in Agriculture 1977 (MAFF) p. 5

After exceptionally long negotiations the Independents proposed an award of £43 per week, which was carried by the votes of the Independents and the Workers, with the Employers opposing it. A full £17 per week less than the Workers' original demand, this award represented a curious victory for the 'winning' side. The pressure placed upon the Workers to vote with the Independents is illuminated by the Landworker's description of events. Once the Independents made their offer of £43 per week, the Workers began to object, saying they had come for £60 - an increase of 50%, not 13%.

"But the independent members told the workers they would go no higher. If the workers refused the package the farmers' proposals were all they were likely to get. And the farmers' offer of £3.90 was contingent on the Workers voting for it. If there was a settlement imposed on the workers, it would be £3.70.

"Faced with this ultimatum, the workers agreed to support the Independents, and the package was agreed. Reg Bottini (the General Secretary) told the Press afterwards:

"'We only agreed to this after a lot of heart-searching. Average earnings will rise by around 13 per cent. That is not as much as farm workers deserve. There will be profound disappointment among our members.'"¹

'Profound disappointment' with the AWB's awards is an inevitable by-product of the Board's approach to wage negotiation, although this can be easily overlooked if one focusses exclusively on the Board's formal voting. The Independents' persistent search for compromise settlements combines with the uncompromising attitudes of the two Sides to ensure that neither the Employers nor the Workers will ever achieve the target which they hope for at the outset of negotiations. However, it is the Workers' Side which suffers the most profound disappointment: the awards which the AWB has settled on have consistently satisfied

¹ Landworker December 1977

the Employers' aim of maintaining low wages in agriculture, rather than assisting the workers in their efforts to achieve parity with other manual workers. This imbalance in the two Sides' respective 'disappointments' is attributable primarily to the affinity of outlook between the Independents and the Employers' Side, both of whom regard 'reasonable' settlements ultimately in terms of what employers are willing to pay.

Yet the very nature of the AWB is such that it simultaneously dilutes the anger and disappointment which it gives rise to among farmworkers. Union members may feel inclined to blame their representatives on the AWB for what is perceived as a paltry wage award - to which the AWB representatives reply that the award was imposed upon them by the Independents: within the confines of the AWB there is nothing the Workers' representatives can do to change this situation. The Workers' Side of the Board is thus relieved of any responsibility for the low wage awards, and Union members are forced to complain about the decisions of the other Side and the Independents - people over whom they have no direct influence.

The AWB reduces the potential anger felt over wage settlements in another way, one which helps to perpetuate the 'peaceful' labour relations which have characterised 20th century agriculture. One of the Employers' representatives explained this function of the Board to me in terms reminiscent of Lewis Coser's observations on the social significance of "those safety-valve institutions which serve to divert hostility into substitute objects or which function as channels for cathartic release".¹ According to the Employers' representative,

1 L. Coser 'The Functions of Social Conflict' (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London: 1956) p. 41

"What is important is the (the AWB) does take all the aggravation out of setting approximate levels of wages away from the average employer and the average worker so that they are able to work together on very good terms which they do do ... Most farmers and most workers get on well together and work well together and they are able to vent their feelings on the Wages Board which is a group of faceless people - one never know who they are, really - and they can say 'Sorry, Fred, it's only 5%, but it's the Wages Board up there, whoever they are, that are responsible'. Or, similarly, if an employer is paying what he thinks is a disproportionately high increase, he doesn't cuss the worker, he cusses the Wages Board ... The net gains are considerable, because everyone is a little happier than they otherwise would be, they don't waste their time hating each other as much as they otherwise might do."

The Independent Members' disproportionate influence over the decisions of the AWB has meant that they in particular have been 'blamed' repeatedly by other AWB members and by the people whom they represent for the disappointment caused by the AWB's annual settlements. There is, however, a marked difference in attitude towards the Independent Members between the Employers' Side and the Workers' Side. In general, the Employers have accepted the 'independence' of the Independent Members, and they have regarded their decisions as being overall fair and impartial. (One of the employers' representatives with whom I spoke supported this view by pointing to the equal number of times the Independents had voted with each Side over the past 20 years.) The Employers approve also of the Independents' semi-permanent role on the AWB. They claim that sitting on the Board for so many years has provided the Independent Members with the necessary familiarity with the industry for setting its wage levels, a familiarity which can be maintained without having personal ties with agriculture. This, argue, the Employers' Side, is a preferable context for wage negotiation than that provided by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) whose members would have no appreciation of agriculture's idiosyncracies.

Conversely, the Workers' Side is generally more critical of the AWB's constitution, and in particular its Independent members. The Workers' Side perceives a distinct bias in the Independents' attitudes and decisions which it attributes to the Independents' social and economic backgrounds. Although it is incorrect to argue that all Independent Members have come from an employer's background per se, it may be true, as certain Workers' representatives have argued, that the Independents have had an "employer's approach" to the wages issue - or, as one leading member of the Workers' side argued, the Independents have "all been drawn from one stratum of society". Even one of the more recent additions to the Independent team who was appointed by the Labour Minister of Agriculture John Silkin in the interest of 'balance' has been a disappointment to the Workers' Side. The new member is a Worker-Director in the steel industry and has voted consistently along with the other Independent members. This has been attributed to his common social situation with the other Independents, insofar as he has a number of people working 'below' him and is thus alleged to be relatively unsympathetic to the least well-off in any industry.

It is impossible to determine how far the Independents take the decisions they do because of their occupational backgrounds; but the argument that the Independents are drawn from a single social and economic stratum is verifiable. Since 1924 there have been ten Board Chairs, three of whom were Lords, three were Knights and the remaining four were Professors. The other Independent members have been drawn overwhelmingly from the academic, financial and legal worlds. As an ex-Chair remarked, "You know, we were terribly middle-class, which was a pity."

(iv) The distribution of information - a resource of power in wage negotiation

The perceived bias among the Independent members - or 'Appointed' members, as the Workers' Side refers to them - has not prevented the Workers from trying each year to convince the AWB that a 'large' increase in the agricultural minimum wage is imperative. However, in attempting to defend their interests through the AWB, the Workers' Side has been confronted by a major obstacle: it has been denied access to a crucial resource, namely the necessary information for arguing and defending their case. Although wage awards have been broadly in the favour of the Employers' Side due to factors which lie outside of the Board itself (i.e. the Employers' superior strength in the labour market and the Independents' awareness of this), the Workers' ability to argue a convincing case within the AWB is important for the defence of their limited interests in an award which is at least a few per centage points higher than it might otherwise be. It is with respect to these more limited interests that the Workers' restricted access to information has prevented them from negotiating successfully on so many occasions within the Agricultural Wages Board.

Between 1948-1984 the data-base used in AWB negotiations has been the 'Annual Review of Agriculture', which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) produces every year. The Annual Review is a White Paper which provides data drawn from surveys of farmers across the U.K. concerning the "economic condition and prospects of the U.K. agricultural industry".¹ Like most government White Papers, the Annual Review's statistics have been regarded widely as accurate indices of

¹ Annual Review of Agriculture 1983 (MAFF) p. 1
(Prior to 1973 the publication was known as 'Annual Review and Determination of Guarantees.')

of the industry's existing and anticipated prosperity. However, as Barry Hindess has pointed out, official statistics cannot be accepted as "mere givens to be taken as they are". Instead, they must be analysed as a product which has been created in a specific context and by certain instruments.

"In the case of statistics we may distinguish between two sets of instruments - the 'technical' instruments of the social survey and the 'conceptual' instruments, the system of concepts and categories governing the assignment of cases into classes."¹

What the Workers' Side of the AWB has found is that the conceptual instruments employed for the production of the Annual Review have been such as to have precluded statistics which could be of assistance to their case for high wages. On the contrary, they have provided abundant information for the Employers' Side to use in order to convince the Independents that high wages are undesirable and unnecessary in agriculture.

Given that one of the most frequently raised points of discussion in the AWB concerns the farmers' ability to pay high wages, it is interesting to note what information the AWB provides in connection with this issue. The most important point to notice is that the Annual Review fails to distinguish between farmers who employ labour and those who do not. This omission is of great consequence. For example, in the tables which outline average farm incomes the figure would be considerably higher if they were calculated on the basis of only those farmers who employ labour. This in turn could be used by the Workers' Side to support its arguments that farmers can afford to pay high wages; but the figures as they are constituted in the Annual Review, depressed by the inclusion of farm incomes of those farms which do not employ labour, are of limited

¹ B. Hindess 'The Use of Official Statistics in Sociology' (Macmillan, London: 1973) p. 12

use to the Workers' Side. Similarly, farm income statistics in the Annual Review are calculated on the basis of averages between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, whereas the AWB is concerned only with England and Wales. Once again, the statistics favour the Employers' case, because farm incomes are generally lower in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The Workers' Side has been able to establish that at least 50% of the agricultural workers whom they represent work on the 6,000 largest farms in England and Wales - but they remain unable to specify how prosperous those farms are because of the Annual Review's aggregated data.

Where the Annual Review does provide information on farmers' incomes, it does so in terms of the conceptual category 'net farm incomes'. Once again, this is of greater use to the Employers' Side than to the Workers' because it represents farming incomes as lower than they might otherwise be construed. 'Net farm incomes' constitutes the farmers' incomes after the deduction of various items of expenditure and depreciation. For the purposes of the Annual Review's fact-gathering, the farmer's expenses on car maintenance, insurance and licensing, telephones, electricity and fuel, house repairs and water charges, and even 7/8 of their NFU contributions are all included under the heading of 'business expenditure' and are thus subtracted from the farmers' incomes before the 'net farm income' is determined. This contrasts greatly with the figure provided by the Annual Review for agricultural workers' 'average pay' from which all expenses have to be paid, even where they are work-related, such as the maintenance of cars which are required in order to get to work.¹ Thus, the statistics as they are presented in the

¹ Confidential copy of the Workers' Side's Submission to the AWB, March 1983.

Annual Review inflate farmworkers' pay relative to farmers' incomes by the differential treatment of the two groups' expenditure and incomes.

It is also significant that the Annual Review provides plenty of detail on the state of each agricultural sector but that the only information on farmworkers among its 27 or 28 tables concerns the numbers employed, their average hours and earnings and the rate of labour productivity. Information on their cost of living, their prospects for alternative employment, their dependency on Family Income Supplement and other forms of social security is omitted; yet conceptual categories such as these would be of use to the Workers' Side of the AWB.

There is no statutory obligation on the part of the Workers' Side of the AWB to utilise the Annual Review in presenting its case to the AWB. However, the Union's limited resources for researching independently into this area and the secrecy which pervades the topic of income levels generally¹ have prevented them so far from producing an acceptable alternative data-base. So, although the Workers' Side has not invested MAFF's statistics with a "status of reality which they do not warrant",² it remains obliged to use them as far as possible in support of its wage claims in the AWB.

III. The AWB 1981-1984: Confirming Farmworkers' Powerlessness I

In 1981 the Independent Chair of the AWB retired from his post, having held it for nine years. Professor Miles explained his resignation by referring to his belief that the Chair must always be aloof from the Board's other members and relatively unpredictable. He felt that

1 See B. Wootton (op.cit.) pp. 28-35 on the secrecy which has traditionally shrouded peoples' incomes levels - particularly those in the higher brackets.

2 D. Rose et al 'Land Tenure and Official Statistics' JAE Vol.28 No.1 1977 pp. 75-76

after nine years the two Sides of the Board had acquired the ability to predict his actions and reactions and that consequently it would be in the interests of all concerned if he retired.

On 14 May 1981 Gordon Dickson, Professor of Agriculture at Newcastle University, was appointed as the new Independent Chair of the Agricultural Wages Board. On taking up his new post Professor Dickson claimed to have few preconceptions about the nature and role of the Wages Board; yet, soon after his first meeting with the Board's members he decided that the AWB would benefit from certain reforms.

In particular, Dickson believed that the AWB and the agricultural industry generally would prosper if a "progressive wages policy" were to take the place of the existing practice of passing annual piece-meal wage awards. Dickson argued for a long-term but relatively flexible strategy which, once the two Sides of the Board agreed upon it, could become the common objective of the entire Board. Thus, for example, the Board might decide to aim for a 40% increase in agricultural wages over the coming 3 or 5 years. In the context of this commonly held aim the two Sides of the Board would be able to meet annually to discuss 'how', rather than 'whether', to implement this wage increase. This plan of Dickson's never took off in the AWB. The Employers' Side were opposed to it, ostensibly on the grounds of 'impracticality': they insisted that a 'long term strategy' was incompatible with the unpredictability of the agricultural industry. The Workers' Side agreed with the programme in principle, but did not see how it could be implemented through the existing machinery of the AWB.

Having failed in this particular attempt to establish a means by which the AWB could begin to take corporate decisions, Dickson sought some other mechanism through which the AWB could develop a "corporate

identity or responsibility".¹ He decided to try to develop the face-to-face negotiations between Workers and Employers which had been attempted under the previous Chair in 1977, but which had foundered after one hour. Dickson refused to follow his predecessor's practice of separating the two Sides of the AWB and discussing the issue of wages with each side in the absence of, and in a sense on behalf of, the other Side. Instead, he kept the two Sides together in the same room and forced them to negotiate openly with one another, limiting the Independents' role to that of asking for points of clarification. Under Dickson the AWB's wage bargaining process began to resemble the direct employer-employee wage negotiation which characterises most other industries. Only towards the end of the three-day talks was Dickson obliged to separate the two Sides in order to enforce a final settlement upon them. In this way, Dickson hoped the AWB would be able to reach 'genuinely agreed' settlements rather than the compromises which had been imposed in the past on one or both Sides by the Independents.

Dickson departed from what was expected of him in other ways, too. Compared to his predecessors he took a more high profile approach, addressing various agricultural meetings and making speeches which pertained to his role as AWB Chair. During many of his speeches Dickson remarked that he would like to see the Wages Board taking a more 'corporate' approach to the issue of agricultural wages because this, he believed, would be the only way in which the gap between agricultural and industrial wages could be narrowed.

What was arguably Dickson's greatest innovation surfaced in 1983. At the end of 1982 the farmworkers' minimum wage was increased by 7.1%. Then, in February 1983 the Annual Review of Agriculture was published,

¹ Farmers Weekly 13 November 1981 "Wages Chief Plans to Rejig Board" p. 40

revealing that 1982 had seen an average 45% increase in net farm incomes. This revelation was more of a surprise to the Workers' Side and Independents than to the Employers who had already had some idea of how profitable the industry had been during the preceding year - particularly given that the NFU's members and officials provide much of the data from which MAFF compiles its statistics. The Workers' Side responded by demanding an interim award, a demand which the Independents would not at first agree to. A further change, and one with more long-term implications, was then demanded by the Workers' Side in the light of the recent events: they called for an adjustment in the timing of the annual wages negotiation from autumn to spring so that the material in the Annual Review could be available to both sides of the AWB. The Independents, under Dickson's leadership, viewed this as an acceptable request. In February 1983 the Independents and the Workers' Side voted against the Employers in favour of initiating new wage negotiations, with any increase that was decided to apply for up to one year, and all future negotiations to be held likewise in the Spring rather than Autumn. The Workers then withdrew their interim claim and submitted a fresh application to cover the change-over period.

As a result of these changes the Workers' Side won a 5% increase in May 1983, which took effect in September and lasted until Spring 1984, when new wage negotiations began. The Workers' Side hailed these events as a great victory. This was not so much because of the second award which they had gained in the space of twelve months, for wages still remained £30 less than other manual workers' wages; but because, as their Trade Group Secretary put it:

"The farmers are running scared because, for the first time, we shall now have exactly the same access to government information on farm incomes which they have kept up their sleeves all these years when we negotiated and settled before publication of the Annual Farm Review."¹

The AWB's subsequent negotiations in April 1984 entailed an even greater departure from 'normal' proceedings. After confirming the new pay increase of 4.5%, Professor Dickson announced under 'Any Other Business' that he had been dismissed from his post as Independent Chairperson by the Minister of Agriculture, Michael Jopling.

The dismissal of Professor Dickson was explained initially to the media by the Ministry of Agriculture which insisted that three years was long enough for any public appointment - even though the previous AWB Chairperson had served for nine years and left at his own request. This 'official' explanation was countered by a host of alternative ones, starting with the explanation which Dickson himself had been offered personally by the Minister and which he passed on to the Board: that the Employers had expressed a loss of confidence in the Chair. The vehement objections to this allegation by the NFU representatives on the AWB were accepted by Dickson who read in the press shortly after the AWB meeting that the 'real' reason he had been dismissed was that he had claimed publicly on numerous occasions that he wished to see the pay gap closed. Dickson rejected this explanation because, as he remarked so disarmingly, both the Workers and the Employers had voiced the same desire in public on many occasions. As Dickson put it, expressing such a desire was entirely different to establishing a commitment to achieving this end regardless of its costs.

There is, however, a more plausible explanation for Dickson's dismissal which has been provided by confidential sources. It would

1 Landworker May 1983

appear that the Conservative Government of the day expressed strong disapproval of the AWB's progress under Dickson and, in particular, over the 'double award' of 1983 which conflicted with the Government's policies of keeping wages as low as possible so as to curb inflation. However, when Dickson was cautioned by a Senior Civil Servant and told of the Cabinet's displeasure at the farmworkers' 'extra' pay award, he insisted that he could not be truly 'independent' if he were compelled to observe government guidelines, whatever they might be. He explained to the Civil Servant that he would prefer not to carry out his duties as AWB Chair than to carry them out under external pressure.

Given that Dickson's position as AWB Chair was a Government appointment and that the AWB, as a statutory body, would be influenced to some extent by contemporary Government economic policies (as it was in 1975), it would be reasonable to assume that the Government's dissatisfaction with Dickson's performance was a major factor in MAFF's decision not to re-appoint him as the AWB's Chair. However, given also that the awards passed between 1981-1984 achieved nothing in terms of narrowing the earnings gap between agricultural and industrial workers, what is unclear is why the government should be so unhappy with the way in which Dickson had discharged his duties. This apparent anomaly can be explained through an analysis of the NFU's activities during 1981-1984 in regard to the Chairing of the AWB.

The NFU's AWB representatives may have been genuinely astonished when Dickson announced his dismissal in April 1984, for they themselves had not made any representations to MAFF in this connection. What had happened was that the NFU's County Committees had begun to send in resolutions to NFU Headquarters complaining about Dickson's performance and, in particular, his public speeches and comments concerning the need

to improve agricultural wages. The NFU's Headquarters decided not to take this matter any further, however, because they knew that if they secured the dismissal of the AWB Chair they would provide the Workers' Side with evidence that 'Independent' members were not appointed independently, and that the Board was biased in the Employers' favour.

The County Committees, unhappy with their Headquarters' silence, began to voice their complaints through other channels. Specifically, they began to lobby local Conservative MPs who eventually formed themselves into a cohesive group which then brought the issue forward for the attention of the Agriculture Minister, Michael Jopling. The Minister, anxious to placate his backbenchers - particularly since in so doing he would be supporting the Government's policy of securing low wage increases - decided that the dismissal and replacement of Dickson would solve more problems than it would create. To minimise the complications which Dickson's dismissal could give rise to, the Minister found a replacement for Dickson before telling Dickson that he would not be re-appointed. This was intended to decrease any possible reluctance on the part of the new Chair to take up a position which might later be surrounded by controversy. Jopling then waited for four months after choosing the new Chair, and three months after dismissing Dickson, before announcing the new appointment publicly. This careful juggling of private negotiations and public announcements was aimed at defusing the furore surrounding the dismissal before new negotiations were due to begin.

The NFU's ability to secure the dismissal of an allegedly unsympathetic Independent AWB Chair bears witness to the NFU's outstanding capacity for promoting and defending its members' interests. This capacity, which contrasts so starkly with the farmworkers' powerlessness to influence the AWB, is due partly to the NFU's superior access to relevant power resources and partly to its extremely skilful use of these resources.

In the incident described above, the relevant power resources were the NFU's extensive ties with Members of Parliament. (This political resource, noted in Chapter Two, will be examined more closely in Chapter Five where it will be contrasted with the relative paucity of parliamentary ties held by the farmworkers' Union.) The NFU used its parliamentary allies in order to re-assert its control over the AWB's agenda, as derived from the Independents' customary, albeit tacit, recognition of the employers' superior labour market strength. The NFU had been under the impression that Professor Dickson was challenging the NFU's long-standing control over the AWB's agenda, through the 'deviant' reforms which he had proposed and which might, some time in the future, actually allow for the promotion and defence of farmworkers' real interests. By overseeing Dickson's dismissal, the NFU regained its ability to set the AWB's agenda and so to ensure that the AWB would operate as it always had done - namely, in the interests of agricultural employers and against the interests of agricultural workers.

What makes this exercise of power by the NFU so interesting is not simply that it illustrates the NFU's ability to take action outside of the formal decision-making arena in order to influence what occurs with it.¹ A certain interest also derives from the peculiar skill with which the NFU made use of its power resources. The NFU's National Officers recognised the damage which could be done to their Union's public image if they were seen to approach central Government in order to complain about what was, after all, an 'independent' appointment. Consequently, they left this task to the County Committees who not only had strong links with local MPs, but also would not be criticised in the same way

1 Cf. pluralist analysis which looks only at the decision-making arena, (dis-)regarding the rest as part of the 'background' against which power is exercised. See: N. Polsby op.cit. pp. 191-199

for complaining about an 'independent' appointee. The National Officers must be credited with at least some responsibility for the dismissal of Dickson, however, insofar as it was their very inaction which guaranteed the NFU's successful exercise of power. The net effect of the incident was to reaffirm the farmworkers' powerlessness to promote their interests through the AWB.

* * *

The NFU's opposition to Dickson was based chiefly upon what he said rather than what he did, for the wage increases which he oversaw failed to improve farmworkers' relative earnings by any significant amount. Yet, even Dickson's proposed changes to the AWB did not constitute the threat which some NFU members may have perceived. His desire for a 'corporate identity' was simply a logical extension to the AWB's established approach to wage settlements which had been based on compromise and agreement. Dickson sought only to eliminate the enforced nature of the AWB settlements and in this way to expand the 'consensus' element of AWB negotiations. Nevertheless, his proposals and his public statements in favour of eventually narrowing the gap were regarded as a threat to the status quo by some NFU members and for this reason they filed their objections to his Chair via NFU County Committees and local Conservative Members of Parliament.

Yet any allegations of Dickson's 'partiality' towards the Workers' Side were profoundly misguided. Not only did farmworkers' earnings fail to improve in real terms between 1981-1984, but confidential correspondence between Union officials suggests that they were far from happy with Dickson's approach, which was so weighted in favour of consensus as to preclude any substantial increases in farmworkers' wage levels.

Both sides were impressed by Dickson's introduction of face-to-face negotiations, and expressed hopes that these would continue after

Dickson's departure. But beyond this innovation there was little in his performance to make his dismissal in itself a greatly regretted affair by either Side. For the Employers' Side he was too radical, with his verbal challenges to established AWB practice. For the Workers' Side he was 'more of the same', unwilling to force through genuinely substantial pay increases and excessively concerned with compromise, consensus and corporatism. As an Independent Chairperson of the AWB, Dickson may have looked upon this disfavour which he drew from both Sides as a sign of his success and impartiality.

IV. The Farmworkers' Overtime Ban 1984: Confirming Farmworkers' Powerlessness II

The dissatisfaction of the farmworkers' Union with the AWB's operation has on occasion led certain members of the Union to contemplate taking industrial action in support of its wage claims. The purpose of doing this would be two-fold. Firstly, it would, if successful, bring about an immediate improvement in farmworkers' wages. Secondly, the longer-term effects of such action would be to strengthen the Workers' Side of the AWB for, as the Union recognises, unless and until farmworkers can assert at least some strength in the labour market, the Employers' Side will continue to enjoy the tacit support of the Independent members in the process of wage negotiation. However, as this section shows, any attempt at flexing the farmworkers' industrial muscle is likely to fail unless the Union first reverses the existing reluctance among its members to take direct action in support of the Union's claims.

This reluctance was highlighted most recently by a survey conducted in late 1984 by the Northern Regional Trade Group of the Agricultural and Allied Workers' Trade Group of the Transport and General Workers'

Union (AAWNTG). The survey sought to gauge members' attitudes towards taking action in support of the Union's 1985 wage claim. Copies of the questionnaire were sent to the Regional Trade Group's 153 branches in Humberside, South Yorkshire and North Lancashire and 33 of the branches responded. The results were as follows:

	YES	NO
Should we hold a national wages rally?	18%	74%
Should we hold a regional wages rally?	18%	74%
Should we organise a One-day stoppage?	8%	92%
Should we organise an Overtime Ban?	8%	92%
Should we organise a Work-to-Rule?	20%	80%
Should a wages settlement (agreed by the AWB) be subject to a ballot?	58%	33%
Should a call for rejection of settlement arising from such a ballot be interpreted as a vote for industrial action?	26%	74%

When the NUAAW merged with the TGWU in 1982 there was an initial sense of optimism in regard to the possibilities of taking industrial action. Union officials hoped that once the agricultural workforce took limited action, other TGWU members would join in with supportive action. This would in turn encourage farmworkers to go further in their own endeavours and would bring their action to a successful end. Of particular importance in such a scenario would be the TGWU's organised lorry- and milk tanker-drivers whose prompt collections and deliveries are crucial to the purchase and sale of fresh farm produce. However, even amidst the optimism which accompanied the merger, doubts were expressed over whether farmworkers would be willing to take the necessary steps for initiating such events. The Union's experiences in 1984 showed that misgivings such as these were well-founded.

In May 1984 the AAWNTG's Annual Conference carried a resolution instructing the National Trade Group Committee to "seek an ordinary

minimum wage of £130 for a 35-hour week at the next wage round". More significantly, it carried an addendum to this resolution which called for a vigorous campaign in support of the £130 target, in which each Regional Trade Group Committee was asked to draw up plans for possible action. The Union thus found itself committed to breaking a 60-year tradition of industrial quiescence.

Prior to the Union's Annual Conference, the Region One Trade Group Committee had already agreed to advise its members in East Anglia and South East England to take direct action in support of a campaign for higher wages. It was felt that there was no alternative to such action - apart from continuing to complain, largely without effect, about farmworkers' low wages. Yet, although direct action was regarded as a desirable and necessary course of action, the Regional Trade Group Committee viewed an all-out strike as a physical impossibility for the near future, because of the extensive preparation and organisation which it would require. In view of these constraints the officers of Region One decided to call on their members to take part in an overtime ban for the duration of one week, to begin on the August Bank Holiday of 27 August. The planned action was then announced and publicised as widely as possible. Union leaders described it as the Union's response to the recent pay increase of 4.5%, as well as a gesture of support for the new pay claim of £130 for a 35-hour week.

Although a week-long overtime ban would not have the same impact in terms of industrial disruption that a full-scale strike would have, it was chosen in preference to strike action for a number of reasons. The Regional Trade Group Committee's main consideration had been members' lack of experience in industrial action and their anticipated reluctance to participate in any seriously disruptive action. Region One officers

believed that the membership would have dismissed as adventurist nonsense a proposal for all-out strike action, given the low concentration of Union members. Conversely, an overtime ban would have the attraction of being a moderate, but meaningful, gesture of support for the Union's wage claims. Furthermore, it would represent from the activists' point of view a 'first step' towards a more far-reaching campaign of action: many officers hoped that a successful overtime ban would provide members with sufficient confidence to take further action in the coming years.

As only a 'first step' into a long-term campaign, the overtime ban was not intended to harm seriously the farms on which Union members were employed. For this reason it was scheduled to coincide with the end of the main harvest so that for the most part crops would not lay rotting in the ground. Moreover, the Union gave clear instructions to livestock workers to ensure that animals came to no harm, by making arrangements for relief workers to take their place when they took part in the action. Nonetheless, the overtime ban was not to be without any impact at all. Even in the last stages of a harvest, human labour is a vital resource: farmers could stand to lose valuable crops if they were not harvested in time. The primary impact of the overtime ban, however, was symbolic. For the first time in many decades farmworkers were to take the August Bank Holiday as a day of rest and they would only work for eight hours per day for the following week - regardless of their employers' needs or desires. It was to be a sign from farmworkers that their goodwill towards their employers would no longer continue unless it was reciprocated by better wages. At the same time, it was to serve as a message to fellow-farmworkers that the barriers to industrial action could be overcome if the will to do so was strong enough.

Following the National Conference's endorsement of Region One's plans, two other Regional Trade Group Committees voted to participate in the overtime ban. As in 1923, however, it was the Union's best organised areas which became most involved in the action on behalf of the entire membership.

Between June and August numerous letters were sent out by national and regional officers to branch secretaries to inform them of developments in the plans for the overtime ban. The Branch Secretaries then relayed these messages to their members, either during their monthly collection of Union dues or during Branch meetings where a national or regional officer was often present to answer any queries. Some of these meetings were characterised by an enthusiasm for the forthcoming action; but in the majority of cases, members voiced profound doubts about its chances of success and about their own involvement in the action. The doubts ranged from a fear of victimisation; to the lack of impact an overtime ban would have compared to a strike; to the anticipated substitution of Union labour by contract workers. Many members agreed in principle to the overtime ban; but they refused to take part in it because of what they perceived to be practical considerations. This attitude was exemplified by a letter sent to Region One officers by a Hertfordshire branch secretary:

Dear Brother Jim,

I write on behalf of the above branch re: the overtime ban between August 27 and September 1st, as discussed at our Branch meeting on Tuesday 4th May.

Our members accept the 4½% wage award and can see no point in the overtime ban now that the new wages award has been settled. And the number of Union members are so thin on the ground that it will not affect farms at all in this part of the County.

Yours fraternally,

Bill Collinson, Branch Secretary

(Fictitious names)

In the view of some Union members, the very fact that industrial action was being discussed by farmworkers marked a breakthrough for the Union. For the first time in 60 years Union members had begun to consider seriously a course of action which had been neglected ever since the Norfolk Strike. As one Sussex Branch Secretary told me:

"There are some of the most heartfelt, most serious comments coming out now. It shows that the willingness is there ... most people I've discussed it with support it in principle; but they can't see how to do it practically ... As far as I'm concerned, it's really stirred things up, both inside and outside the Union. It's a major step forward."

This optimism over the overtime ban's immediate objectives of disrupting agricultural production and encouraging further action by farmworkers proved to be misplaced. Few workers participated in the action and there were no complaints of ruined crops from farmers. In the language of the popular press, the overtime ban was a 'flop'.

In the areas of Suffolk where I carried out fieldwork prior to and during the overtime ban, the most outstanding obstacle to large-scale participation in the action had been the farmworkers' fear of reprisals from their employers. Of the 26 farmworkers with whom I spoke all but one said that they would not be taking part in the overtime ban: their overriding concern had been the insecurity of their employment and the risk which industrial action would entail in this connection. The one worker who expressed enthusiasm for the action in the event declined to take part because, as he pointed out, there would have been little sense in taking action on his own. A number of national, regional and district officers subsequently agreed that the fear of job losses had been a major factor in the overtime ban's low turn-out.

Within the NFU there had been a conscious decision among certain officials to play down the overtime ban in the months which led up to

its planned enforcement. Their decision to remain silent over the event was explained to me by one officer (who was also a practising farmer):

"... The more one reacts to these kinds of issues the more we build up the kudos of the other side ..."

The officer, who was a leading figure on the NFU's Employment and Education Committee, believed that reactions to the overtime ban might be hostile on individual farms if the workers came out in support of the Union's policy. In his view,

"... it's only human nature that there's going to be hostility towards this".

When he was asked to clarify the form which this hostility might be expected to take, the official replied:

"If they want to take industrial action, that's fine. But don't come running to us in a year or six months time, saying there aren't the jobs in agriculture that there used to be."

The 'silent approach' to the overtime ban was also adopted by some farmers at their places of work: in the months before 27 August these employers avoided any confrontation with their workers over the issue. One of the Regional Trade Group Secretaries involved in the action explained that on the farms where employers failed to discuss the overtime ban with their workers there was often a reported 'change in atmosphere' between employers and workers. In these situations farmworkers sensed a need to 'tread carefully' if they were to avoid their employers' anticipated anger and the possibility of reprisals. And in many cases the anticipation of anger and reprisals was sufficient to prevent the workers from taking part in the action.

The threat of job losses proved to be a pervasive one during the build-up to the overtime ban. In some cases the NFU's silence was broken

in order to emphasise the insecurity of farmworkers' employment. Of particular significance was the well-publicised circular issued by the NFU head office in June, headed 'Agricultural Workers Proposed Industrial Action'. The circular included the following passage:

"Obviously employees would not be entitled to wages in respect of hours they do not work as a result of this action. Apart from this however the only other recourse open to the employer would be to consider dismissal but this would hardly seem appropriate in the circumstances. HOWEVER THE BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE LEGAL SITUATION SET OUT BELOW MIGHT BE USEFUL."
(my emphasis)

Legal advice was thus provided by the NFU to its members informing them that a ban on overtime could in certain cases constitute a breach of contract and could thus qualify the worker for fair dismissal. Most workers were aware of this legal constraint, even if they did not know about the NFU circular. For many of them their contract of employment specified the worker's obligation to work overtime 'as required'. The legal interpretation of this stipulation is done on the basis of previous years' experience. Thus, if the farmworker had worked overtime during the week of 27 August in previous years then he was obliged by contract to do so in 1984. Farmworkers knew that a failure to fulfill the duties set out by their contracts of employment entailed a risk of dismissal and few of them were willing to take this risk.¹

It was not only the fear of losing their jobs which prevented farmworkers from becoming involved in the overtime ban. An important constraint lay also in their poverty which meant that many farmworkers were dependent on any overtime work which was available during the

1 J. Gaventa op.cit. p. 87

See also: S. Lukes 'Power: a radical view' (Macmillan, London: 1974) on the use of inaction in the exercise of power. This relates to the employers' use of silence as a means of responding to the farmworkers' planned Overtime Ban.

See also in this connection: M. Crenson op.cit. pp. 77-80

harvest season. In some cases this work provided them with a vital source of income which would help to pay for essential expenses incurred during the winter months when overtime work would be less plentiful and fuel bills higher. Farmworkers' reliance on overtime pay was highlighted in another way in 1984. In some cases farmers broke their silence over the planned action, by threatening to withdraw the opportunity to work overtime ever again if the worker failed to work overtime during the Union's week of action. As one might expect, threats such as this ensured that farmworkers carried out the required overtime work between 27 August-1 September.

The isolation of farmworkers also proved to be a barrier to successful organisation. One farmworker who said that he would not be taking part in the overtime ban told me of a successful local strike which he had participated in 'many years ago'. But there had been 22 workers on the farm then: today there were only four. It was not possible to build up the confidence and solidarity which would be necessary for taking action against the employer. It would be fair to assume that this situation was a common one on many of the farms where workers were employed in groups of four or less.

Many farmworkers also pointed out that even if Union members participated in the overtime ban it would have little impact. Employers could cope with the situation easily by employing contract labour to replace striking farmworkers. From the farmworker's point of view this meant that he would be taking risks for no purpose: on this basis the worker rationalised his or her non-participation in the overtime ban.

There was in general a sense of powerlessness among farmworkers and a consequent unwillingness to participate in the overtime ban. No farmworker believed that he was being paid high enough wages. But

equally, they could not conceive of any means of challenging the situation. They had little reason to believe that the withdrawal of their labour in 1984 would be any more successful than it had been in 1923. On the contrary, the extent of their labour market weakness and their greater isolation compared to the situation in 1923 suggested that they had less chance of success in the 1980s. In anticipation of failure, most farmworkers refused to put their employment at risk by demanding better remuneration for it. Yet, by declining to take direct action en masse in support of their wage claim, the agricultural workforce cemented the extensive power which their employers continue to exercise over them in the Agricultural Wages Board.

V. Conclusions on Power and Powerlessness in the Determination of Agricultural Wages

Having noted how the bias of the AWB prevents farmworkers from promoting and defending their interests in earning high wages, it must also be said that the AWB does to some extent serve other of farmworkers' interests. This seemingly contradictory situation is explained by the fact that although the Board precludes 'high' wage settlements, without its statutory regulation of agricultural minimum wages, and in the absence of a national minimum wage, the agricultural workforce would be even worse off than it currently is. Without a statutory minimum wage for agriculture, the farm workforce would have experienced between 1948-1984 difficulties comparable to the hardship which it suffered between 1921-1924, when wages plummeted to the point where they were scarcely enough for workers and their families to live on.

The abolition of the AWB today would almost certainly bring a similar decline in the wages and conditions of many farmworkers, particularly

those with the most limited bargaining power who are currently paid the minimum wage as prescribed by the AWB. This prediction is supported by evidence drawn from the aftermath of the abolition of the Wages Councils in other industries which took place between 1960-1983.¹ Many of the workers who lost their Wages Council during this period experienced a serious deterioration in living standards which had been kept previously at least marginally above the poverty line. As Chris Pond remarked, "Although the councils had performed abysmally, they at least afforded some minimum protection for the most vulnerable workers."²

However, the AWB's minimum protection for the industry's most vulnerable workers is in itself problematic for the Union. It has been seen in this Chapter that the AWB serves farmers' interests to a relatively large extent. Not only does the AWB perpetuate low wages in agriculture, it also legitimises them insofar as wages are decided 'together with the workers' and under the guidance of 'independently appointed arbitrators'. Furthermore, the AWB

"... has removed from the arena of the farm what is customarily the most sensitive issue of all between employers and employees and the one which is most capable of highlighting any conflict of interests ..."³

The resulting 'peaceful labour relations' helps farmers to satisfy their interests in maintaining high output levels while depriving farmworkers of a focus for their demands.

While the Board is thus of considerable value to agricultural employers, the employers do not have to take any positive action

1 C. Craig et al 'Labour Market Structure, Industrial Organisation and Low Pay' (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1982)

2 C. Pond 'Low Pay' in N. Bosanquet and P. Townsend (eds) 'Labour and Equality' (Heineman, London: 1980) p. 93
See also Craig et al (op.cit.) for a study of the effects of Wages Council abolition in six industries.

3 H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' p. 178

to ensure its continued survival. This is because the farmworkers' Union values too highly the AWB's protection of its weaker members to campaign for the Board's total abolition. The harsh lessons of 1921-1924 remain vivid enough for farmworkers to recognise that the situation could become even worse than it is at present. They are consequently forced to support an institution which enables the employers to defend their interests to a far greater extent than the workers can defend theirs.

This imbalance in the AWB's performance is attributed by the Workers' Side to the peculiar institutional bias of the AWB and, in particular, to the manner in which the Independents have approached their responsibilities. The Union's recent demands for the replacement of the AWB by direct employer-employee negotiations in the form of a Statutory Joint Industrial Council (SJIC) is based on the belief that in the absence of the AWB's Independent Members the Workers would not be compelled to compromise to the extent that they are at present. Any impasse within an SJIC would be settled by arbitration through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), which would allegedly produce more genuinely balanced compromises than the Independents have done.

The belief that an SJIC would bring about more favourable wage settlements to farmworkers than the AWB has done is misplaced, for it fails to take adequate account of the fact that the bias of the AWB's decision-making process is related above all to the context in which it operates, rather than to particular features inherent in the AWB per se. As this chapter has shown, the vastly superior power of the employers over their workers outside the AWB has been the over-riding factor which has determined their power within the Board.

The Independents have steadfastly supported the employers' rather than the workers' interests largely because they believe that the employers could and would respond to high wage awards by replacing even more men by machines, thereby increasing prematurely the capitalisation of agriculture. At the same time, the Independents recognise that the workers would be unable to halt or reverse such a programme of labour cutbacks because of their relative weakness in the labour market. Rather than risk mass redundancies (and a possible fall in production levels which they believe would result from high wage awards), the Independents have chosen instead to support the status quo by overseeing consistently low pay increases. There is little reason to believe that members of ACAS would not be influenced similarly by the employers' labour market strength.

The Overtime Ban of 1984 confirmed the employers' superior position within the labour market and cemented at the same time their power within the AWB. The dismissal of Professor Dickson as AWB Chair revealed that, should their economic power prove insufficient to maintain the Employers' control over the AWB's agenda, the agricultural employers are equipped with other power resources which can be used to ensure the continued payment of low wages in agriculture. The political resources which the NFU utilised in 'regaining' control over the AWB between 1981-1984 were, like the employers' labour market strength, located outside of the Board - and yet by using them, the employers determined what would and would not be discussed and decided upon within it. This means of controlling the agenda suggests that one cannot discover 'who governs' merely by studying the formal decision-making process in isolation from its economic and social foundations.¹

1 N. Polsby op.cit. Chapter Seven

R. Dahl op.cit. p. 66

B. Hindess 'On Three Dimensional Power' P.S. Volume 24 1976

This is not to deny the importance of those exercises of power identified in this chapter which relate specifically to the internal workings of the AWB. The systematic mobilisation of values and of historical precedents by the Independents and by the Employers' Side of the AWB were shown to force farmworkers to pursue very limited claims, rather than their greater interests in high wage increases. Certain procedural biases were found to have been created and mobilised by the Independents for similar purposes. Until 1982 the Independents kept the two Sides apart from one another throughout the negotiation process. This facilitated the evolution of compromise and the covert exercise of power, since nobody would 'see' the pressure upon the Workers' Side to reduce its claims and to relinquish its pursuit of farmworkers' objective interests. The Independents recognised that face-to-face negotiation would serve to harden attitudes and would necessitate the overt exercise of power through the imposition of 'reasonable' pay awards.¹

A further bias in the AWB, and one which would arguably not necessarily exist within alternative wage negotiation machinery, concerns the inequality of bargaining resources. The AWB's negotiations are such as to enable the Employers to use their abundant information resources to the full. These include the Annual Review and a first-class Economics Department staffed by a number of ex-employees of MAFF. Meanwhile, the AWB's procedures highlight the Workers' relative lack of access to relevant information and other bargaining resources. As a result of this inequality the farmworkers are often powerless to defend their very limited interests.

1 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Decisions and Nondecisions' A.P.S.R. Volume 57 1963 p. 641
 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'The Two Faces of Power' A.P.S.R. Volume 56 1962 p. 948: The mobilisation of bias in the AWB provides a perfect illustration of how, in the words of Bachrach and Baratz, "... A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A."

A host of different forms of power, exercised at a number of levels and within different arenas, coupled with an inequitable distribution of power resources and the farmworkers' unfavourable location within the labour market, have ensured that farmworkers' interests in earning high wages have been frustrated throughout the post-war period. The power which employers have exercised over farmworkers, both within and beyond the AWB, directly as well as through their influence over the Independents, has been such that each year farmworkers have had to accept wage settlements which have entrenched their position as one of the country's lowest paid groups of workers. Their labour market powerlessness has been compensated for by the AWB to the extent that they are not on starvation wages. But the AWB has not brought farmworkers' wages in line with those of other workers, and this is chiefly because the powerlessness which the AWB was set up in order to compensate for, has itself determined the low level of its settlements.

CHAPTER FIVE: FARMWORKERS AND THE LABOUR PARTY - A POWERFUL ALLIANCE?
THE CASE OF THE TIED COTTAGE CAMPAIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to explore further the notion which was examined in Chapter Four that the power which is exercised outside formal decision-making procedures can be of greater significance for Q's objective interests than that which is exercised in the formal decision-making process itself. In showing this to be the case this chapter draws once again on the concept of nondecision-making. It goes further than this, however, by investigating in detail a second idea raised in Chapter One, namely the pluralist belief that the social distribution of power resources is neither cumulative nor concentrated. This chapter shows that, contrary to this pluralist principle, the NUAAW's powerlessness to set the agenda of important value-allocating institutions is due largely to farmworkers' deficiency in a number of crucial power resources - which contrasts starkly with the relative abundance of power resources which the NFU can and does make use of.

By focussing upon the alliance with the Labour Party which the NUAAW had forged in a bid to set parliament's agenda on tied cottage reform, this chapter is able to address itself to a number of issues which have been raised in earlier chapters. Firstly, a study of the obstacles encountered by the Union in its efforts to set institutional agendas provides an opportunity to examine some of the concepts raised in Chapter One. As well as nondecision-making and the social distribution of power resources, the relationship between power and responsibility is discussed, as is the importance of identifying both Q's objective and limited interests in order to distinguish between a real and false consensus. Secondly, the chapter is able to investigate (and largely to refute) the proposition raised in Chapter Three that farmworkers'

workplace powerlessness might be compensated for by their Union's political alliance with external agencies. Finally, a study of the consequences of the Union's relative powerlessness to set the agenda for tied cottage reform serves to confirm the conclusions of Chapter Four: that the second face of power has crucial implications for Q's objective interests. In re-assessing this point, the present chapter underlines the inadequacy of the pluralist approach, which focusses solely upon who prevails in formal decision-making.

* * *

Section I analyses the social and economic issues raised by the agricultural tied cottage system, as well as the conflict of interests between agricultural employers and workers which the tied cottage system is said to entail at both a subjective and objective level.

Section II explores the extent to which post-war Labour Governments have been able and willing to compensate for farmworkers' powerlessness to achieve their goal of tied cottage abolition. This section concentrates chiefly on the Labour Government of 1974-1979, looking in detail at that Government's exercises of power over the NUAAW.

The Labour Party is shown to have exercised power over farmworkers initially by taking steps to prevent tied cottage abolition from emerging on the Parliamentary Labour Party's (PLP) and parliament's agenda. What is interesting is that the PLP's insistence on tied cottage reform, as opposed to abolition, was agreed to with scarcely any protest from the NUAAW. This consent to what is effectively a transgression of farmworkers' objective interests is explicable only if one recognises that the Union lacked the necessary electoral and economic resources with which to oppose the Party's line, and so to withstand the Party's exercise of power. The resulting alliance between the Government and the Union was thus based on a 'false' rather than a 'real' consensus,

insofar as it aimed at satisfying farmworkers' limited interests in tied cottage reform rather than their objective interests in the wholesale abolition of the tied cottage system. This important distinction can only be made if the observer begins with a conception of 'objective interests' which is independent from actors' subjective desires: as the case study shows, subjective desires and consensus can both be products of exercises of power.

The Chapter follows the guidelines set out in Chapter One by inquiring not only into the satisfaction or frustration of farmworkers' objective interests in tied cottage abolition, but also by looking into the NUAAW's ability to promote and defend farmworkers' limited interests in tied cottage reform. The importance of not dismissing limited interests as irrelevant in a study of powerlessness is borne out in this chapter. By following the farmworkers' pursuit of their limited interests in tied cottage reform, it is possible to identify further exercises of power and so to determine further the nature of powerlessness. Research reveals that the National Farmers' Union (NFU) exercised power over farmworkers via the Labour Government in such a way as to frustrate even farmworkers' limited interests in achieving security of tenure within the tied cottage system.

What Section II underlines is the importance of how power resources are distributed and used in any given power relationship. The NFU's manipulation of information combined with its access to and use of parliamentary, organisational and economic resources are shown to have compelled the Government to reduce further its commitment to assisting the NUAAW. Once again, the NUAAW's lack of power resources ensured its powerlessness to counter these power exercises and to influence the agenda in its own interests. Consequently, the tied

cottage reform which was eventually discussed and decided on in parliament only served farmworkers' very limited interests - in spite of the fact that their allies 'prevailed' in the formal decision-making process.

Section III examines the main changes introduced by the Government's Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976. What this section argues is that the Act achieved less for farmworkers' interests as they are defined in Chapter One than the rhetoric which accompanied it might suggest. Moreover, while serving only farmworkers' very limited interests, the legislation is shown to have left agricultural employers' interests wholly intact - indeed, in certain respects their interests are better served than they were prior to 1976. This situation is attributed not to the decisions which were taken in parliament; but rather to the power which was exercised over farmworkers outside of parliament prior to the Bill's formal parliamentary passage, for which both the Government and the NFU are held causally, if not morally, responsible.

I. The Tied Cottage Debate - a Conflict of Interests

'Tied accommodation' consists of housing which is provided 'free of charge' along with a job or, to put it slightly differently, it is accommodation which is tied to employment. In the agricultural industry tied housing has a long history whose starting point is a matter of dispute between scholars. According to some, the agricultural tied cottage system has its roots in the feudal era, when the great manorial lords of precapitalist England were dependent upon a bonded, or tied, labour force to ensure for themselves an abundant supply of labour to work on their vast estates. In return for the provision of this labour, the serfs gained the right to live on the lord's land

and to cultivate certain areas for their own subsistence. This method of payment in kind virtually guaranteed the serf's obedience and diligence, for he was wholly dependent on the lord for his basic needs, including food and shelter. Although feudalism thus ensured the serf's subjugation to the lord, it also provided the serf with a degree of security in his housing and sustenance. For, as G.M. Trevelyan put it, although it was true that

"... the peasant could not strike and could not legally emigrate without his lord's consent, ... neither could his lord evict in fact, whatever may have been the case in theory."¹

The development of capitalism in general and the enclosure movement in particular saw a fundamental transformation in this reciprocal, if inequitable, relationship. Serfs were replaced by a new class of landless wage labourers, while lords of the manor lost their supremacy to a new class of wealthy and enterprising tenant farmers who sought economic profit from agriculture. These capitalist farmers paid low wages to their labourers and, as a measure of further economy, they included the worker's house which was provided on the estate, as part of the worker's wage. This placed the farm labourer in a position of great insecurity, for he was dependent on the farmer not only for employment but also for housing (and food and fuel). As in feudal times, these benefits were tied to the labourer's employment; but unlike previously, employment could be terminated at a moment's notice, leaving the worker both jobless and homeless.²

1 G.M. Trevelyan, quoted in:

A. Jones 'Rural Housing: the agricultural tied cottage' (Occasional Papers on Social Administration No.56, York: 1975) p. 13

2 A. Jones 'Rural Housing' pp. 13-16

The late 19th century saw further developments in the tied cottage system: according to some scholars, this period marks the true beginning of the agricultural tied cottage system.¹ The decline of farm service (in which workers lived in the farmhouse itself) combined with legislative restrictions on the use of labour gangs to create the future possibility of an agricultural labour shortage. It was with this threatening eventuality in mind that many farmers began to build new dwellings on their land, so as to ensure a continuous pool of labour for themselves: as long as they could provide housing, farmers were confident that they would not be short of hired workers. Many new cottages have been built since the late 19th century, but the broad principle behind their construction remains unchanged: it is still a means of attracting and controlling an adequate supply of labour for the farm enterprise.

As in feudal times, the modern farm worker often has little choice but to accept the accommodation which his employer offers him. It is the nature, rather than the extent, of this dependency which differs today from the feudal era. In pre-capitalist England, the landlord's provision of housing to his serfs was one element in the prevailing social relations of production; by contrast, the contemporary farmworker's reliance upon tied housing is linked primarily to the nature of the modern rural housing market.

Particularly since World War II, rural housing has been subject to special pressures which have combined to close off most non-tied housing to the farmworker. Among these pressures are rural second homes, country houses reserved for tourists, rural homes purchased by ex-urban retired people, and those which are bought by wealthy

1 H. Newby 'Tied Cottage Reform' B.J.L.S. Vol.4 1977

urban commuters. The high demand from these various quarters for housing in England's green and pleasant land has swallowed up much of the rural housing stock and has at the same time pushed up the rents and prices of those few houses which are put on the open market, placing them well beyond the means of most farmworkers. Thus, for example, in the mid-1970s, the pressures on the housing market were such that rural housing prices were on average 60% above the national average - yet farmworkers' earnings were only 67% of the all-industry average.¹

In this situation one would expect farmworkers - and other rural low-income groups - to turn to the public sector for housing. In fact, the severe shortage of council accommodation has closed off this option for many farmworkers. For reasons which a number of writers have speculated on, rural areas contain a considerably smaller proportion of council housing than do most urban areas, despite there being a comparable demand for such housing in the two areas.² In the late 1970s only 22% of all properties in predominantly rural districts were council-owned (as compared to the national average of 32%) and yet council house waiting-lists in rural areas have been known to include as many as 2,000 names.³ Nor is there any sign that this

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- 1 D. Clark 'Rural Housing: problems and solutions' in 'Rural Housing: problems and solutions - A Seminar Report' (Peak National Park Study Centre, N.C.V.O. and the Development Commission: 1982)
D. Phillips and A. Williams 'Council House Sales and Village Life' New Society 28 November 1981
A. Rogers 'Rural Housing' in G. Cherry (ed.) 'Rural Planning Problems' (Leonard Hill, London: 1976)
 - 2 H. Newby et al. 'Property, Paternalism and Power' (Hutchinson, London: 1978)
D. Phillips and A. Williams 'Rural Britain' (Blackwell, Oxford: 1984) Chapter Five
A. Larkin 'Rural Housing and Housing Needs' in J. Martin Shaw (ed.) 'Rural Deprivation and Planning' (Geo Abstracts, Norwich: 1979)
 - 3 Newby et al op.cit. p. 252
D. Clark op.cit.

trend is being reversed. Although roughly 50% of all houses built in England between 1974-1979 were provided by councils and housing associations, only 24% of these were in rural areas.

Agricultural workers' restricted access to private sector housing and the failure of the public sector to compensate for this have combined to force a growing proportion of the farm labour force to turn to tied accommodation wherever it is available. Whereas in 1948 only 34% of farmworkers lived in a tied cottage, by 1976 the proportion had risen to 53%.¹

The standard of housing provided in the tied cottage sector varies from region to region, and often from farm to farm, which makes generalisations on this topic difficult. The most comprehensive study of agricultural tied housing to date was carried out in 1974 by Barrie Irving and Linden Hilgendorf whose survey covered 804 farmworkers and 281 farmers in Britain.² They found that 4% of tied cottage inhabitants lived in houses less than 10 years old, whereas 60% were in houses built over 50 years ago. This compares with 13% and 36% respectively among farmworkers in non-tied accommodation. Irving and Hilgendorf also compared the amenities provided in tied and non-tied houses occupied by farmworkers. Their conclusions were that "the only significant difference between the two groups is that people not living in tied cottages are more likely to have central heating than those living in tied cottages". A more significant difference emerged, however, when the authors compared the distances which the two groups had to travel in order to reach public amenities and services. It should

1 Shelter 'The Forgotten Problem: a study of tied accommodation and the cycle of insecurity' (Shelter, London: 1979) p. 14

2 B. Irving and L. Hilgendorf 'Tied Cottages in British Agriculture' (Working Paper no.1, Tavistock Institute, London: 1975)

be noted that because tied houses are situated on or very near the farm at which their inhabitants work, tied cottage dwellers have a shorter distance to travel to and from work each day than do their non-tied cottage counterparts: 79% of the tied cottage sample had to travel only half a mile or less, as compared to 36% of the non-tied cottage respondents. However, distances to public amenities present a reversal of these advantages, a factor with particularly severe implications for the farmworker's family. For instance, 71% of the tied cottage dwellers in the sample had to travel half a mile or more to reach the nearest shop, compared to 42% of the non-tied cottage respondents. Only 1% of tied house inhabitants lived within half a mile of the nearest secondary school, compared to 19% of non-tied farmworkers. And, finally, the mean distance to the nearest shopping town for tied cottage dwellers was 6.36 miles, compared to 3.78 miles among non-tied respondents.

Only two thirds of all farms in Britain have agricultural dwellings on them, and of these 170,000 houses, half are occupied by tourists, members of farmers' families, and other persons not employed in agriculture. The remaining 85,000 houses and the farmworkers who inhabit them are characterised by certain notable trends. For example, over two thirds of farmworkers in South-East England and Scotland live in tied housing, whereas little over a quarter do in Yorkshire and Lancashire.¹ Moreover, tied cottage accommodation is linked to some extent with the inhabitants' occupations, as the table suggests:

1 Shelter 'Forgotten Problem' p. 14

PERCENTAGE OF REGULAR WHOLE TIME FARMWORKERS RECEIVING A HOUSE OR COTTAGE AS PAYMENT IN KIND: ENGLAND AND WALES 1982

Dairy Cowmen	67.8%
All other stockmen	51.8%
Tractor Drivers	56.9%
General Farmworkers	39.0%
Horticultural Workers	14.0%

(Source: Wages and Employment Enquiry, MAFF 1983)

Another interesting feature of the agricultural tied cottage system is that inhabitants of tied houses tend to receive higher than average wages for their industry. This is largely because the majority of tied cottage dwellers are stockmen who form the most skilled, most sought-after - and hence best paid - sector of the farm labour force. Where a tied cottage becomes available the farmer is likely to offer it to a stockman or similarly skilled worker as a means of attracting his labour, rather than to a general farmworker whose bargaining position is such that he would probably accept a job without the bonus of 'free' housing, often making do instead with sub-standard accommodation. A second possible reason for the tied cottage dweller being paid above-average wages is that the worker who lives in a cottage is likely to stay on the job longer and thus acquires a valuable knowledge of the employer's farm. The employer rewards the worker for this specialised knowledge with higher wages, so that the worker has incentive to remain on the farm. However, it is worth noting the corrolary to this factor: insofar as the worker's well-being depends on a specific relationship with a given farm, his mobility in the labour market will be restricted.¹

¹ Irving and Hilgendorf op.cit. p. 48

Although it may appear to an outsider to be uncontroversial, the agricultural tied cottage system represents far more than simply a means of accommodating 50% of the country's farm labour force: it can be found at the heart of many of the most bitter and intense conflicts in the history of agricultural labour relations. The attitudes held by farmers and farmworkers to the tied cottage system are in some cases diametrically opposed, as Giles and Cowie suggest:

"The employers defend the system as essential to the efficient operation of their business, whilst the workers attack it as demoralising, degrading and unnecessary."¹

Although such extreme views are not held uniformly by the country's entire population of farmers and farmworkers, the tied cottage has nevertheless provided a unique source of division in agricultural labour relations. The irreconcilability of the tied cottage conflict, together with the importance attached to it by each side, have made the tied cottage the single most contentious issue in agricultural labour relations for 75 years.

The importance of the tied cottage issue to each side is attributable to its close bearing upon the objective interests of agricultural employers and workers as defined by the capitalist economy in which they inter-act. To the employer, the tied cottage is a valuable instrument for ensuring adequate supervision of valuable livestock, as well as being a means of controlling the labour supply. Conversely, for the worker the tied cottage represents a tool for depressing agricultural wages, restricting labour mobility to other industries, and sharpening the worker's sense of insecurity and isolation. Given their importance

¹ A.K. Giles and W.J.G. Cowie 'Some Social and Economic Aspects of Agricultural Workers' Accommodation' J.A.E. Vol.14 No.2 1960 p. 148

to each side in the dispute, these economic nerves which the tied cottage cuts through deserve closer scrutiny.

The agricultural employers' case in favour of retaining the tied cottage system rests on two principle arguments. Firstly, employers insist that it is important to have skilled stockmen continuously on the farm premises in order to provide more or less constant cover over the stock, in case of emergencies such as calving or the outbreak of disease. Secondly, employers claim that without the ability to offer farmworkers free or subsidised housing, farmers would be unable to attract the necessary quantity and quality of farm labour required for the efficient running of farm enterprises.

The first of these arguments has been weakened in the post-war period by the increased use of telephones and automated transport which have enabled farmers, in the event of emergency, to contact stockmen who can report to work virtually at any time, regardless of where they live. Nevertheless, some farmers have continued to insist on the need, or at least the convenience, of having a man-on-the-spot in case of emergencies. In general, however, it is the second argument which has been emphasised over the past 40 years; unlike the first, its credibility has been greatly increased by recent developments. The fact that tied cottages are provided rent-free, or for a nominal rent set by the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB), is important in the context of the lack of rural council housing and the inability of most farmworkers to pay the market rent for the decreasing number of non-tied private houses which become available on the market.¹ It is this context which has greatly strengthened the farmers' case in favour of the tied cottage system, for their opponents are hard-pressed to suggest an alternative means by which to house the farm labourforce.

1 Shelter 'Report on Tied Accommodation' (Shelter, London: 1974) p. 10
G. Clark 'Housing and Planning in the Countryside' (Research Studies Press, Chichester: 1982) p. 35

In spite of the severe housing problems which many farmworkers would face if farm cottages were no longer made available to them, most agricultural workers have maintained a rigid opposition to the tied cottage system. They have based their arguments on three broad points, each of which relates to their objective interests which were outlined in Chapter One. Farmworkers contend that the tied cottage system restricts agricultural labour mobility; it gives rise to insecurity and industrial quiescence; and it has the effect of depressing agricultural wages.

The first of these contentions is based on the observation that for the tied cottage dweller, finding a new job has meant the need to find simultaneously new accommodation - a task which can prove to be difficult, particularly when the worker has a family to support. In this situation, the worker's mobility is usually restricted to new employment in which another tied house is available - which usually means another agricultural job. Movement outside the industry is made difficult by the fact that agricultural wages are often too low for the farmworker to accumulate saving which could be used to purchase or rent non-tied housing.¹ Thus, in many cases the tied cottage dweller is placed in an effective trap wherein new employment must provide yet another tied house.²

The second plank of the farmworkers' argument against the tied cottage system concerns the tied cottage dweller's insecurity which derives from the awareness that the termination of his employment - whether through illness, injury, dismissal, resignation or retirement - carries with

1 R. Gasson 'Provision of Tied Cottages' (Univ. of Cambridge, Department of Land Economy, Occasional Paper No.4: 1975) p. 84

2 See Shelter 'The Forgotten Problem' Chapter Two for a depiction of this tied housing trap.

it the likelihood of eviction and homelessness. Until the 1960s, the tied cottage dweller could be evicted from his home with little, if any, advance notice being given by the employer. The farmworker was left homeless, as well as jobless, and was dependent on the mercy of friends or relatives to provide temporary accommodation. Following legislation passed in the 1960s (the subject of the following section) the farmworker was given, at least in principle, a period of up to twelve months in which to find alternative accommodation for himself and his family before being physically evicted from the cottage. In practice, it was not until 1976 that farmworkers were really freed from the fear of being made homeless at the virtual whim of their employers. Until that year, insecurity was part of the tied cottage dweller's life, regardless of how fortunate people may have told him he was for having a 'free' house to live in.

The farmworker's Union journal, *Landworker*, is replete with emotional accounts of tied cottage evictions which give the onlooker a taste of the distress caused by evictions to farmworkers and their families.¹ There is, for example, the experience of Brother Williams in 1960:

"It was in January that Bro. Williams injured his shoulder in an accident at work, and he had no sooner returned to work after a couple of weeks off than he went down with pneumonia. Towards the end of February he was given notice terminating his employment and this was followed by a summons for possession of his cottage, which was heard in the County Court at the end of April. The Union arranged his defence, but there was no real answer to the claim and an Order was made for possession in 28 days. However, the employer undertook not to issue a Warrant for eviction before the end of June ..."

Brother Williams was a family man with nine children and a keen sense of responsibility. In spite of his poor health he travelled

1 E.g. *Landworker*: September 1946, March 1949, August 1960, December 1972

"... all over the country in search of work and a house. There were times when he slept rough in order to be able to carry on the search in that area on the following morning."¹

As agricultural employers have been quick to point out, the number of evictions which took place each year was relatively small. Prior to 1976 there were roughly 1,000 possession orders granted by the Courts to farmers each year, but the number of evictions was always much smaller than this - rarely over 20 a year.² (In many cases workers found somewhere, often temporary shelter, to move into before the bailiffs arrived to physically enforce an eviction.) Nevertheless, apart from the very real misery which this 'relatively small' number of evictions represents, tied cottage evictions were of profound significance for all tied cottage dwellers, not simply the 20 or so who were evicted annually. As the Union's sponsored Labour MP and one-time Vice President, Joan Maynard, explained:

"... eviction is merely the tip of the iceberg. It is not whether a person is evicted, it is whether the power is there to do it. That is what counts. That power has hung like the sword of Damocles over the heads of our people for many years ..."³

It was the possibility that they might be evicted which brought to many farmworkers a strong sense of insecurity and vulnerability. Moreover,

"It is not a simple concept, this insecurity. Being in a tied cottage colours one's attitude to many of life's vicissitudes ... Illness is something to be feared more than normally because being laid off for any length of time involves the risk of being dismissed. Old age is viewed with great apprehension: retirement brings nearer the day when some alternative accommodation must be found; loss of physical strength may necessitate the abandonment

1 Landworker August 1960

2 Shelter 'The Forgotten Problem' p. 15
Newby 'Tied Cottage Reform' p. 97.

3 Hansard Volume 910 4 May 1976 Col.1092

of agricultural work some years before retirement, adding the task of finding other work to that of finding other accommodation. Redundancy also poses similar difficulties should it arise. The occasional news of some fellow-worker's plight under any of these vicissitudes ... keeps such fears alive."¹

The insecurity brought upon farmworkers by the tied cottage system compounded their fear of losing their jobs which their labour market weakness carried with it. This dual weakness forced many farmworkers into positions of quiescence and apparent deference towards their employers who were also their landlords.² Rather than join the Union and oppose their employers' extensive power over their livelihoods, many farmworkers have chosen instead to 'play it safe' by cultivating harmonious relations with their employers-cum-landlords.³ Giles and Cowie found in their survey of farmworkers in Gloucestershire some evidence of this instrumental submissiveness and friendliness.

"A few confess frankly to feeling obliged to be careful in their demeanour, to experiencing a sense of dependence on their employer's goodwill. The vehemence with which most deny any such feelings, however, suggests an automatic face-saving reaction to a question which challenges their self-respect."⁴

It would be disingenuous to argue that the traditional quiescence and lack of militancy among farmworkers has been due wholly to the insecurity which tied cottage accommodation has placed upon them - especially since the proportion of farmworkers living in tied houses in the post-war period has rarely exceeded the 50% mark. Nevertheless, most historians agree that the tied cottage has played a significant role in retarding trade

1 Giles and Cowie, op.cit. p. 155

2 Gasson op.cit. p. 79

3 Landworker July 1966 provides an illustration of this phenomenon. It relates the case of "a sixty-nine-year old colleague who had been working with cutting cabbages in the pouring rain. When asked why he was doing it he replied: 'You know how it is. I am living in a house. If I do not do it, he will want it for someone else'."

4 Giles and Cowie op.cit. p. 156

unionism and labour militancy among agricultural workers.¹ Furthermore, it should be noted that although only half of the workforce live in tied cottages, many of these workers are drawn from the sector which has the strongest bargaining position in the labour market. Yet, as tied cottage dwellers, these stockmen and skilled workers would have been more reluctant than otherwise to flex their industrial muscle, for fear of losing their homes as well as their jobs if they failed.

The insecurity promoted by tied cottage accommodation has thus cemented the powerlessness experienced by farmworkers in the labour market. They have confronted formidable obstacles on two fronts, which helps to explain their reluctance to demand more forcefully the payment of higher wages. The tied cottage system is related to farmworkers' low pay in other respects. Although many tied cottage dwellers are paid higher rates than those farmworkers who do not live in tied accommodation, they are nevertheless paid poorly in comparison with similarly skilled workers in other industries. Employers often justify the payment of these low wages by pointing to the 'free' accommodation which they provide their employees with. Moreover, while this 'free' housing which some workers are provided with saves them from having to pay high rents, the cost of this perk is the inability to move from the tied house into other housing because of the low cash wage which is paid to the worker concerned. 'Free' housing is thus balanced by relatively low wages, a lack of independence from employers and labour immobility - factors which explain why tied cottage accommodation is regarded by many farmworkers as being a dubious privilege,

1 For example, G.E. Mingay 'The Transformation of Agriculture' in R. Hartwell et al 'The Long Debate on Poverty' (Institute of Economic Affairs: 1972) pp. 51-52
 Reg Groves 'Sharpen the Sickle!' (Merlin Press, London: 1981)
 G.E. Fussell 'From Tolpuddle to T.U.C.' (Windsor Press, Slough: 1948)
 Chapter Five

and why it is in practice a contravention of their objective interests as defined in Chapter One.

One solution to the problems relating to tied accommodation which has been put forward in the past, and which takes due account of the employers' argument that farm cottages are essential in view of the rural housing shortage, might be the abolition of 'privileged rents' for tied houses.¹ According to proponents of this claimed solution the houses would remain as physical entities for farmworkers to live in, but the tied system per se would be abolished. Once farmworkers were compelled to pay market rents for the farm cottages, their employers would be obliged to pay higher wages - which in turn would provide farmworkers with a greater choice as to where they lived and worked. However, for the time being, and particularly in the existing context of the rural housing shortage, even some of the most highly skilled farmworkers have to accept low cash wages where they are accompanied by a 'free' house. The tied cottage is, in effect, the "carrot which will tempt the agricultural worker to accept a low wage".²

It is worth noting further that the tied cottage system has been used to depress the wages of the agricultural workforce as a whole, rather than just those of the tied cottage dwellers themselves. The tied cottage is often pointed to by the Employers' Side of the Agricultural Wages Board when they argue against any significant increase in the agricultural minimum wage. The employers' provision of 'free' housing is used to justify the payment of low wages across the board, in spite of the fact that roughly half of the workforce pays council or private rents and mortgages and many of these non-tied workers are paid less than the workers in tied houses.

1 Joan Maynard quoted in the Landworker June 1975

2 Newby op.cit. p. 97

Some commentators and participants in the tied cottage dispute have claimed that although the workers' case has been argued strongly and consistently by their Union, it is not a view which is upheld by the majority of ordinary farmworkers.¹ Clearly, there have been some cases where farmworkers have felt relatively secure in their tied houses, where their employers have paid comparatively good wages and where they have therefore felt no immediate desire to see the tied cottage system abolished.² In other cases, farmworkers may express a wish to retain the tied cottage system because they see no viable alternative to it, particularly given their low wages and the rural housing shortage.³ However, such support for the tied system of housing is of a distinctly negative nature: tied cottages are regarded as desirable because they are seen as the only available option. The notion that workers' support for the tied cottage system is a negative support is borne out by the absence of any Union resolutions at Branch, Regional or National level in defence of the tied cottage system, which contrasts with the long string of resolutions calling for its abolition or reform to be found throughout the Union's history.⁴ Furthermore, in as much as the mass of farmworkers have been relatively silent on the tied cottage issue, this must be attributed at least partially to the very insecurity and fear of industrial conflict which is generated by the tied cottage system itself.

Above all, the tied cottage system runs counter to farmworkers' objective interests in the ability to bargain freely for higher wages and better conditions of work. By the same token, the tied cottage system satisfies

1 H. Rossi 'Shaw's Guide to the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976' (Shaw & Sons Ltd., London: 1977) p. 4
R. Gasson op.cit. p. 81

2 Shelter 'Report on Tied Accommodation' p. 9

3 H. Newby 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 190
Giles and Cowie op.cit. p. 155

4 cf. Hansard Vol.910 4 May 1976 Col.1092

the interests of agricultural employers in keeping labour costs low while at the same time maintaining peaceful labour relations.

The two sides of the tied cottage conflict thus represent anti-pathetic views and opposing interests at both objective and subjective levels. The employers benefit from the tied cottage system not only because it allows for the close supervision of animals and the proper housing of good workers, but also because it provides them with the ability to control the labour force, both numerically and in terms of labour relations, and this in turn serves their interests in efficiency and profitability. Meanwhile, the workers attack the system for tying them to the land, depressing their wages and enforcing their subservience to their employers. Although both sides of the dispute often obfuscate the issues involved through their use of misleading rationalisations and emotive language, in the final analysis each side is found to be pursuing a valid case. The employers want to protect their interests in low labour costs, the workers seek the freedom to demand better conditions without fear of reprisals. Stripped of its rhetoric, the tied cottage debate represents a "... conflict of interest between capital and labour with each side pursuing its legitimate interest to the detriment of the other".¹

The agricultural tied cottage has generated a profound bitterness among employers and workers, which contrasts somewhat with the relative uncontentiousness of tied housing in other industries. This is largely because those industries with large-scale tied accommodation networks - such as mining, the railways and the metropolitan police - also have sufficient resources to enable employees to remain in their tied house for a lengthy period of time after the termination of their employment,

1 Newby op.cit. p. 184

during which time alternative housing can be found. Conversely, in agriculture, although there is tied housing on a large-scale, it is distributed among many thousands of employers who each have at most only a handful of service houses. In the majority of cases, agricultural employers have been compelled to evict their workers promptly - although often regretfully - so as to offer new workers 'free' housing before stock and crops begin to suffer.¹

There is a further reason for the particular emotiveness of the tied cottage issue in agriculture. The conventionally divisive issue of wage negotiation has been removed from the farmyard, having become the responsibility of the anonymous AWB whose decisions are imposed upon farmers and farmworkers alike. As Howard Newby observed, "only the tied cottage has remained to epitomise the conflict between capital and labour".² This conflict is all the more intensive because of the otherwise 'friendly' relations which exist between farmers and farmworkers. On a day-to-day basis, many farmers and farmworkers work co-operatively and they enjoy what are frequently referred to as 'good labour relations'. However, tied cottage evictions, when they occur, underline the ultimate priorities of agricultural employers which are maximum production and economic profit - as opposed to the fulfilment of personal obligations to employees of many years' standing. The peculiarly friendly nature of agricultural labour relations are thrown into painful disarray by each economically motivated or threatened eviction which workers either experience or hear about. In this way, the tied cottage

1 R. Gasson op.cit. p. 1
 A. Jones op.cit. p. 52
 G. Clark op.cit. p. 1

2 H. Newby 'Tied Cottage Reform' p. 98

serves to remind farmworkers that behind their 'good labour relations' lies a skilful instrumentality on the part of their employers which sometimes obscures the conflict of objective interests which exists between the two parties.¹ Above all, it is a conflict which the employers appear to be better equipped to pursue.

II. The NUAAW's Alliance with the Labour Party: Power or Powerlessness?

In view of the harm inflicted upon farmworkers' interests by the tied cottage system, the farmworkers' Union committed itself to a long and vigorous campaign for tied cottage abolition. The issue was politicised as early as 1909 when George Edwards, the leader of the Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Smallholders' Union (a predecessor of the NUAW) addressed a Trades Union Congress in Ipswich. At the meeting, Edwards called upon Labour Members of Parliament to:

"... take up at once the issue of eviction of workmen and their families from their homes during trade disputes and do everything possible to pass into law a measure which would put an end to this cruel method of warfare."²

Ever since that date, the Union has conducted its campaign for tied cottage abolition by pressing the Labour Party to "take up the issue of eviction" on its behalf. This approach to the issue was adopted partly because the changes which the Union sought were specifically legal ones whose hoped-for effect would be the curbing of employers' power over their workers which derived from their role as landlords. As Landworker explained,

1 H. Newby 'Deferential Worker' pp. 421-422

2 Quoted in A. Jones op.cit. p. 16

"A change in the law can only be made by parliament, and the issue therefore automatically becomes a political one. The Tory Party has said quite plainly, 'We believe in the tied cottage system, and we intend that it shall remain'. There is only one other political party in the country which can hope to form a Government - the Labour Party."¹

A further, and in a sense related, reason for the farmworkers' dependency on the Labour Party was that, as Peter Self and Herbert Storing have noted, the Union did not in practice have the option of 'going it alone' because of its "intrinsic economic and organisational weakness". In a political campaign directed against the interests of agricultural employers - as the tied cottage campaign was - the Labour Party was the only effective ally to whom the Union could turn.²

The following narrative and analysis suggest that the Union's dependency on the Labour Party for assistance in its tied cottage campaign had important ramifications not only for the course which the campaign took, but also for the very nature of its goals. For, although numerous issues of Landworker suggest that many Union members and officers favoured in principle the wholesale abolition of the tied cottage system, in practice the Union is found to have aimed almost exclusively for tied cottage reform.³ This discrepancy is attributed to the consistent unwillingness of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) to place tied cottage abolition on the political agenda for reasons of political expediency. The PLP's rejection of the abolition option was usually implicit, being carried out most often through its inaction - that is, by the PLP's

1 Landworker January 1957

2 P. Self and H. Storing 'The State and the Farmer' (Allen & Unwin, London: 1962) pp. 175-176

3 For example: Landworker August 1921; July 1942; December 1946; July 1952

failure to discuss the possibility of placing abolition on the agenda.¹ On a few occasions, however, abolition was mobilised off of the agenda through decisive action, although it remained covert. This occurred, for example, in 1975 when a minority proposal to consider tied cottage abolition was swiftly stifled by numerous Labour MPs who branded the proposal 'unrealistic' and politically dangerous, thus squashing its legitimacy within the PLP.²

Meanwhile, the NUAAW lacked the necessary electoral, organisational and economic resources with which to sway Labour's attitudes on this matter. Recognising its own powerlessness and its dependency on Labour's support for the achievement of any change, the Union was compelled to campaign for tied cottage reform.³ The resulting consensus between successive Labour Governments and the NUAAW over the goal of tied cottage reform should therefore be recognised as being an enforced consensus which resulted from Labour's exercise of power over the Union through its persistent refusal to place farmworkers' higher interests in tied cottage abolition on the parliamentary agenda.

The NUAAW's heavy dependency on the Labour Party and its relative powerlessness to influence the Party's attitude vis-a-vis tied cottage reform thus explain why the Union concentrated on defending its members' relatively limited interests in tied cottage reform, rather than attempting to promote their greater interests in abolition. However, even within the framework of farmworkers' limited interests, certain reforms were more satisfactory than others for the farmworkers. The particular reform

1 Cf. P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Poverty' (Oxford Univ. Press, New York: 1970) p. 44: "... nondecision-making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced."

2 Ibid. p. 45

3 A. Jones op.cit. p. 16

which the Union sought from the Labour Party was the introduction of the exact same security of tenure for tied cottage inhabitants as that enjoyed by other, non-tied tenants. If achieved, this reform would remove the fear of eviction and homelessness which had plagued the tied cottage dweller for so long. It was true that apart from this improvement the tied cottage system would remain intact, along with its many problems which were not related specifically to the 'eviction' aspect of the system. Yet providing the farmworker with a secure house and home represented such a significant and desirable breakthrough that this version of tied cottage reform was referred to frequently, but misleadingly, in numerous Union documents and press releases as 'tied cottage abolition'. For the purposes of this study the distinction between reform and abolition is an important one to bear in mind.

* * *

(i) Labour Governments between 1945-1970

In spite of pre-election promises, the Labour Party's verbal support for the tied cottage campaign failed to materialise into concrete measures of tied cottage reform between 1945-1951 when the first majority Labour Government was formed. This was due largely to the opposition of the National Executive Committee (NEC) to carrying out such reform, in spite of the numerous Party Conference resolutions which had called for immediate action on the tied cottage.¹ The NEC's opposition contrasted with the Government's otherwise enthusiastic programme of national reconstruction and reform. Ironically, however, it was precisely this commitment to reconstruction which was used to justify the Government's neglect of the tied cottage issue.

¹ Ibid. p. 18. Also see: Landworker December 1946, July 1947, May 1948, June 1949, June 1950 and July 1952.

Even Landworker adopted this line of argument when it wrote in October 1951:

"Some members had said that the abolition of the tied cottage was one of the first things the Labour Government should have done. That was to reason from immature experience and the half knowledge which is indeed a dangerous thing. It was inevitable that Britain should begin her reconstruction with the overhaul of the coal industry and other of the basic industries. Great legislative measures such as the nationalisation of coal, the gas and electricity industries, the transport services, banking, the social security schemes, housing and other reforms had to take precedence over problems of lesser importance."¹

What was probably a more significant reason for the Government's failure to legislate on the tied cottage concerned its other involvements in the agricultural industry. The Minister of Agriculture, Tom Williams, introduced the Agriculture Act in 1947 - an Act which was to become immensely popular with farmers and landowners, but which was at the time of its parliamentary passage a highly controversial measure. The concept of extensive State support to agriculture in a non-military context was a novel one, and farmers were worried about the possible interference in their business which State support was (wrongly) expected to bring with it. Having secured the reluctant agreement of the National Farmers' Union (NFU) to cooperate in the new agricultural support system, Tom Williams was unwilling to jeopardise the delicate arrangement by introducing contentious legislation on the tied cottage.

In this way the Labour Government and the NFU together exercised power over the agricultural workers, rendering them powerless to place the issue of tied cottage reform on the parliamentary agenda between 1945-1951. The NFU's exercise of power involved the use of agriculture's newly-recognised economic importance as a resource with which to command the Agriculture Minister's virtually undivided attention and loyalty.

1 Landworker October 1951

This in turn resulted in the Government's failure to assist the farmworkers in their tied cottage campaign. Although the NFU may have exercised its power over farmworkers unconsciously and indirectly, while the Government exercised its power through inaction, together they contributed significantly to the NUAW's continued inability to promote farmworkers' interests in achieving tied cottage reform.

* * *

A lack of enthusiasm for tied cottage reform was not peculiar to the Labour Government of 1945-1951. Similar attitudes were in evidence among members of the Labour Governments which held office between 1964-1970. Prior to the General Election of 1964 George Brown, MP, gave a pledge during a speech at Swaffham that the Labour Party, if returned to office, would "ensure that there would be no eviction from a farm cottage without suitable accommodation first being made available". Compared to the apparent firmness of this promise, the actual performance of the new Labour Government proved to be a disappointment.

The significant pieces of legislation which were passed by the 1964-1966 and 1966-1970 Governments were the Protection from Eviction Act 1964, the Rent Act 1965, and the Agriculture Act 1970. The first of these was not strictly aimed at tied cottage dwellers, as it applied to all types of tenancies in the private unfurnished housing sector. The purpose of the Act was to provide security of tenure for tenants in such housing, but its greatest significance for the agricultural worker was that the tied cottage was brought to the statute book for the first time. Two important principles were established by the 1964 Act: first, before a landlord could evict a tenant he had to obtain a court order or else be liable to criminal proceedings; and second, the Court was empowered to suspend the execution of the order for up to twelve months.

The Rent Act 1965 made permanent the provisions of the Protection from Eviction Act, and it also changed the 'twelve month' period to 'a period to be determined by the Court'. However, under both the 1964 and the 1965 Acts the Courts were obliged to have regard for the circumstances of each case brought before it when it made its decisions over suspending orders for possession.

"For instance the court needed to consider whether suitable alternative accommodation was available to the occupier; whether the efficient operation of the farm would be seriously prejudiced unless the premises were available for occupation by another employee, or whether greater hardship would be caused by the suspension of the execution of the order than by its execution without such suspension or further suspension."¹

The likely failure of these two Acts to improve the farmworker's security of tenure was more or less conceded by the Government's Housing Minister, Richard Crossman. Crossman recognised the likelihood that the Courts would not suspend orders for any lengthy period of time, despite their new legal ability to do so, for fear of "prejudicing the efficient operation of the farm" (by depriving farmers of new workers to replace those ex-employees still living, but not working on their farms). Crossman therefore pledged that if the new legislation did not have the desired effect of preventing further evictions of farmworkers without the provision of alternative accommodation the situation would be reviewed at a later date and further measures would be considered. It was only this promise which prompted the NUAAW's Executive to accept the Bill which the Union regarded as being otherwise wholly inadequate.²

As Crossman anticipated, the 1964 and 1965 Acts failed to improve the situation of most agricultural tied cottage dwellers. Evictions

1 A. Jones op.cit. pp. 24-25. Details of these three pieces of legislation are taken from A. Jones, Chapter Three.

2 Landworker January 1966

continued to be threatened and enforced, and the Courts failed to suspend the execution of possession orders for the reasons which Crossman had foreseen. However, the NUAAW's Annual Report for 1968 suggests that the Government was reluctant to pass any further legislation on the tied cottage issue, and it notes further the Government's resort to nondecision-making in its efforts to avoid passing any such legislation. The Annual Report refers to numerous meetings held between Union officials and the Housing Minister, promises put forward by guest speakers at the Union's Biennial Conference, meetings held with the Agriculture Minister, and still more meetings with the Housing Minister - all of which failed to materialise into a firm commitment on the part of the Government to legislate strong measures of reform for the tied cottage system. Given its dependency on the Government, the Union had little choice but to adopt a patient and hopeful 'wait and see' attitude, while the Government continued to use procedural devices - continuously referring the issue to more meetings and committees - so as to avoid placing extensive tied cottage reform on the parliamentary agenda.¹

The NUAAW's persistence on the issue, and in particular its constant references to the promises made by the MPs George Brown and Richard Crossman, eventually resulted in action on the part of the Government. In 1970 the Agriculture Act was passed, the main effect of which was to compel the law courts to grant the tied cottage occupant a period of six months of security of tenure following the end of the occupant's formal right to occupy the cottage. However, this extra period of grace during which the tied cottage dweller was supposed to search for alternative accommodation was qualified by an amendment submitted by the House of Lords.

1 NUAAW Annual Report 1968 p. 42
 Bachrach and Baratz op.cit. p. 45

The amendment proposed that the Courts should once more be allowed and obliged to take into consideration the effects of its decision upon the efficiency of the individual farms concerned. If the six-month period granted to the worker was regarded as prejudicial to the interests of the farm enterprise, then the Court was empowered to waive the six-month period of grace. The Lords' amendment was accepted by the Commons because, according to the Government, this was the only way of getting the Bill passed before the impending dissolution of Parliament. Thus, a further procedural bias inherent in the parliamentary system of decision-making was invoked to prevent farmworkers from promoting and defending their interests in housing security.

The amendment to the Agriculture Bill was regretted and resented by the NUAAW, whose President Bert Hazell, complained:

"I can only hope that the time is not too far distant when we might have complete fulfilment of the promise given many years ago by the Labour Party. I am bitterly disappointed by the decision of the Government. I can do no more than convey what I know are the feelings of those I represent."¹

The Union's Vice-President, Joan Maynard, was similarly bitter over "this sordid sell-out of our membership", and she spoke out strongly against the Party of which she was a member.² Complaints such as these were echoed by almost all of the 1966 Conference delegates who spoke to the motion on tied cottages, which roundly condemned the Government for its failure to honour its pre-election pledge to improve farmworkers' security of tenure.

However, in spite of these and other criticisms of the Labour Government's performance on the tied cottage issue, the NUAAW stopped short of outright

1 Quoted in A. Jones p. 29

2 Landworker July 1966

rejection of the Party's work. However inadequate, the legislation marked at least some minor improvements in the farmworker's situation.¹ More significantly, the NUAAW's continuing reliance upon the Labour Party for political assistance in achieving its industrial goals meant that it could not afford a wholesale rejection of its alliance with the party, nor of the Government's very limited work on the tied cottage. As Bert Hazell had confessed, the only thing the Union could do was 'convey its feelings'. It could not take steps to set the Government's, or parliament's, agenda because it was too severely constrained by its members' electoral and economic marginality, as well as by their organisational weakness. In view of its powerlessness, the Union was ultimately compelled to accept whatever crumbs the Government was willing to throw in its direction.

There were three main reasons why the Government was willing to throw only crumbs at the NUAAW when it had promised the Union an entire loaf at Swaffham and on numerous other occasions. Firstly, tied cottage abolition, or a total overhaul of the existing tied cottage system, was ruled out by the continuing rural housing shortage which made farmworkers dependent on their employers for the provision of accommodation. As in the 1940s, it was argued in the 1960s that the 'abolition' of tied cottages would leave farmworkers homeless and therefore worse off - not, as some suggested, better off.²

Secondly, extensive tied cottage reform was blocked by the organised opposition of the NFU.³ Even the limited measures which the Protection from Eviction Bill proposed "generated much heated argument in and out of Parliament" and led the NFU to circularise all MPs with forboding warnings of the likely detriment which the Act would allegedly cause

1 Landworker October 1966

2 Landworker July 1947

3 Self and Storing op.cit. p. 147

to the farming industry.¹ The NFU's pressure on the Government was successful, not only because it was well-organised, but also because the Government's commitment to maximum agricultural production meant that it took seriously the NFU's threats about the negative implications of tied cottage reform for agricultural efficiency. The Government thus held conflicting allegiances to agricultural employers and agricultural workers, resulting in a temporary confusion and ambivalence. This was reflected in Crossman's explanation of the Courts' new duties under the Protection from Eviction Act:

"They should not forget that women and children might be thrown on to the streets, but also that a pedigree herd might be ruined. How one measures between the two, I do not know."²

As the Government's performance shows, it decided finally that evicting families was a lesser evil than harming pedigree herds, since such a step would at least leave agricultural production levels intact.

This preference for maximum production over security of tenure was closely tied to the third factor which militated against tied cottage reform. This was the Government's belief that only an 'efficient' agricultural industry would be capable of providing sufficient food to feed the urban working class at a low cost. Rather than question the validity of the NFU's argument that tied cottage reform would seriously harm agricultural production, the Government assumed that the NFU had sufficient expertise to make such predictions. On the basis of this assumption, the Government decided to protect the interests of farmers and industrial workers (the Government's natural constituency) at the relatively low cost of disappointing the agricultural labour force. The farmers had the necessary economic and organisational resources with which to promote

1 Landworker January 1965

2 Hansard Volume 702 16 November 1964 Col.1569

their interests, and the urban working class had the necessary economic and electoral resources for doing this; by contrast, farmworkers lacked these relevant resources, as a result of which they were unable to see their interests in extensive tied cottage reform promoted in parliament. Thus, by 1970 Labour's tied cottage legislation left agricultural employers scarcely worse off than they had been in 1964; by the same token, agricultural workers were hardly any better off.

(ii) The Labour Government of 1974-1979

When the Labour Government ended its period of office in 1970 it left behind it a disappointed and dissatisfied NUAAW. The Government had tried without success to balance the conflicting views and irreconcilable interests of the NFU, which believed that the tied cottage system was essential for an efficient agricultural industry, and the NUAAW, which held that tied cottages were unnecessary and unjust. Whatever its original intentions may have been, the Government's legislation had made in practice only the slightest of dents in the tied cottage system. The contentment of agricultural employers with the status quo in the early 1970s was suggested by their silence over the tied cottage issue, which contrasted with the farmworkers' continuing calls for tied cottage reform.¹

By 1970 there were in existence three classes of tied cottage occupants: service tenants, service licensees, and ordinary licensees. The security of tenure enjoyed by the latter two categories was negligible. In the case of the service tenant there was a six-month period of security of tenure as from the date when his right to occupy the cottage ceased.²

1 This is observed by A. Jones op.cit. p. 51

2 For details see G. Clark op.cit. p. 31

However, even this six-month allowance was not granted by the Courts in certain circumstances - most notably when the Courts ruled that efficient farm management would be seriously prejudiced if the cottage was not made available immediately to a new worker. Although the legislation was intended as a 'compromise' measure, it depended chiefly upon the compromise of farmworkers', not farmers', interests: nothing had been done to reverse the existing imbalance of advantages enjoyed by the two sides through the tied cottage system.

The manifesto issued by the Labour Party prior to the October 1974 General Election contained a significant admission that the previous Labour Government had failed to satisfy the interests of farmworkers in connection with the tied cottage issue. For, like many manifestos before it, it carried a promise to "abolish the tied cottage system" thereby acknowledging how little had been done so far over the tied cottage problem. Observers could be forgiven for the cynicism with which they may have greeted this well-worn promise; but on this occasion, their cynicism was arguably misplaced. For, although the Labour Government of 1974-1979 by no means 'abolished' the tied cottage system, it did tinker with it to an unprecedented extent.

The greater willingness of the new Labour Government to deal with the tied cottage issue, as compared to previous Labour Governments, is attributable to three main factors. (It should be noted that each of these factors emerged independently of any efforts which the NUAAW may have made to create a favourable climate for tied cottage reform.) Firstly, there was more housing available in Britain than there had been even ten years earlier. This gave the Government greater flexibility for reforming the tied cottage system, as it provided them with the option of re-housing at least some tied cottage occupants.¹

1 Ibid. p. 39

Secondly, the composition of the NEC and the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) had changed over the years, such that by 1974 they held a more favourable attitude than previously to the repeated insistence of party Conference and the TUC that something be done to improve the agricultural tied cottage system.¹ In particular, two MPs with key positions were determined to see the passage of legislation which would improve farmworkers' housing situation. The first was Joan Maynard who joined the NEC in 1972 and became the MP for Sheffield, Brightside in October 1974. Although she had lost her post as NUAAW Vice-President in 1972 when the office was abolished as an 'economy measure', Maynard remained an active member of the Union and she carried her support for it into Parliament where, as the NUAAW's sponsored MP, she devoted most of her maiden speech to the issue of tied cottage abolition.² The combination of Maynard's dedication to the issue and her key position in the Party was crucial because it meant that she could ensure its safe passage from becoming a Conference resolution, into a Manifesto commitment, into part of the Queen's Speech and finally an item for discussion and legislation in the House of Commons. Maynard was successful in guiding the issue through this complex process and Gavin Strang, MP, complemented her efforts with his own. Strang's particular contribution was his continuous drumming up of support for the Government's tied cottage programme both within and beyond Parliament, and his careful steering of the Bill through the parliamentary process so that it could be transformed from a Bill into an Act. In particular, Strang's position as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) enabled him to fulfil his role as successfully as Maynard had done hers.

1 For detailed comparisons of the NEC's changing composition between the 1960s and the 1970s - and the significance which this had for tied cottage reform - see Michael Darke's forthcoming book on the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976.

2 Landworker June 1975

The third factor which explains the new Government's determination to reform the tied cottage system was its commitment to the Social Contract. This was a programme designed to promote mutual support and cooperation between the Labour Government and the TUC, with the intention of serving the interests of both Government and the Unions. Although the spirit and the substance of the Social Contract had long dissolved by 1979, they had a beneficial effect upon the NUAAW's campaign for tied cottage reform in the Government's earlier years. The Government looked relatively favourably upon Maynard's and Strang's efforts because the question of tied cottage reform was framed in terms of the Social Contract in which the Government placed so much hope: if the Government helped the Unions on issues such as housing, then the Government could expect in return the Unions' cooperation over the otherwise conflictual issue of incomes policies. It was particularly significant that Anthony Crosland, the Secretary of State for the Environment in 1974 and 1975, viewed the tied cottage issue within the Social Contract framework, because he was to play an important role in promoting the tied cottage legislation (which was regarded partly as a 'housing' issue, rather than strictly as the concern of agricultural ministers).

Labour's election manifesto committed the new Government to enforcing the "abolition" of the agricultural tied cottage system, but by the mid-1970s the concepts of tied cottage abolition and tied cottage reform were being used interchangeably by politicians and Union officials alike. The Manifesto promise was consequently interpreted by most people as a pledge to improve farmworkers' security of tenure within the tied cottage system, rather than to abolish the system as such. It is therefore surprising to find that in the Government's early days discussions were held between some Labour MPs over the respective merits of abolition versus reform.

One or two voices were raised in favour of total abolition, by MPs who proposed the municipalisation of farm cottages. However, the financial cost involved in the compulsory purchase of farmers' cottages by local authorities was regarded by the great majority of MPs as being far in excess of what was practical. Moreover, the panic and opposition which compulsory purchase was expected to generate made such a move politically undesirable. With the use of dominant values such as 'practicality' and 'pragmatism' Labour's MPs swiftly mobilised the option of wholesale tied cottage abolition off of the parliamentary agenda at an early stage in the Government's period of office. However, to compensate for this exercise of power over the farmworkers the Party turned its attention to finding a means by which it could promote farmworkers' more limited interests in gaining security of tenure within the tied cottage system.

The Government was well-equipped to counter any possible accusations of having 'sold-out' the NUAAW by opting for reform instead of abolition. Most notably, it could point to the enthusiastic support given by the NUAAW leadership to the Government for its proposals on tied cottage reform. When the Government first put forward these proposals to the Union's leaders the latter accepted them without hesitation for, although they did not constitute abolition, "they went 90% of the way".¹ After waiting 60 years for a significant improvement in farmworkers' housing, the Union leaders regarded the Government's proposals as a giant step forward, however far they fell short of abolition.

The Government's aim, then, was to provide tied cottage occupants with the same security of tenure which other Rent Act protected tenants enjoyed. This would mean that farmworkers could not be forced by their landlords to move out of their homes and, sometimes quite literally,

1 This was explained to me during an interview with Reg Bottini (on 30 November 1984), who was the NUAAW's General Secretary between 1970-1977.

on to the streets. Insofar as this reform enabled the farmworker to retain control of the tied cottage after the termination of his employment, it represented a severe threat to the interests of farmers who insisted on their need to retain complete freedom in the use of the cottages as a means of attracting an adequate work force. The more security of tenure the farmworker was given, the less leeway the farmer would be left with in the operation and use of his housing stock as an instrument of labour control. It was therefore to be expected that the NFU would oppose the Government's proposed tied cottage reform in the hopes of preventing it from reaching the statute books.

The NFU's most extensively and skilfully used resource in its campaign against the Government's proposed tied cottage reform was its ability to control and manipulate information.¹ Although the NFU used this resource to influence Labour MPs, it did this ultimately in order to exercise power over farmworkers rather than the Labour MPs as such – for it was the farmworkers', not Labour's, interests which were to be frustrated by the NFU's actions. The Labour MPs acted as intermediaries in this power relationship between the NFU and the farmworkers, for it was via the NFU's influence over the MPs that the NFU succeeded in preventing the proper promotion and defence of farmworkers' interests within the parliamentary arena.

Prior to the parliamentary passage of the new Rent (Agriculture) Bill, the Government had set aside a period for consultation during which it invited the views of all interested parties on its proposed reforms. It was during this period that the NFU conducted its extensive lobbying campaign which involved issuing all MPs with written accounts of the chaos and impoverishment which would allegedly result in the agricultural

1 Cf. R. Dahl 'Who Governs?' (Yale Univ., New Haven: 1961) Chapter 23

industry (and beyond) if the Government went ahead with its tied cottage plans. The NUAAW's General Secretary later described the NFU's campaign as being:

"Total and complete. Every string was pulled. All MPs were circulated. (The NFU made out that) it was going to be a disaster for British agriculture. Every stop was pulled ... they left no stone unturned."¹

The information which the NFU distributed to MPs was essentially contained in their formal reply to the Government's 'Consultative document'.² In this the NFU made the following claims:

"The provision of accommodation on the farm for farmworkers is essential if the full food-producing potential of agricultural land in the UK is to be achieved. The abolition of the system without the creation of an effective alternative will surely lead to a decline in the efficiency of all sections of farming and will have particularly harsh consequences in the livestock sector ... If service houses are to cease to be available on farms the resulting disruption of agriculture will mean inevitably that food prices will need to be increased ... any interference with the freedom of the worker to be housed on the farm, and hence with the chances of attracting the right type of labour, will be an added disincentive to expansion and will lead ultimately to reduced food production."³

The NFU thus resorted to its two most frequently invoked arguments in defence of the agricultural tied cottage, or 'service cottage' as the NFU prefers to call it. The first argument concerned the need among livestock farmers to have a man-on-the-spot, and the second related to the necessity of providing housing in order to attract the 'right type of labour'.

The validity of the first of these two arguments was questionable. Giles and Cowie pointed out as early as 1960 that if it was in fact essential

1 Reg Bottini during interview: see p. 226 Note 1

2 'Abolition of the Tied Cottage System in Agriculture: Consultative Document' (Department of the Environment and MAFF: 1975)

3 NFU Paper Cyclo 1633/75 Parl.201 29 September 1975

for a farmer to have a farmworker living in a particular house then one would expect that if the worker wished to move from the house into a non-tied house off of the farm, the farmer would be compelled to replace the worker altogether. Giles and Cowie's survey showed, however, that only about a quarter of farmers in their sample reacted in this way. The remainder allowed the ex-tied cottage dweller to remain in employment, despite living off of the farm; or else they considered each case on its own merit. Giles and Cowie concluded that:

"Natural reaction as this may seem, it is not logical if the cottage is really essential. There is surely some suggestion here that the tied cottage may not always be as important in reality as some farmers think."¹

A further counter-argument to the man-on-the-spot claim was raised by an alert Labour MP:

"I am told that it will be quite impossible to run any kind of dairy undertaking without the agricultural tied cottage ... I am told that the cottage is essential because the worker must be on the spot at all hours, day and night. One never knows, apparently, when a cow will have a calf or when a sheep will have a lamb. We are told that there will be dire consequences if the worker is not present. My wife managed to have a son on a couple of occasions, once very recently, and I found no need to employ a midwife in a tied cottage anywhere near the house. This argument seems a little out of touch with modern developments, particularly in transport."²

Conversely, in the context of the existing rural council house shortage and the inflated prices of private sector housing, the NFU's second argument in favour of retaining the tied cottage system was a highly convincing one. The NFU insisted that unless farmers were allowed to continue to provide their workers with cheap housing, they would be unable to attract the necessary quantity and quality of labour - for where would such labour

1 Giles and Cowie op.cit. p. 151

2 Hansard Volume 910 4 May 1976 Col.1137

be housed? As plausible as this argument was, it was firmly rooted in two tacit assumptions: that the rural council house shortage and the low pay of farmworkers were both immutable facts of life.

It is not surprising that the NFU built these two assumptions into its arguments, for to have done otherwise would have been irrational. For farmers to campaign in support of higher wages for farmworkers or in favour of extensive council house construction would have been contrary to their interests in keeping their production costs (and their rates) low while retaining maximum control over their workers. The NFU was therefore behaving entirely rationally when it defended the status quo against the perceived threats posed to it by Labour's plans for tied cottage reform.

The most notable feature of the NFU's campaign was not that it was aimed at satisfying farmers' legitimate interests in profit maximisation and labour control: it was that in spite of the inaccuracies and assumptions on which the campaign was based, and despite Labour's professed commitment to the farmworkers' cause, many Labour MPs were convinced by the NFU that extensive tied cottage reform was undesirable. It was by persuading Labour MPs that tied cottage reform would be ill-advised that the NFU managed to defend its interests in labour control, while rendering the NUAAW powerless to promote, via the Government, the interests of farmworkers in housing security. Although the MPs may not have wanted to frustrate farmworkers' interests, their intermediary role in the NFU's exercise of power was crucial to the success of that power exercise: in this respect Labour shared (causal) responsibility with the NFU for the continued thwarting of farmworkers' interests.¹

1 P. Saunders 'Urban Politics' (Hutchinson, London: 1979) pp. 49-59
J. Gaventa 'Power and Powerlessness' (Univ. of Illinois, Chicago: 1982) p. 67

The NFU's indirect exercise of power over the NUAAW was made possible by the interplay of a number of factors. Firstly, side-by-side with the Party's promise to improve the lot of the farmworkers there was an overriding commitment among the majority of Labour MPs to support the agricultural industry, whose continued generation of wealth was regarded as a vital asset for the country's balance of payments. Any threat to the industry's output was viewed by MPs as an economic crisis which was to be pre-empted or overcome by whatever means were necessary. If the industry's efficiency demanded a degree of sacrifice from the workforce, as the NFU suggested it did, this would have to be carried out in the interests of the nation as a whole. Since MPs did not contemplate restructuring the social basis of the agricultural industry so as to remove this division between capital ('efficiency') and labour's interests, farmworkers found that they could hope for tied cottage reform only insofar as it did not threaten the existing structure and levels of agricultural production. This constraint was made clear in the Government's Consultative Document:

"... The focus should be on how to shape the legislation on lines that will enable farmers, farmworkers, local authorities and other interests concerned effectively to adapt themselves to the changing requirements of modern society while maintaining the key contribution which this great industry can make to the national economy."¹

In this respect there was a degree of tension, as there was in previous Labour Governments, between the Government's commitment to the irreconcilable interests of both agricultural capital and labour. The NFU promoted the interests of agricultural capital by highlighting at every available opportunity its economic importance in terms of the national economy.

1 'Consultative Document' (DOE and MAFF) Preface (my italics)

Conversely, by virtue of farmworkers' structural location in the economy, the NUAAW had no comparable economic resource with which to influence the political decision-makers. Nor did the farm workforce have significant electoral resources which it might have been able to use (indirectly) to compensate for its economic weakness. Hence, as on previous occasions, it was the Government's commitment to capital which prevailed.¹

The commitment of virtually all Labour MPs to the interests of agricultural capital does not in itself explain why they should be prepared to believe that extensive tied cottage reform would seriously damage agricultural production. The reason for their adoption of this belief was that their commitment to agricultural efficiency combined with two other factors: the ignorance of many Labour MPs about agricultural affairs; and the excellent resources which the NFU had access to with which to exploit this ignorance.

The lack of knowledge about agriculture among Labour MPs was due above all to their predominantly urban origins, interests and political bases. The Labour MP for Lichfield and Tamworth noted that although he himself represented a constituency in which there was a considerable amount of agricultural activity,

"... on the Labour side of the House it is increasingly rare to represent such a constituency, because the division between the parties is becoming increasingly one of urban and rural interests and seats."²

Not only has the Labour Party had historically little support or political representation among agricultural constituencies; its MPs have also had far less personal experience of the agricultural scene than their

1 R. Miliband 'The Power of Labour and the Capitalist Enterprise' in J. Urry and J. Wakeford 'Power in Britain' (Heinemann, London: 1973) p. 136

D. McEachern 'A Class Against Itself' (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge: 1980) p. 100

R. Dahl op.cit. pp. 228 and 163-165

Conservative counterparts. In the parliament of 1975/1976 there was a total of 78 MPs who declared themselves to have private interests in agriculture: 65 of these were Conservative while only 7 were on the Labour benches, with the remainder being shared out between four other parties.¹

In the context of Labour's relative inexperience in agricultural matters, the NFU was encouraged to use its organisational and economic resources to their full capacity, putting forward to MPs at every available opportunity the notion of impending agricultural disaster if the Government's plans were implemented without first being modified.² The NFU's superior knowledge of agricultural matters, coupled with the economic importance of agricultural capital (which Labour politicians did not question) provided the NFU with a certain authority to pronounce upon the needs of the industry as a whole. Thus, when the NFU claimed that the profitability of agriculture would suffer if extensive tied cottage reform were instituted, Labour politicians tended to believe the argument rather than to challenge it, for they wished to avoid any risk of damaging the efficient production of food. At the same time, the NFU's tradition of 'political neutrality' proved to be of great value, for it meant that the NFU had channels of communication not only with its 'natural allies' - the Conservative and farming MPs - but also with Labour Members of Parliament whose ignorance over farming issues meant that they would be relatively open to the NFU's views on tied cottage reform. In this sense the NFU's organisational, economic and information resources were mutually reinforcing, with the result that the NFU encountered few difficulties in persuading the Labour Government not to promote farmworkers' interests in gaining full security of tenure.

1 A. Roth 'The Business Background of MPs: 1975-1976' (Parliamentary Profiles, London: 1975)

2 See the NUAAW Annual Report 1974

Nor was the NFU hindered in its lobbying by the NUAAW's counter-lobbying. Indeed, one could hardly speak of a competition in this sphere between the two organisations because of the tremendous inequality of their organisational and financial resources. For example, while the NUAAW was struggling with debts which forced it only a few years later to merge with the Transport and General Workers' Union, the NFU had a healthy financial balance with which to pay for a political campaign. Its budget for 1976-1977 was as follows:

£1,562,521	=	County Branch expenditure
£2,412,677	=	Headquarters expenditure
£4,075,198	=	Overall expenditure, including provision
=====		for contingencies

The NFU's income for that year from subscriptions alone was £4.2 million, on top of which it earned an undisclosed income from its numerous financial investments. Compared to this wealth, the NUAAW claimed an income in 1977 of £869,545 and a total expenditure of £830,355.¹

Moreover, the NFU had to its advantage many years' experience of parliamentary lobbying, with the result that its methods were by the 1970s highly sophisticated and effective. Traditionally the NFU had relied on lobbying MPs directly in the House of Commons, either orally or by circulating them with written information sheets. The great success of this approach led other pressure groups to adopt similar tactics with the result that by the 1970s, the NFU found the halls of Westminster to be "packed with lobbyists". Consequently, the NFU complemented its traditional lobbying practices with the more subtle approach of "taking

1 NFU Annual Report 1977
NUAAW Annual Report 1980-1981

MPs out to lunch or dinner" and discussing the issues with them in a more relaxed and congenial atmosphere.¹

By contrast, the NUAAW held purely formal meetings with Labour MPs, and with a few Liberal MPs whose support in the tied cottage campaign was regarded as crucial, given Labour's tiny and unreliable majority of three in the House of Commons in 1975. In spite of this precarious parliamentary situation, the Union never met with any Conservative MPs to discuss the tied cottage campaign - because the NUAAW expected them all to oppose the campaign, regardless of anything the NUAAW might say or do.² Given Labour's small majority this difference of approach between the NFU and the NUAAW (in which the former confronted MPs of all parties while the latter devoted its energies largely to negotiating with its known allies) was vitally important. If more Labour MPs became convinced of the NFU's case than Liberal MPs were of the NUAAW's, the Union would lose the opportunity of achieving any tied cottage reform at all - an eventuality which appeared highly likely.

In an attempt to compare more systematically the strength of the ties which exist between the NFU and MPs on the one hand, and the farm-workers' Union and MPs on the other, I carried out a postal questionnaire in January 1985. The survey was relatively simple so as to ensure maximum returns from the respondents. Copies of the questionnaire were sent to the NFU's 37 County Secretaries in England and the Agricultural and Allied Workers' National Trade Group's (AAWNTG-TGWU) 37 District Officers in England. The response rate was 18 out of 37 from the NFU and 27 out of 37 from the AAWNTG. The results of the survey are set out in the table below.

1 Explained to me during an interview with Michael Darke (26 February 1985) who was the NFU's Parliamentary Secretary at the time when the Rent (Agriculture) Bill was being discussed in and outside of parliament. Mr Darke was responsible for NFU contacts with MPs at Westminster.

2 Explained to me by Reg Bottini: see p. 226 Note 1

RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL MPS AMONG OFFICERS OF THE NATIONAL FARMERS' UNION AND THE AGRICULTURAL AND ALLIED WORKERS' TRADE GROUP, 1985

	NFU %	AAWNTG %
1. Is consultation with local MPs a significant part of your work?		
YES	95	7
NO	5	93
2. How often do you meet with MPs to discuss NFU/AAWNTG business?		
WEEKLY	0	0
EVERY 2 WEEKS	0	0
MONTHLY	17	0
EVERY 2 MONTHS	50	4
EVERY 6 MONTHS	11	11
OTHER	22	52 rarely/never 23 as need arises 11 other
3. How successful is your consultation with MPs?		
NOT VERY	0	40
FAIRLY	66	11
VERY	17	4
OTHER	17	33 n/a 11 other
4. Does the success of the consultation depend significantly on the MP's party affiliation?		
YES	17	52
NO	83	7 41 n/a *
5. Which Party is generally most cooperative?		
CONSERVATIVE	22	0
SDP/LIB ALLIANCE	22	0
LABOUR	5	60
Mainly/only Conservative MPs in the area*	61 17 * whoever is in opposition	7 33 n/a *
	N = 18	N = 27

* This response was not offered as an option in the questionnaire, but was given without prompting by respondents.

NOTES: 1. Figures are rounded to add up to 100%
2. NFU responses to Question 5 add up to over 100% because a number of respondents gave more than one answer.
3. n/a = not applicable

Several conclusions concerning the two organisations' political resources can be drawn from the survey. First of all, unlike the farmworkers' Head Office in London's Grays Inn Road, the NFU's Knightsbridge Headquarters can depend on their regional officers to back up direct contacts with Westminster through extensive consultation with MPs at the constituency level. Secondly, to the extent that lobbying is carried out in the constituencies, that which the NFU's County Secretaries have undertaken has not only been more consistent but also more successful than that performed by the AAWNTG's District Officers. Third, the NFU's County Secretaries replicate the practice of Headquarters officials by negotiating successfully with MPs of all Parties. Conversely, to the limited extent that District Officers consult their local MPs, they claim to have achieved success only with Labour MPs. Given the predominance of Conservative MPs in rural areas (which numerous respondents commented on without prompting) the overall lack of lobbying by the District Officers can be attributed at least partly to their anticipation of failure were they to contact their local (Conservative) MPs on Union business. By contrast, 63% of NFU respondents who noted the prevalence of Conservative MPs in their areas also pointed out that where local MPs have been in the past Labour, or where one or two Labour MPs exist among a majority of Conservative MPs, these Labour politicians have proven to be as cooperative as those from the Conservative Party. This record of cross-party success encourages County Secretaries to maintain their consultation with local MPs as a significant part of their work.

The NFU's programme of opposition to extensive tied cottage reform highlighted its ability to draw upon a relatively abundant supply of capital and parliamentary contacts for use in a campaign directed against a measure which it regarded - and portrayed - as prejudicial to the interests of farmers and farm production. By contrast, the farmworkers' poor economic

and organisational resources, plus their electoral weakness and lack of parliamentary allies, were such that they depended overwhelmingly on the efforts of the NUAAW's sponsored MP, Joan Maynard, and her parliamentary colleague Gavin Strang for the promotion and protection of even their very limited interests.

The superiority and apparently cumulative nature of the NFU's campaigning resources became evident during the consultative period which preceded the parliamentary stage of enacting tied cottage reform. It was during this period that the NFU mobilised its resources and succeeded in convincing at least some Labour MPs that any far-reaching reform of the tied cottage system would have detrimental effects upon levels of farm production. When I spoke with Gavin Strang about this, he commented that the NFU even had some influence on Labour Ministers, "who reckoned that [tied cottage reform] would damage agriculture". The NFU achieved its influence among Labour backbenchers and Ministers chiefly by "lobbying MPs and creating a climate of opinion whereby people were receptive to the idea that the dairy industry, for example, could not go a long way without tied cottages..."

Strang attempted initially to counter this notion by travelling up and down the country in an effort to explain to a variety of agricultural and non-agricultural audiences that there were potential benefits to be derived from the Government's plans for tied cottage reform. According to Strang, a 'hard line' approach was adopted at first, in which he refused to bow to the NFU's threats, attempting instead to point out the alleged spuriousness of some of the NFU's arguments. However, the NFU held out its campaign against the Government's proposals and managed to sustain its influence over Labour politicians. The result was that Strang was eventually compelled to moderate his 'hard line' through the introduction

of a concessionary measure into the Government's guidelines for the forthcoming legislation.

The Government's eventual revision of its original plans for tied cottage reform constituted an effective exercise of power over farmworkers insofar as it once again rendered farmworkers powerless to promote their interests in gaining complete (Rent Act) housing security through the parliamentary channels of policy-making. However, the Government's exercise of power was far from straightforward. It was compelled to renege on its original commitments and to exercise power over the farmworkers because of external pressures which were acting upon the Government at the time.

Firstly, the country faced a creeping 'balance of payments crisis' which, unless halted and reversed, spelt out doom for the Government and (allegedly) the country as a whole. This economic crisis shaped the Government's entire political agenda, including its policy on tied cottage reform. The Government regarded agricultural capital as a useful asset in forestalling the impending crisis and for this reason it sought to appease and satisfy the interests of the representatives of agricultural capital. One way of doing this was to retreat from its original proposals for tied cottage reform and to move towards sufficient moderation for agricultural efficiency not to be threatened.

Secondly, the Government's compulsion towards moderation is explicable by Labour's small majority in the House of Commons at the time of the tied cottage debate. The parliamentary 'rules of the game' were such that if the Government could not carry the entire PLP as well as some Liberals on the tied cottage issue, then the Bill would be lost altogether. The only perceived means of avoiding such a defeat was by moderating the Government's original tied cottage reform plans so as to quell the NFU's opposition, which in turn would guarantee the PLP's and Liberals' support for the forthcoming legislation.¹

1 D. Coates 'Labour in Power?' (Longman, London: 1980) pp. 94-96 and 150-151

The Labour Government's exercise of power appears to have been both reluctant and yet unavoidable; above all, however, it was highly effective for it cemented the farmworkers' powerlessness to promote their interests in achieving extensive tied cottage reform. Labour, along with the NFU, must be held causally responsible for this setback; however, to refer to 'moral' responsibility in this context would be wholly inappropriate.¹

The concession introduced by the Government involved the proposal to establish Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees (ADHACS) whose composition will be considered in Section III. The broad effect of the ADHAC measure was to enable agricultural employers to evict ex-employees from their cottages as long as two conditions were satisfied. Firstly, the farmer had to prove to the satisfaction of the ADHAC that the tied cottage in question was essential for an incoming worker to move into; and secondly, the local housing authorities had to be able to provide the ex-worker with suitable alternative accommodation. The proposed procedure was that once the farmer had convinced the ADHAC that the cottage was needed for a new worker, the ADHAC would advise the local authority on the urgency of the case in question. In its turn, the local authority would act on the basis of this advice, using its 'best endeavours' to find suitable alternative accommodation for the ex-farmworker to move into within the time advised by the ADHAC.

The ADHAC provision was agreed in principle during the consultation period prior to the Bill's parliamentary passage, at a meeting held between

1 S. Lukes 'Power: a radical view' (Macmillan, London: 1974) pp. 55-56
 W.E. Connolly 'The Terms of Political Discourse' (2nd edition, Martin Robertson, Oxford: 1983) pp. 94-101, 131
 P. Saunders op.cit. pp. 49-59
 M. Parenti 'Power and the Powerless' (St. Martins, New York: 1978) p. 5
 G. Therborn 'What does the ruling class do when it rules?' in Giddens and Held (eds.) 'Classes, Power and Conflict' (Macmillan, Basingstoke: 1982) pp. 231-232

Ministers, Civil Servants and representatives of the NFU and NUAAW.

When the NUAAW first heard about the ADHAC measure it opposed it on the grounds that the measure threatened to dilute farmworkers' long-awaited security of tenure. However, having already compromised their interests in tied cottage abolition, the workers' leaders were now compelled to compromise yet again, this time on the ADHAC measure, for they feared that their failure to do so would jeopardise the satisfaction of even their limited interests in acquiring a degree of housing security. Consequently, the NUAAW representatives finally agreed to the concession (in spite of opposition to this move by the Union's left-wing which had been carefully excluded from the decisive consultative meetings).

Once the ADHAC provision was agreed in principle (its precise form was not thrashed out for some months) the NFU's greatest fears over the Government's reform plans dissolved. It no longer opposed the Rent (Agriculture) Bill to the extent which it previously had done, resigning itself instead to the forthcoming legislation. There were a few final attempts to prevent the legislation from going through, such as the move within MAFF to publish a White Paper instead of a Bill, thus leaving the publication of a Tied Cottage Reform Bill for a later date. Gavin Strang was aware that such procrastination would probably destroy altogether the existing opportunity to pass tied cottage legislation. He therefore convinced the Minister of Agriculture, Fred Peart, to go ahead with the planned Rent (Agriculture) Bill.

Similarly, the NFU rallied opposition to the Bill among its political allies in the House of Lords who, being many of them farmers and landowners, took a hostile view of the Rent (Agriculture) Bill. The Lords introduced amendments to the Bill which, if passed, would have left the Act with scarcely more bite than that of previous tied cottage reform Acts.

Among other amendments, the Lord proposed: the exclusion of livestock and forestry workers from the Bill; the replacement of the "best endeavours" clause with one which placed an absolute duty upon local authorities to provide alternative accommodation within three months; the enablement of authorities to house farmworkers in caravans and other temporary accommodation if no alternative accommodation was available; and the annulment of all provisions where the worker had been dismissed from his job for 'misconduct'.¹ As the NUAAW's General Secretary put it, the Lords:

"... emasculated the Bill beyond recognition, and returned to the Commons an instrument that was virtually meaningless as far as both the Government and the Union were concerned."

However, Bottini reported to his members:

"... the Government again stood firm and reversed the Lords' amendments by use of the guillotine procedure. On its return to the House of Lords, the Bill was accepted as re-amended."²

* * *

The Rent (Agriculture) Act was passed in 1976 and came into effect on 1 January 1977. The NUAAW heralded the Act as "the most significant development in the Union's history"³ and breathed an almost audible sigh of relief and achievement, having finally reached its 70-year old goal. Many Labour MPs and Ministers also showed signs of satisfaction with their work, in the apparent belief that the Rent (Agriculture) Act

1 H. Newby 'Tied Cottage Reform' p. 107

2 Landworker January 1977

3 Ibid.

fulfilled the Party's promise to "disengage farmworkers' conditions of employment from the circumstances in which they are housed".¹

Insofar as the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 did mark a "significant development" in the Union's history it was an accomplishment which owed a great deal to the fortuitous presence in the House of Commons of two sympathetic MPs, Gavin Strang and Joan Maynard, whose efforts to overcome some of the obstacles to tied cottage reform proved to be successful.

The achievement of tied cottage reform owed something also to the fact that the NFU was not seriously opposed to it. Once the NFU had secured the ADHAC concession from the Government, the only serious opposition to reform came from the NFU County Secretaries who in certain cases voiced local hostility to the Bill. At NFU Headquarters, however, there was a general recognition that with the inclusion of the ADHAC provision the Bill did not in practice present a threat to farmers' interests. Therefore, apart from a posture of opposition which they adopted chiefly for the benefit of the County Secretaries, the NFU's national officers cooperated with the Government in most respects, hoping in this way to win for farmers the best possible terms in the final drafting of the Bill.

The NFU's broad assent to the Rent (Agriculture) Bill following the introduction of the ADHAC proviso and throughout the Bill's parliamentary passage should not be interpreted as a sign of the NFU's powerlessness or defeat. On the contrary, it signifies that the NFU had already won its battle, a battle which had been fought prior to the Bill's parliamentary passage and on battlegrounds other than the formal parliamentary arena.

1 'Consultative Document' (DOE and MAFF) p. 2. This is seen in certain Labour Party documents which have been published since 1977. For example, the Labour Party's 'Campaign Handbook for Agriculture' (printed in 1978) says that the Rent (Agriculture) Act "effectively abolished the tied cottage system". A similar line is taken in private correspondence from John Silkin (Minister of Agriculture in 1978) and from Ernest Armstrong (Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Department of the Environment in 1977) addressed to Reg Bottini.

Its chief outcome - the introduction of the ADHAC measure - had been such that the NFU could afford to remain relatively silent when the Bill was discussed formally and publicly in parliament.¹

The NFU's experience suggests that certain notions central to the pluralist approach to power are mistaken. Political power is not exercised simply in the formal arena of decision-making, nor can power be measured by locating 'who prevails' in the formal decision-making process.² Rather, the NFU exercised its power before the Bill was even discussed - let alone decided upon - in parliament. Moreover, the apparent victory of the Labour-NUAAW alliance in pushing the Rent (Agriculture) Act through parliament disguised the actual victory of the NFU in protecting the interests of farmers at the cost of the farmworkers'. The NFU congratulated itself justifiably on its success, recognising that "the Bill to abolish the agricultural service house system is very far removed from what most farmers had feared and it provides yet more testimony to the NFU's moderating role in safeguarding farmers' interest".³

The ADHAC provision enabled the NFU to cease exercising power over farmworkers through the pressure it had been applying on Labour MPs. In turn, these MPs were able to give their necessary support to the much diluted Bill during its parliamentary passage without worrying about its possible damage to agricultural production levels. In this way, the Rent (Agriculture) Bill became an Act in 1976.

1 G. Clark op.cit. p. 38
P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'The Two Faces of Power' APSR Vol.56 1962 p. 948

2 N. Polsby 'Community Power and Political Theory' (2nd edition; Yale University, London: 1980) pp. 3-5 and 189-218
P. Bachrach and M. Baratz op.cit.

3 British Farmer and Stockbreeder 24 April 1976

III. The Promotion of Farmworkers' Interests? The Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976

The chief regret expressed by the NUAAW's General Secretary, Reg Bottini, in connection with the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 was that he was prevented by ill-health from attending the Union's celebrations when the Act received Royal Assent in 1976. Apart from this, the NUAAW and the Labour Party were openly pleased with the Act, and they congratulated one another on what seemed to represent a major step forward in the promotion of farmworkers' occupational interests. How well-founded was this interpretation of the Act's provisions?

The terms of the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 have been neatly summarised in the following way:

"... The main purpose of the Act is to give a form of security of tenure to agricultural workers living in housing provided by the farmers who employ them. This security is not security of tenure in the full Rent Act sense. When the employment comes to an end, the farmers may require the local authorities to rehouse such workers, if it can be shown that the cottages are urgently required for incoming workers in the interests of agricultural efficiency. The local authorities have a statutory duty to provide alternative accommodation in such circumstances and the outgoing workers to accept it or have no home. Thus farmworkers are given guaranteed housing rather than security in their own home."¹

Three further points of clarification should be added to this short outline of the Act. First, in order to qualify for the Act's protection, farmworkers must have been employed in agriculture for 91 out of the preceding 104 weeks (so as to prevent 'abuse' of the Act). Second, for those workers who do qualify, the Act's protection extends to their retirement and also to their dependents in the event of the worker's death. Finally, as long as the tied cottage dweller occupies the cottage by

¹ H. Rossi op.cit. p. 1

Note: the "statutory duty" placed upon local authorities by the Act is to use their "best endeavours" to re-house agricultural workers.

virtue of his employment, he is a 'protected tenant' whose rent is regulated by the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB). (The maximum rent which farmers can charge currently is £1.50 per week, although Agricultural Wages Committees can vary this according to individual cases.) Once the worker is no longer employed by the tied cottage owner, he becomes a 'statutory tenant' under the terms of the Rent Act. This means that a statutory rent can be charge up to one-and-a-half-times the rateable value of the house, until a fair rent is established by the appropriate authorities.

To what extent do these legal provisions serve the interests of the tied cottage dweller? Contrary to the claim of the Labour Party, the Rent (Agriculture) Act did not "effectively abolish(ed) the tied cottage system, whereby a man's home was tied to his employment".¹ Instead, home and job remain closely entwined for the tied cottage dweller, despite the introduction of the Act.

The Government's main contribution to tied cottage reform was to provide farmworkers with 'housing security', a concept which MAFF defined as follows:

"... 'housing security' means that you will not be called upon to leave your cottage unless and until suitable alternative accommodation is available, or unless certain limited grounds for possession apply (e.g. if you fail to pay any rent that was due, or damage the property ...)"²

The main benefit to farmworkers, then, is that they no longer fear homelessness as a result of losing their job, whether through injury, illness, retirement, redundancy or dismissal. If the farmer wishes to repossess the cottage, the farmworker must first be given somewhere

1 Labour Party 'Campaign Handbook on Agriculture' (The Labour Party, London: 1978) p. 18

2 'Some Questions and Answers about the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976' (DOE and MAFF, Welsh Office: 1977)

suitable to move into. Nor is the process of eviction as traumatic as it was prior to 1976. The experience of being dragged through the County Courts by an ex-employer has been replaced by the more civilised ADHAC procedure. This change has removed the farmworker's sense of degradation and has also spared the Union the considerable expense of defending hundreds of members in the courts each year.¹

The improvement in the farmworker's working conditions brought about by the Act was warmly welcomed by the NUAAW's leaders who proclaimed in 1976 that it would be regarded by many as "the most notable and far-reaching achievement in the Union's history". To some extent this joyous reception of the Act was well-founded.² The tied cottage inhabitants with whom I spoke during the summer of 1984 were all very aware of the improvement in their conditions which had taken place over the past ten years. Few of them knew the precise details of the improvement - for example, that it had been the legacy of the last Labour Government, or how it had been worked out in the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster. Nevertheless, the tied cottage dwellers spoke with a distinct sense of pride about the fact that they were safe in their homes, and that if for any reason they were required to move out, it was the duty of someone else to find them a new home to move into. When they spoke of this relatively novel security there was a sense of defiance in their words: the farmer could try as hard as he liked to intimidate the workers, but the workers were protected against eviction and the pain which once accompanied it.

1 See the NUAAW's Annual Reports for details of this expense.
Also: Landworker July 1966 and May 1974

2 NUAAW Annual Report 1976
'Outlook for Agriculture' (NUAAW Policy Document, London 1976)
Landworker January 1977, March 1977, November 1977 and February 1978

The introduction of this new element of security in the tied cottage dwellers' lives suggests that they might be able to bargain more freely than previously for higher wages and better conditions. This is not, however, the case for farmers still wield considerable power over their workers by threatening them with dismissal, as the 1984 Overtime Ban illustrated. Moreover, there remain the problems which are related to tied accommodation which the Rent (Agriculture) Act did not tackle. Tied cottage dwellers remain isolated in many cases from the neighbouring village community and they have to travel often long distances to reach important amenities and services. Many are still expected to fulfil a 24-hour duty on the farm, in the sense that they can be called out at any time of day or night to attend to 'emergency situations'. Tied cottage dwellers also continue to suffer occupational immobility insofar as they are able to accept new jobs only where they provide further tied accommodation: in many cases this restricts their mobility to within the agricultural industry. Furthermore, Labour's Rent (Agriculture) Act

"... has not really modified the system of labour control that tied housing represents. Farmers are still free to use the lure of a tied cottage to attract workers. Due to the overall shortage of rural housing many agricultural workers have no choice but to accept such an offer. They are still then dependent on the farmer for housing, even if they have security."¹

In other words, in spite of the Act, the tied cottage continues to be dangled in front of farmworkers as "the carrot" which entices them to accept a low wage. Moreover, the tied cottage is still used in the AWB where farmers' representatives continue to insist that farmworkers' 'free housing' justifies the payment of a relatively low wage.

1 Shelter 'The Forgotten Problem' p. 16

The Union's sponsored MP, Joan Maynard, was one of the few people to point out that as long as tied cottage inhabitants continued to pay the 'privileged rent' set by the AWB, there would remain a crucial and oppressive bond between the worker's home and job.¹ Her proposed solution to these problems was for farmers to charge tied cottage inhabitants the market rent for the tenancy of the cottages. This, she alleged, would be beneficial to farmworkers in the long run because it would force farmers to pay their workers adequate wages so that in turn the workers could pay their rents. This development would lead to the farmworker being given the option of moving out of the tied cottage, as he would be able to pay for non-tied housing. However, Maynard's proposal was rejected by other MPs on the grounds that it was wholly impractical. Not only did it rest upon the dubious assumption that farmers would increase wages sufficiently for farmworkers to afford market rents; it also depended essentially upon the construction of a great deal more cheap non-tied rural housing for farm-workers to move into. Until these two hurdles were overcome, long-term solutions to the tied cottage problem such as Maynard's would continue to be seen as unrealistic.²

The remaining problems attached to agricultural tied housing suggest that, contrary to the Labour Party's claims, the tied cottage system had not been 'abolished'; nor did the Rent (Agriculture) Act satisfy many of the farmworkers' more limited interests which might have been served by more thorough-going tied cottage reform. The discrepancy

1 Hansard Volume 910 4 May 1976 Cols. 1097-1098

2 Phillips and Williams 'Rural Britain' p. 124
 R. Gasson 'Provision of Tied Cottages' p. 119
 Shelter op.cit. p. 16
The Times 14 March 1975 'Can the Government Ever Settle the "Feudal Relic" of tied cottages?'
'The Agricultural Tied Cottage - Discussion Papers' (Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, London: 1975) p. 5

between the Government's original plan to disengage farmworkers' conditions of employment from their housing, and what it eventually carried through, must be related at least partly to the NUAAW's actions and inaction.

The NUAAW's leaders did not press the Government for full-scale abolition at any time during the two-year prelude to the passage of the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976. Instead of emphasising the tied cottage problems which would persist if abolition or extensive reform were not introduced, the leadership accepted the Government's offer of security of tenure because "it went 90% of the way". Moreover, when the Government diluted its original notion of security of tenure by adding the ADHAC measure to the proposed reform, the Union refrained from opposing this further step away from farmworkers' interests, so as to see at least some reform passed.

The Union's rank-and-file appeared to accept without criticism the leadership's compromising line - apart from a few notable exceptions, such as this:

"In my estimation, the blackest day in our Union's history was the day the (Conference) delegates rolled over on their backs to have their tummies tickled by the Government's and the Union's top brass, and accepted their own practical version of what we all thought was going to mean the abolition of the agricultural tied cottage, and with it the disengagement we had been promised in the Labour Party's manifesto and the Government's Consultative Document."¹

It is significant that the writer of this letter to Landworker blamed not only the Government's but also the Union's "top brass" for the perceived shortcomings of the Rent (Agriculture) Act. The NUAAW leaders received from the Government that which they had argued for: security of farmworkers' housing, which was in no way comparable

¹ Letter to Landworker December 1978

to tied cottage abolition or 'disengagement'. The important question is: what reforms would have been achieved if the Union leaders had applied pressure on the Government for full-scale abolition?

The experience of Joan Maynard is enlightening in this context. When the tied cottage issue was first debated by the Labour Party during its 1974-1979 period of government, Maynard supported the suggestion of Gerald Kaufman, MP that local authorities should purchase all tied cottages from farmers and then rent them out to farmworkers. Both Maynard and Kaufman recognised that only a drastic move such as this would enable the Government to fulfil its pledge to "disengage farmworkers' conditions of employment from the circumstances in which they are housed". The suggestion was immediately opposed, however, by the great majority of Labour MPs on the grounds of excessive cost, both in financial and political terms. Maynard and Kaufman were consequently obliged to shelve their proposal. As a second-best measure, Maynard then suggested an amendment to the proposed legislation which would make market rents payable for tied houses, instead of the AWB-determined privileged rents. This reform would serve to un-tie houses from jobs and would allegedly give rise to an improvement in agricultural wages and conditions. This second proposal was similarly blocked by Maynard's parliamentary colleagues who argued that it would jeopardise the entire Bill. Maynard regarded such arguments as spurious, but she was obliged to bow to the pressure of the great majority of Labour MPs in order to get at least some reform through parliament before its dissolution.¹

The NUAAW recognised that prevailing attitudes in parliament - and the NFU's proven ability to mobilise and exploit these attitudes -

1 Explained to me in an interview with Joan Maynard, MP (8 November 1984).

Cf. J. Westergaard and H. Ressler 'Class in a Capitalist Society' (Heinemann, London: 1975) pp. 146-147

were such that abolition would have been construed almost automatically as an unrealistic and unacceptable demand. In this sense, the NUAAW can be said to have achieved success in its tied cottage campaign chiefly because it defined its goals according to what it anticipated it could achieve.¹ The NUAAW thus heralded the Rent (Agriculture) Act as a major breakthrough for farmworkers in a spirit of 'realism' which had been shaped by successive nondecisions carried out by the NFU, the Parliamentary Labour Party and parliament as a whole.

The main service brought to farmworkers' interests by the Rent (Agriculture) Act was the provision of a new housing security which liberated the tied cottage dweller from his earlier fears of eviction and homelessness at the whim of his employers. Apart from this, the Act failed to satisfy many of the farmworker's occupational interests, which consequently continue to be frustrated by the tied cottage system. The tied cottage dweller is still often obliged to accept low wages, to work long hours, to live in isolation from the village community and to remain tied to agricultural employment. By contrast, the agricultural employer's interests continue to be served by the tied cottage system - indeed, the Act has in certain respects enhanced the tied housing system from the employer's point of view.

The gains which accrue to farmers from the Act derive almost exclusively from its ADHAC provision. The ADHAC consists of three members: an 'independent' chair (selected by local MAFF officers in consultation with the Chair of the local Agricultural Wages Committee), one representative for the farmer and one for the farmworker, each being drawn from their respective Union organisations, even where the farmer and/or

1 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Poverty' p. 46.
 "... situations where B, confronted by A who has greater power resources, decides not to make a demand upon A for fear that the latter will invoke sanctions against him."

farmworker is not a member of their Union. The farmer concerned always appears at the ADHAC, so as to put forward his case; the worker has the opportunity to attend, too, but in practice does so less frequently than the farmer.

An ADHAC meets each time a farmer applies to have an ex-employee removed from his cottage. If the farmer proves to the ADHAC that it is in the interests of agricultural efficiency for a new worker to move into the house, then the ADHAC will advise the local authority to find the ex-worker a new home. The local authority reacts to this advice by placing the farmworker's name at or near the top of the council waiting list so that the continued shortage of council houses does not obstruct the ADHAC's operation.

Every time the ADHAC agrees to make such an application to the local authority on the farmer's behalf, it is doing the farmer a great service, for it enables the farmer to remove unwanted workers from their homes without resort to conflictual and bitter court procedures. In many - but not all - cases, such action by the ADHAC is welcomed by the farmworker, too, as he often desires to move from the farm cottage into a council house in a near-by village or town.

When it meets, the ADHAC is not expected to make decisions about 'eviction' and 'homelessness' which were the issues which the courts had to deal with prior to the Act. Rather, the ADHAC is concerned with the more straightforward questions of whether it is agriculturally necessary for a given farmer to gain possession over his cottage and whether the worker should therefore be provided with alternative housing. The ADHAC meetings are consequently relatively unemotional and non-conflictual, their main topic for discussion being the technical one of whether it is in the interests of 'agricultural efficiency' for a new worker to move into the cottage in question. In the six ADHACs which

I attended as an observer, discussion between the ADHAC members and the farmer and worker concerned (when they attended) was always cordial, consensual and businesslike.¹ Nobody concerned themselves with emotive issues such as insecurity, independence or justice: courtroom dramas have been replaced by technical evaluations of the 'agricultural need' for particular cottages. Thus, the ADHAC has made it unnecessary for farmers to engage in the messy business of tied cottage eviction.

In an effort to ensure the 'independence' of ADHAC chairs, MAFF's policy dictates that the Chairs, "... whilst having a sympathetic understanding of the rural scene, should have no direct agricultural or local authority housing interest ..."² Many commentators have pointed to this lack of agricultural experience among ADHAC chairs to explain why ADHACs so often find it agriculturally necessary for farmworkers to vacate their homes in order that a new worker can move in.

ADHACs: STATISTICAL SUMMARY (NATIONAL FIGURES)

	1981	1982	1983
Cases brought forward	35	34	33
Cases received	639	644	620
Cases withdrawn	106	107	88
Cases heard	534	538	522
Agricultural need established	459	469	448
No agricultural need established	75	69	74
Cases carried forward	34	33	41

(Source: MAFF)

¹ By kind permission of MAFF in Oxfordshire and in Suffolk.

² Taken from a private explanatory letter sent by MAFF in reply to my request for information.

From the farmers' point of view, this trend of finding 'agricultural need' in the great majority of cases is an unqualified benefit. It means that they can remain confident about removing ex-workers from their cottages, without having to engage in the conflict and bitterness attached to such action in earlier years. The advantages which the ADHAC carries for the farmworkers are less clear-cut. It is true that in many cases, the farmworker hopes that the ADHAC will find 'agricultural need' because this enables him to move to council housing which is often situated nearer to friends, relatives, amenities, and the worker's new place of work. However, in other instances, farmworkers do not wish to be uprooted from their homes of many years or decades. In spite of this, the ADHAC's priority is always 'agricultural requirements' - the Rent (Agriculture) Act makes no provision for the requirements of farmworkers and their families in cases where they wish to remain in their homes. The number of such cases is unknown, but clearly some do exist.¹ Moreover, the contracting stock of council houses due to the increased sale of such houses, and the concomitant council house rent increases, will almost certainly mean that more farmworkers will in future prefer to remain in their farm cottages.²

Overall, the conclusion must be that, far from representing the clear-cut promotion of farmworkers' interests, the Rent (Agriculture) Act satisfies the interests of agricultural employers to a large degree and those of tied cottage dwellers to a lesser extent. The single most important feature of the Act is that through the introduction of the ADHAC mechanism it has ensured the future smooth running of the tied cottage system. Tied cottage conflict has been replaced by

1 Landworker July 1982

2 'Social Trends 1984' (HMSO 1984) p. 120 for details

what is usually the orderly re-housing of ex-employees - a development which has provided the agricultural tied cottage system with at least a semblance of harmony and efficiency. This image has in turn guaranteed the perpetuation of the tied cottage system - for who would wish to tamper with such an efficient system?

It is the agricultural employer who benefits most from this situation. As long as the rural council house shortage continues, he will be able to use the tied cottage as a means of attracting skilled labour for low wages. At the same time, he can continue to force ex-employees out of their homes while avoiding the disruption to labour relations which tied cottage evictions gave rise to so often in the past. Conversely, the tied cottage dweller's newly-found security of housing must be set against the significant disbenefits brought about by the Act. Not only can the tied cottage inhabitant be made to leave his home in what is made to appear a humane manner; but also - and more importantly - the tied cottage-related problems which the Act has left intact will be lasting ones, given the tied cottage system's new lease of life provided by the Rent (Agriculture) Act.

CHAPTER SIX: "WHITEWASH IS NO ANTIDOTE TO POISON"
THE FARMWORKERS' CAMPAIGN TO BAN 2,4,5-T

This chapter evaluates the NUAAW's efforts to promote and defend farmworkers' interests in maintaining a reasonable standard of occupational health and safety. In particular, it concentrates on the Union's attempts to promote its members' interests in securing a ban on the controversial weedkiller known as 2,4,5-T. By studying the Union's campaign to ban 2,4,5-T this chapter is able to confirm the argument of Chapters Four and Five, that an appreciation of the second face of power is crucial to an understanding of political powerlessness. Beyond this, however, a focus on the 2,4,5-T campaign enables the present study to underline the limitations of the 'second face' approach as it has been put forward by Peter Bacrach and Morton Baratz.

In particular, this chapter challenges Bachrach and Baratz's refusal to include unobservable phenomena, such as objective interests, in a study of power. What this chapter shows is that a conception of Q's objective interests is imperative if one is to locate the insidious ways in which power can be exercised, such that Q is unaware of its exercise and consequently unable to 'inform' the observer in any behavioural fashion that it is being exercised. The only way the observer can recognise that power is being exercised in such a case is by beginning with a conception of Q's interests which exists independently of Q's subjective desires.

This is not to deny that considerable methodological difficulties can be involved in identifying those power exercises of which Q is unaware. In this chapter these difficulties are overcome by adopting the approach set out in Chapter One: that is, by combining a prior conception of Q's objective interests with historical analysis. Beginning

with the heuristic proposition that it is in farmworkers' objective interests not to use 2,4,5-T until its safety is guaranteed, the study inquires into farmworkers' apparent harming of their own interests through their use of the herbicide without the benefit of such a safety guarantee. Research reveals that farmworkers acted against their objective interests for many years primarily because power had been exercised over them through the control of information to keep them ignorant of the possible harm which 2,4,5-T use might entail. The identification of this power exercise is reached through the study of the changes in farmworkers' behaviour before and after information was released concerning the weedkiller's possible dangers: once information was released, farmworkers began to act upon their objective interests by refusing to use the chemical. It is by commencing with a heuristic conception of farmworkers' objective interests, and a definition of power which includes all those (in)actions which contribute significantly to the harming of Q's interests, that this exercise of power through the control of information can be located.

This chapter also continues the theme of the distribution of power resources which was raised in Chapter Four and then studied in greater empirical detail in Chapter Five. The present chapter finds that the single greatest resource available to farmworkers is solidarity with occupational groups whose interests are similar to their own. In the case of the 2,4,5-T campaign the NUAAW's skilled use of this resource led to what some regard as an unprecedented success by the Union.

However, the chapter also notes the limits to this success - limits which are attributed above all to the Union's lack of access to any other significant power resources. It is this lack of power resources - in particular 'legality' and 'social standing' - which is shown to have prevented the NUAAW from withstanding the second face of power

which was mobilised against the Union by the Government and its Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP). These two groups are seen to have resorted successfully to the mobilisation of dominant values, the use of silence, the use of membership bias in decision-making institutions, and other techniques noted in Chapter One in their efforts to invalidate the Union's demands for a ban on 2,4,5-T and for workers' representation on pesticide safety decision-making bodies.

In finding that power is exercised over the NUAAW by the Government and ACP in these ways this chapter also confirms the proposition in Chapter One that although it may be useful to begin with an idea of which group's objective interests conflict with those of Q, it would be mistaken to assume that this group is necessarily responsible for the frustration of Q's interests. Although such an assumption proves to be warranted in Chapters Four and Five, in this chapter the conflict of interests over pesticide use which exists between agricultural employers and workers can not be taken to imply that the former is responsible for the frustration of the latter's interests in the chosen case study. Empirical investigation reveals instead that farmworkers' interests vis-a-vis 2,4,5-T are harmed above all by the (in)action of the ACP.

* * *

At an empirical level, this chapter is concerned with farmworkers' interests in maintaining an adequate standard of occupational health and safety as a basic requisite to satisfying their interests in economic maximisation. It therefore begins with a general review of the health and safety problems which characterise the contemporary agricultural industry.

In Section II the extent of pesticide use in British agriculture is outlined, and the conflict which exists between agricultural employers and workers over its use is discussed.

Section III examines the NUAAW's powerlessness to reverse the official clearance of 2,4,5-T, using the concepts of information control, the mobilisation of bias, the use of silence and the distribution of power resources to explain the nature of this powerlessness.

Then, in Section IV the Union's response to its powerlessness in the 2,4,5-T campaign is considered. The Union's successful use of the power resource referred to as 'solidarity' is considered, as is the Union's overall failure to enforce an official ban on the herbicide. This failure signifies the Union's wider powerlessness to assert its claimed right to participate in pesticide safety decision-making at all levels of the decision-making process. The provisions of the new Food and Environment Protection Bill confirm the Government's persistent refusal to recognise such a right. As a result, the Union is shown to remain relatively powerless to regulate the standard of its members' occupational health and safety.

I. Health and Safety in the Contemporary Agricultural Industry

The key to the post-war boom in agricultural output which was outlined in Chapter Two has undoubtedly been the introduction of heavy machinery and of numerous new chemicals into the agricultural production process. However, the infusion of science and technology into the farming industry - financed through state subsidies - has not simply given rise to enormously increased production levels: it has also profoundly changed the nature of agricultural work.

A major aspect of this change has been in the area of occupational health and safety. Agriculture has always been a dangerous industry to work in: but whereas once farmworkers faced dangers relating primarily to their work with animals and their immensely long hours of work,

today they confront new dangers which derive from their use of complicated machines and new and potentially toxic chemicals. The seriousness and prevalence of farmworkers' new health and safety problems helps to explain the rising devotion of their Union's resources to campaigns relating to farmworkers' interests in securing the best occupational health and safety standards possible.

Contemporary farmworkers are marked by the undesirable distinction of working in the country's third most dangerous industry, after mining and construction. Between 1976-1981 nearly 200 work-related deaths among farmworkers were reported and during that period a rough average of 4,000 non-fatal accidents were reported each year. However, these figures do not reveal the true extent of agricultural health hazards, for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) acquires its statistics from the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS) and not all work-related accidents are reported to the DHSS. The causes of this non-reporting of accidents are varied; what is significant here is that according to the Robens Committee (whose report led to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974), for every reportable accident at work a further 30 are not reported. On this basis, it can be argued that non-fatal accidents among farmworkers occur at a rate of 120,000 per annum, leaving farmworkers with a one-in-three chance of being injured at work each year.¹

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- 1 D. Eva and R. Oswald 'Health and Safety at Work' (Pan, London: 1981) p. 62.
 Health and Safety Executive: 'Health and Safety: Agriculture 1976' (HMSO, London: 1978)
 HSE 'Health and Safety: Agriculture 1977' (HMSO, London: 1979)
 HSE 'Health and Safety: Agriculture 1980/1981' (HMSO, London: 1983)
 S. Winyard and R. Danziger 'Hard Labour' (Low Pay Unit, London: 1984) pp. 3-5

Death and injury are caused in agriculture by a host of different elements and circumstances. These have included accidents with stationary machinery, self-propelled machines and other field machinery; disease; poisoning; asphyxiation; electrocution; drowning (in liquid and in grain); and collisions with falling and swinging objects.

Until relatively recently the greatest single recorded cause of farm deaths was the overturning tractor.¹ When a tractor overturned the driver would invariably fall out and would in almost all cases sustain serious, if not fatal, injuries. The frequency with which tractors overturn has meant that for many years farmers and farmworkers were being injured or killed by the very same machine which so drastically revolutionised their industry.² It was not until 1974 that legislation was passed which required new agricultural tractors to be fitted with approved protective safety cabs and frames, and only in 1977 was the legislation extended to cover all tractors driven by employees. Although the swift fall in the number of farm deaths relating to overturning tractors after 1977 was a welcomed development, many people regretted the relatively late introduction of the safety legislation which had led to this improvement.

While the overturning tractor is no longer as great a cause for concern among hired farmworkers as it once was, the continuing prevalence of occupational hazards in agriculture continues to bear down upon the farm workforce. The HSE lists each year the causes of work-related deaths among farmworkers and farmers each year and in its list for 1979 it included the following:

1 HSE 'Health and Safety: Agriculture 1978/1979' p. 1

2 H. Newby 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 80

H. Newby 'Green and Pleasant Land?' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979) p. 75

- (i) an employee was killed when attempting to pull free a bogged tractor. He attached a wire rope to the top link of his tractor causing it to overturn on top of him;
- (ii) an employee entered a tower silo to dislodge grain that had bridged and was overcome by carbon dioxide;
- (iii) an employee was killed when his clothing caught in the unguarded pto shaft of a slurry tanker;
- (iv) a worker was killed when he fell and was run over by a flat bottomed trailer.¹

What incidents such as these suggest is that, regardless of how skilled and careful a worker might be, the nature of his work is such that unforeseen accidents are always just around the corner.

The high number of occupational deaths and injuries in agriculture has led the farmworkers' Union to adopt the issue of occupational health and safety as one of its major concerns. Indeed, in recent years health and safety issues have assumed a prominence which is arguably equal to that of the wages and tied cottage issues. The importance which is attached to health and safety issues by the Union is shown most clearly by its dedication of scarce resources to the running of a separate Legal/Health and Safety Department, and by the rising number of health and safety related motions put forward at the Union's Annual Conferences. Equally telling is the Union's continuous campaigning over a number of different health and safety issues.

The NUAAW was a major force behind the introduction of the tractor cabs legislation, and it has been fighting with vigour for the right to appoint its own workplace health and safety representatives. Another issue over which the Union has fought (without success) has been the fall in the number of Agricultural Inspectors - from 198 in 1979 to

1 HSE 'Health and Safety: Agriculture 1978/1979' Appendix 5

155 in 1983. This drop has meant that 'labour holding farms' are inspected once every six years which, according to the Union, has led to a situation "whereby the most consistently productive, most consistently underpaid workers are also becoming the least protected in terms of health and safety at work".¹ However, the most vociferous of the Union's campaigns has been over pesticide use and its related dangers: it is this area of health and safety campaigning which the rest of this chapter is concerned with.

II. Pesticide Use and Pesticide Safety - a conflict of interests

Pesticides are materials which control pests by killing them. Applied in agriculture, they allow crops to grow without being impaired by weeds (which are killed by herbicides), insects (which are killed by insecticides), or fungi (killed by fungicides).²

Since the 1940s the British pesticides market has become increasingly sophisticated, with a growing number of products becoming available annually. In 1944 there were 65 approved pesticide products on the market, based on a few simple active ingredients; by 1980 there were over 800 approved products to choose from, containing some 200 different, and mostly complex, synthetic ingredients.³

1 AAWNTG Document 'Health and Safety Inspectors/Representatives'
21 October 1983

2 I.D. Farquhason 'Pesticides: a guide to terminology' in D.L. Gunn and J.G.R. Stevens 'Pesticides and Human Welfare' (Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford: 1976) p. 256

3 Hansard Volume 977 31 January 1980 col.1597

SALES OF FORMULATED PESTICIDES BY UK MANUFACTURERS (£'000)

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Herbicides	49,719	76,156	81,422	96,894	93,453
Insecticides	16,330	27,134	35,434	45,858	47,830
Fungicides	9,915	14,272	14,028	17,061	21,560

(Source: Keynote Publications Ltd. 1981)

The figures above suggest quite clearly that the UK pesticides industry has achieved a striking success in terms of the sale of its products. By 1982 total agrochemical sales in the UK were estimated at £542 million and a leading stockbroker predicted a "favourable outlook" for the industry in the coming years.¹ This prediction has been borne out with the result that pesticide companies have concentrated in the 1980s on the manufacture of more and more new products. ICI, for example - one of the world's largest pesticide producers - announced plans in 1985 to invest a further £20 million in research and development alone, with the aim of doubling its sales figures of £635 million worldwide by the early 1990s.²

This outstanding growth of the pesticide industry is closely bound up with the 'high input/maximum output' cycle which has come to characterise modern British agriculture, particularly since 1973 when Britain joined the Common Market (EEC) (see Chapter Two). As agricultural grants

1 Stockbrokers Wood Mackenzie & Co. 'Agrochemical Service' December 1983
As well as UK sales, there is a very lucrative export market with Great Britain being the third largest exporter of pesticides in the world. Britain supplies 15% of all pesticides in international use and more than half of Britain's pesticides income derives from exports.
New Scientist 16 August 1984 'Pesticides: exporting death'

2 Guardian 5 March 1985 'ICI plans double sales'

from the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have risen in value and been weighted in favour of the largest producers, so farmers have invested more and more of their capital in materials which promise to stimulate crop production in the hopes of claiming even larger grants and subsidies from the CAP. The CAP capital which they then receive is used (at least partially) for purchasing still more agrochemicals, with the aim of increasing output yet further and thus securing the farmer's eligibility for even greater financial support. This high input/high output cycle entails clear benefits for the agrochemical companies (who were active pro-Marketeters when Great Britain's EEC membership was being debated in the early 1970s),¹ insofar as it ensures the continued large-scale purchase of their products. It is chiefly because of the capital intensity of EEC farm policies that the value of pesticides sprayed in Great Britain has leapt from £40 million per annum in 1972 to £329 million in 1985. Even allowing for inflation, this represents a 400% increase in chemicals sprayed per square inch in Britain.²

Although the pesticide industry, together with many of the country's large farmers, have vested interests in the current boom in pesticide production and application, not all groups share their enthusiasm for pesticide use. As well as being seen by many as an "irrevocable assault on the environment" and a terrible threat to wildlife,³ pesticides are regarded by some people as a potential, and sometimes actual, danger to the health and safety of human beings. The chemicals used in pesticides

1 R. Body 'Farming in the Clouds' (Temple Smith, London: 1984) p. 21

2 Guardian 13 March 1985 'Crop of Ailments could be the price of farm spraying'

3 R. Carson 'Silent Spring' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1965) p. 23

designed to kill fungi, insects and plants, are often suspected of being sufficiently toxic to harm, if not kill, those people who come into contact with them. Workers involved in the manufacture of pesticides form one group of possible victims of pesticide poisoning; the people who apply pesticides form another.

Pesticides can thus be found at the centre of a conflict of interests between agricultural employers and workers where the former demands that the latter apply a potentially dangerous pesticide with a view to increasing crop production. This conflict is not a simple one. Sometimes the conflict remains latent when the farmworker, and often the employer, are unaware of the harm that a given pesticide can cause to the farmworker who applies it. Moreover, pesticides do not in themselves necessarily give rise to conflict. Just as most employers are concerned to ensure an adequate standard of safety for their employees, so too many farmworkers would agree that at least certain pesticides can be used without danger to themselves in the interests of lucrative farming. Conflict becomes actual and overt when the two sides seek to defend their respective interests at the cost of the other's: that is, when the farmer attempts to compromise his employee's health and safety in the interests of increasing production levels, and when the worker threatens those production levels by refusing to apply an effective pesticide to crops on the grounds that it may be dangerous to his health.

When overt conflict of this nature arises, the employer can often strengthen his case by pointing to the official safety clearance of the given pesticide by the Government's appointed safety regulators. In response to this, the worker often concedes to his employer's demands, for the official safety regulators are usually seen as too remote to be approached and challenged on their decisions as to the safety of

the given pesticide.¹ Not only are the safety officers based in London, but they are shrouded in an aura of expertise and officialdom which does not invite the layman's challenge.

The safety of pesticides is under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF)'s Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS) which was set up in 1957. The PSPS is (at the time of writing) a non-statutory scheme, in the sense that no individual firm is compelled by law to join it.² In practice, however, most firms are voluntary members of the PSPS, and their membership entails an obligation to abide by all Government regulations relating to pesticide safety. In return for their compliance the member firms gain a certain legitimacy (derived from the official safety clearance of their products) and this in turn helps to improve their sales figures.

The PSPS functions through the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP), a body of ten academics and civil servants who are trained in pharmacology, clinical toxicology, biology, agricultural science and other related disciplines. The chemical companies which participate in the PSPS submit to the ACP confidential results of safety tests which they themselves have carried out on their products, which the ACP then scrutinises, sometimes asking for further tests to be done before clearing or rejecting the product for safe use. The ACP is serviced by a Scientific Sub-Committee (which is also drawn from academic and government circles) whose specialist knowledge is drawn upon before the ACP passes judgement on the safety of pesticide products.

1 The reluctance to pursue complaints concerning pesticides has been mentioned to me by a number of national and regional Union officers, and was witnessed first-hand during my fieldwork in Suffolk in 1984. Cf. J. Gaventa 'Power and Powerlessness' (Univ. of Illinois, Chicago: 1980) p. 92

2 The Food and Environment Protection Bill, currently passing through parliament, will transform the PSPS into a statutory system.

The safety element in MAFF's duties has been reinforced to some extent by the British Agrochemical Supply Industry Scheme (BASIS) which involves a commitment by agricultural merchants to sell only those products cleared by PSPS. The force of BASIS rests upon the undertaking of the British Agrochemicals Association (BAA) (a trade association representing most firms in the industry) that its member firms will only supply PSPS-cleared pesticides to registered distributors.

It should be noted that MAFF is also responsible for the approval of pesticides in terms of their efficacy. This task is carried out through the Agricultural Chemicals Approval Scheme (ACAS) which grants approval as to the efficacy of those products which have first been cleared for safety under the PSPS. According to MAFF,

"This arrangement enables users to select, and advisers to recommend, efficient and appropriate proprietary brands of agricultural chemicals; and discourages the use of unsatisfactory products."¹

The complicated network of safety regulation and the predominance of academic and governmental experts within that network have tended to deflect potential challenges by farmworkers over the alleged safety of particular pesticides. On one occasion, however, the farmworkers' Union decided to pursue such a challenge because of the very strongly expressed doubts among its members, and by the community at large, over the safety of the herbicide 2,4,5-T. Although farmworkers' interests have been shown to conflict at times with their employers' in the sphere of pesticide use, the exercises of power which the Union encountered when it sought a ban on 2,4,5-T were in fact the work of groups other than agricultural employers whose objective interests, like those of the employers, conflicted with those of farmworkers and their Union.

1. MAFF Information Sheet 'Safety and Efficacy Schemes for Pesticides' (undated)

II. The NUAAW's Campaign to Ban 2,4,5-T

(i) Background to the 2,4,5-T Conflict

2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic (2,4,5-T) is an effective herbicide which has been produced and used since the 1940s. It is manufactured in a series of chemical reactions from trichlorophenol, during which process a toxic contaminant known as dioxin is almost invariably produced. There are about 70 dioxins in existence, and the one which is found in 2,4,5-T is known as TCDD. TCDD is widely regarded as one of the most toxic synthetic chemicals known to man, being one of the most potent known carcinogens (a substance causing cancer) and teratogens (a substance causing birth deformities).¹

Although 2,4,5-T is surrounded by international controversy, there are a few points relating to the weedkiller which many people agree upon. Firstly, there is little question that contact with the TCDD contaminant can be disastrous, if not fatal, causing a disfiguring skin disease known as chloracne, muscular weakness, pains in limbs and joints, increase in blood lipids, porphyria, behavioural abnormalities, and a rare and fatal form of cancer known as soft-tissue sarcomas.² Secondly, there is wide agreement (although by no means universal) that contact with pure 2,4,5-T (i.e. without its TCDD contaminant) can in at least some cases cause birth defects. Thirdly, and least controversially, there is a broad consensus that 2,4,5-T operates highly effectively as a weedkiller, killing weeds by artificially stimulating their growth so that they eventually collapse and die under their own weight. It has been particularly useful in forestry work, but has also been used widely in agriculture, in gardening and in other sectors such as the

1 L. Doyal et al 'Cancer in Britain' (Pluto, London: 1983) p. 111

2 Ibid. p. 111

railways where it is used to clear train tracks of potentially obstructive weeds.

Although most groups are in agreement on the above points 2,4,5-T is more notable for the conflict rather than the consensus which it generates. For, while there is little question that TCDD can be dangerous, there is fierce disagreement over whether there is a level of TCDD content in 2,4,5-T which is sufficiently low to be considered safe and, if so, what that level is.¹ Similarly, although pure 2,4,5-T is generally recognised to have teratogenic potential, there is some debate as to whether it acts as a teratogen in humans (as opposed to other animals) and, if so, whether the chemical can be handled in such a way as to avoid its teratogenic effects. Finally, there is the question of whether it is worth taking allegedly minor health risks by using 2,4,5-T, given the weedkiller's efficacy.

The debate in Britain over whether or not 2,4,5-T is, or can be, a 'safe' weedkiller has been fuelled by well-publicised events at home and abroad. In 1968 an explosion took place at a Coalite factory in Bolsover, Derbyshire which was producing trichlorophenol, among other things for 2,4,5-T. As a consequence of their exposure to the chemical during the explosion, 79 workers developed chloracne, while others died from liver damage. The persistence of heavy dioxin contamination within the factory led to the removal of its equipment which was then buried 150 feet down a disused coal mine.

Eight years later, in July 1976, there was another explosion, this time in a chemical factory in Seveso, near Milan in Italy. One of the vapours which was released into the atmosphere was TCDD. In spite of the Company's attempts to suppress information on the nature

1 Cf. William Durham 'Pesticides in Human Health' in T. Sheet and D. Pimental (eds) 'Pesticides: contemporary roles in Agriculture, Health and the Environment' (Humana, New Jersey: 1979) p. 92

of its products, and on the explosion itself, there were certain consequences which followed from the explosion which could not be kept secret. Crops and animals in the area began to die almost immediately, and human illness, including kidney and liver problems, diarrhoea and vomiting, broke out. When pregnant women began to miscarry and give birth to deformed babies, the public had its worst fears confirmed - that the explosion had been highly toxic, in spite of the Company's earlier assurances to the contrary.

Less 'sensational' but nonetheless tragic events have occurred in 2,4,5-T manufacturing plants in West Germany, Holland and Czechoslovakia.¹ However, 2,4,5-T did not receive widespread public attention and notoriety until the late 1970s, when certain events which had occurred during the Vietnam War became known. Between 1962-1970 the U.S. Air Force sprayed a herbicide mixture known as Agent Orange in South Vietnam, the purpose being to defoliate jungle growth and to destroy enemy crops. Agent Orange was a herbicide 'cocktail', based on 2,4,5-T and a related herbicide known as 2,4-D whose effectiveness from the point of view of the U.S. Air Force was indisputable. In spite of this, in April 1970, the U.S. Government ceased using Agent Orange because, it said, 2,4,5-T had been shown to cause disturbing birth defects in animals.

Since 1977 many veterans of the Vietnam War have attributed numerous illnesses, including cancer, skin disease, fatigue, nervous disorders and birth defects, to their earlier exposure to Agent Orange. Yet the majority of veterans who sought compensation for these problems from the Veterans' Association (VA) were unsuccessful because they failed to meet the VA's requirements for eligibility for compensation. Firstly, their illnesses had not arisen during military service or

1 Thomas Whiteside 'A Reporter at Large: the Pendulum and the Toxic Cloud' New Yorker 25 July 1977

within one year of discharge from service and secondly, there was 'inconclusive' scientific evidence establishing a relationship between Agent Orange and the veterans' health problems. Of the 20,728 disability claims linked to Agent Orange which were filed against the VA by July 1984, only 1,708 claimants had been granted disability compensation; the rest were refused either because their disability had not been acknowledged by the VA, or because they did not meet the VA's 'service connection' criteria.¹

It was largely because of this VA position on Agent Orange disability claims that in January 1979 a group of veterans filed a class-action law suit against seven chemical companies which had manufactured Agent Orange under government contract. Their suit was a long and drawn out affair which attracted considerable publicity, both nationally and internationally. Its connection with the Vietnam War made it a particularly 'media worthy' case to publicise, as did the visual nature of the veterans' complaints. After years of legal action, on 7 May 1984 the parties to the suit finally reached an out-of-court settlement in which the chemical companies agreed to pay \$180 million to a fund which would be used for the veterans' compensation. This sum is believed to be the largest monetary award ever won in a product liability case, a factor which has added to the already-established sensationalism of the lawsuit. Under the settlement the companies denied any liability for the veterans' health problems, insisting instead that they had agreed to the payment as a "compassionate, expedient and productive means" of meeting the needs of all parties. Conversely, the veterans'

1 Barbara McClure 'Veterans' Disability Compensation for Veterans exposed to Agent Orange or Atomic Radiation' Congressional Research Service (CRS) Library of Congress 25 October 1984

lawyers have insisted that the \$180 million payment amounted to an admission of responsibility for the veterans' suffering.¹

A combination of factors has led to the banning of 2,4,5-T production and use in a growing number of countries. (At present its use is prohibited in eleven countries.) The widely publicised and highly emotive Agent Orange case in the U.S. has contributed to this trend, as has the international spread of disasters in and around industrial plants involved in the production of 2,4,5-T or dioxin. Equally important has been the role of the media which has focussed on the physical suffering which resulted from human contact with 2,4,5-T or its dioxin contaminant. Britain ceased to manufacture 2,4,5-T in 1976 when the Seveso tragedy confirmed the lesson of Bolsover: namely, that the production of 2,4,5-T entailed enormous and horrifying risks to the workers involved in the production process. However, although Britain no longer makes 2,4,5-T, it has not banned the use of the weedkiller which it obtains through imports from those countries which continue to manufacture it. (At the time of writing, New Zealand is the only country which still manufactures and exports 2,4,5-T herbicides.)

The campaign by the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers (NUAAW) against the continued use of 2,4,5-T in Britain started in 1979, although preliminary discussion and intermittent action had taken place throughout the 1970s. The Union's headquarters had been alerted to the possible hazards involved in the use of 2,4,5-T as early as 1970 by the growing number of complaints of skin rashes and boils which it had received from forestry worker members who had used 2,4,5-T. In response to the Union's objections to the continued use of the weedkiller,

1 New York Times 8 May 1984 'Veterans Accept \$180 million pact on Agent Orange'
 S. Merrill et al 'Agent Orange - Veterans' Complaints and Studies of Health Effects' (CRS, Library of Congress 21 March 1985)

the Forestry Commission (which was by far the largest employer of forestry workers) agreed to a temporary suspension of 2,4,5-T useage, pending an enquiry into its safety by the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP). The ACP announced its findings in 1971: these were that, on the basis of existing information, a ban on the use of 2,4,5-T on grounds of health hazards would be unwarranted. Thereupon the Forestry Commission lifted its suspension, since which time 2,4,5-T has continued to be used in forestry and farming in Britain.

The workers' objections to using 2,4,5-T coalesced into a formal and concerted campaign for a total ban on 2,4,5-T at the end of the decade. By 1979 the forestry workers' concern about the herbicide's possible ill-effects left their Union leaders with no choice but to speak out once again against 2,4,5-T use. By this time the Union's case had been strengthened by the Agent Orange affair, which had led to a considerable restriction in the U.S. on domestic uses of 2,4,5-T. Similarly, the NUAAW could draw on the Seveso and Coalite explosions, and on reports of cases in Wales, Somerset and Oregon (U.S.A.), all of which had suggested that there was a connection between contact with 2,4,5-T and miscarriages and birth deformities. Incidents such as these gave the Union a stronger voice on the issue than it had had in 1970. By 1979 there was sufficient data, as well as concern and anxiety among 2,4,5-T users, for the NUAAW to embark on a high-profile campaign against 2,4,5-T use in Britain.¹

¹ See J. Cook and C. Kaufman 'Portrait of a Poison' (Pluto, London: 1982) for a detailed narrative.

(ii) The Many-Sided conflict between the NUAAW and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides

By 1979 the NUAAW believed, on the basis of members' reports and international events, that there was sufficient evidence that 2,4,5-T was harmful to its users for the weedkiller to be withdrawn from the market, at least pending the production of 'substantial' evidence of its alleged safety. However, 1979 also saw the publication of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP)'s Eighth Review of 2,4,5-T which, like the previous seven reviews, declared that 2,4,5-T was safe, provided that it was used 'in the recommended way'.¹ The ensuing debate between the NUAAW and the ACP revolved around two questions: is there a safe level of dioxin in 2,4,5-T? and is pure 2,4,5-T to be regarded as a teratogen?

The Union's answers to these questions were that the only safe level of dioxin was zero, and that pure 2,4,5-T - which was alleged to be virtually impossible to produce - was almost certainly a teratogen. Conversely, the ACP disputed both of these claims.² Their disagreement over these issues was tied closely to the two sides' conflicting views on how much and what sort of evidence was necessary to establish the safety (or danger) of a substance, with their conflicting views on these issues being related to their different social values and priorities. Moreover, once the two sides were locked in battle over these matters, they found that an even more fundamental disagreement divided them. This concerned the question of who should be authorised to pronounce on the safety of 2,4,5-T, and on the safety of all of the pesticides which were being used in Britain. While the ACP defended its established

1 'Review of the Safety for Use in the UK of the Herbicide 2,4,5-T' (Advisory Committee on Pesticides, Pesticides Branch, MAFF: London March 1979)

2 'Not One Minute Longer' NUAAW (NUAAW, London: March 1980) pp. 12-13

sole right to pass judgement on the safety of pesticides, the NUAAW was inspired by the 2,4,5-T campaign to challenge this exclusive right and to demand a voice in the pesticide safety clearance system.

The disagreement between the NUAAW and the ACP over the toxicity of 2,4,5-T was not so much due to their use of different studies to back their respective claims as to their divergent interpretations of what were often the same reports and studies. For example, the two sides differed in their willingness to link suspected cause (contact with 2,4,5-T) with alleged effect (miscarriage, birth deformity or cancer). While the NUAAW believed that certain incidences of miscarriage and birth defects which had been reported by its members could be plausibly linked to the victims' exposure to 2,4,5-T, the ACP refuted this linkage. The Advisory Committee argued instead that since miscarriages and birth deformities were relatively common occurrences - regardless of whether 2,4,5-T had been used - a stronger cause-effect relationship would have to be demonstrated before 2,4,5-T could be declared firmly a human teratogen.

A similar difference in approach could be found in the two sides' conflicting evaluations of the various scientific experiments which had been carried out on 2,4,5-T. There are at least three different ways of studying the toxicity of a chemical, each of which has certain advantages over the others, as Irwin and Green note:

"Epidemiology has the advantage of being based on human data but it must wait until after undesired physical effects have demonstrated themselves before it can even make the first steps towards detecting the responsible chemical agent ... animal testing avoids this problem by allowing testing before human exposure, but the problem for regulatory authorities is that of linking animal results to human responses. Various short-term tests are available ... these are cheap and relatively speedy but, again, there is the problem of drawing satisfactory conclusions for human reactions."¹

1 A. Irwin and K. Green 'The Control of Chemical Carcinogens in Britain' Policy and Politics Vol.1 1983 no.4

While the NUAAW was prepared to accept evidence from animal tests on 2,4,5-T and the limited evidence available from the few epidemiological studies which had been carried out so far, the ACP regarded such evidence as inconclusive and inadequate. The ACP insisted that it required absolute proof of 2,4,5-T's toxicity as derived from further epidemiological studies before it would be prepared to recommend a ban on the weedkiller's use in Britain.

As these disagreements suggest, the dispute over whether 2,4,5-T was safe to use was not a purely 'technical' one. On the contrary, the conflict between the NUAAW and the ACP was above all a social one, being based on the question of how much evidence was deemed necessary for establishing that 2,4,5-T was dangerous and the related question concerning what level of human risk (if any) would be socially acceptable. The manner in which each side addressed these questions was shaped by their respective social and economic priorities.

The NUAAW argued, on the basis of 'anecdotes' relating to its members' experiences and the evidence provided by animal tests and experiments conducted abroad, that 2,4,5-T was probably - although not definitely - a carcinogen and a teratogen. According to the Union, the existing body of evidence suggested that it was more likely than not that 2,4,5-T was dangerous, on which grounds the Union felt itself justified in calling for a ban on the weedkiller. The NUAAW recognised that placing a ban on 2,4,5-T on the strength of the existing inconclusive evidence carried a risk of banning what was in fact a non-harmful and highly effective weedkiller. Yet, because the Union's overriding concern was the defence of its members' interests in good occupational health and safety, it declared itself willing to take the risk of sacrificing agricultural efficiency unnecessarily.

1 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 70

On the other hand, the ACP made it clear that it would require conclusive proof from epidemiological studies that 2,4,5-T was carcinogenic and/or teratogenic in humans before it would prescribe a ban on the herbicide. This stance could place the workers' health and safety at risk: but the ACP saw little likelihood of any danger occurring, provided that the workers used 2,4,5-T in the recommended way.¹ Moreover, the ACP balanced against what it perceived as a very slight risk to workers' health the certain benefits involved in 2,4,5-T's continued use in terms of agricultural production levels - and concluded that the case for 2,4,5-T was stronger than the case against it.²

It should be noted that there is no evidence to suggest that the ACP's refusal to recommend a ban on 2,4,5-T was in any sense a 'malicious' attempt to place farmworkers' health at risk - nor did the NUAAW generally regard it as such.³ The ACP's attitude can be understood at least partially in terms of its 'lack of imagination'. As Dr Jerry Ravetz has noted, there are three sides to any industrial hazard: those who create it (the chemical manufacturers), those who experience it (the workers) and those who regulate it (in this case, the ACP). Ravetz then explains:

"Since risks are so difficult to study objectively or even to imagine, it is only natural that the way each 'side' sees a hazard depends strongly on the values and expectations of its role, and that this perception will be very different from that of another side. Hence a manager (or regulator) need

1 'Further Review of the Safety for Use in the UK of the herbicide 2,4,5-T' (Advisory Committee on Pesticides, Pesticide Branch, MAFF (London: Dec. 1980) p. 17

Also see T. Whiteside op.cit. p. 35 who describes the position of Dow Chemicals Co. as similar to that of the ACP when challenged over the safety of 2,4,5-T.

2 'Further Review ...' (ACP) p. 25

3 This was made clear to me during an interview with Chris Kaufman (16 October 1984) who was the NUAAW's Research Officer during the Union's 2,4,5-T campaign.

not be callous or inhumane to allow a hazard to persist, even when warned about it: he just doesn't necessarily see it in the same way as others."¹

A further explanation for the ACP's continued insistence that 2,4,5-T was safe lay in the very fact that the Committee had published numerous reviews on the weedkiller, each of which had cleared it for safety. To announce in the Eighth or Ninth Review that 2,4,5-T was not safe could call into question the credibility and alleged expertise of the Committee as a whole, and of its individual members.

The ACP's balancing of priorities - the usefulness of 2,4,5-T as a herbicide as against the possible risk it presented to human health - was a necessary process, given that the ACP's parent body, MAFF, was responsible for both occupational health and safety and the efficacy of agricultural production methods. The NUAAW argued that there was a potentially dangerous conflict of interests in this dual responsibility, a situation which the Union found wholly unacceptable. The NUAAW claimed that where the safety of a particularly effective pesticide (such as 2,4,5-T) was in question, there might be a temptation on the part of MAFF's ACP to allow for greater health risk by clearing the pesticide than might be allowed for by a body concerned exclusively with matters of health and safety, such as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Consequently, in the course of the 2,4,5-T campaign, the Union began to demand a transfer of responsibility for pesticide safety from MAFF to the HSE.

A second issue raised by the ACP's refusal to recommend a ban on 2,4,5-T concerned the non-statutory status of the Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS). According to the NUAAW, the voluntary nature

¹ New Scientist 8 September 1977 'The Political Economy of Risk' p. 598

of the PSPS offered scope for informal links to develop between PSPS officials and the agrochemical companies, links through which the former could informally advise the latter as to what tests and information would be required of a given product for it to be cleared by the ACP. Any criticism of a chemical which was subsequently cleared could be taken as an implied criticism of the PSPS officials themselves, since they had previously advised on and approved the chemical, albeit informally. Consequently, these officials would be drawn to defend the chemical, on which their reputations seemed to depend.¹ The voluntary nature of the PSPS, along with MAFF's alleged conflict of interests, became central issues in the NUAAW's campaign to have the pesticide clearance system reformed.

The furthest-reaching criticism of the PSPS which the NUAAW began to voice as a result of the 2,4,5-T controversy concerned the ACP's monopoly in the field of pesticide safety decision-making. The Union argued that although scientific experts had an important role to play in any pesticide safety clearance system, they were not the only group with relevant expertise. According to the NUAAW the pesticide user also had a valuable contribution to make to agenda-setting and decision-making on pesticide safety, which derived from his expertise in pesticide application. The Union's demand for workers' representation in the pesticide safety decision-making process was an extremely ambitious one. Not only did the Union have to contend with specific forms of opposition to this demand from the ACP and its allies but also, in making the demand, the Union was challenging dominant and fairly widespread views as to the proper roles of scientific experts and of 'ordinary workers'. The Union leaders were evidently aware of the problems they

1 NUAAW Internal Memorandum (undated)

faced in their dissent from the prevailing view that workers - and especially manual workers - were unqualified to pass scientific judgements and that such judgements were best left to the 'experts'. The leaders' recognition of their difficult situation is suggested by the manner in which they raised the issue of workers' representation on to a philosophical platform, arguing that it was "fundamentally undemocratic" to exclude workers from a decision-making process whose results would have serious implications for the lives of the very workers who were excluded.¹

MAFF responded to this latter argument by ignoring it, so that in effect the alleged 'democratic right' of the Union to be represented in pesticide safety decision-making never became an issue for debate and resolution.² MAFF devoted its energies instead to reasserting the independence, specialist knowledge and - above all - the unquestionable suitability of the ACP to decide on issues concerning pesticide safety. The means by which dominant values were mobilised in the ACP's defence, and specifically in defence of its decision-making role, will be studied in greater detail in a later section of the Chapter. Here it is important to note the wider ramifications of this dispute over who should participate in the decision-making process.

The ACP did not defend its privileged role simply by referring continuously to its independence and implied superiority over the NUAAW in matters relating to pesticide safety. It also defended itself in another, more subtle manner. The Union's challenge to the Committee's authority had arisen out of the 2,4,5-T conflict, in which the Union

1 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 84
Irwin and Green op.cit. p. 440

2 M. Crenson 'The Unpolitics of Air Pollution' (Johns Hopkins, Baltimore: 1971) Chapter Two
S. Lukes 'Power: a radical view' (Macmillan, London: 1974) pp. 50-51

disputed the Advisory Committee's decision over the safety of 2,4,5-T. In defending this decision the ACP was at the same time protecting its exclusive right to make decisions over the safety of 2,4,5-T and over pesticide safety matters in general. Thus, by continuing to insist that 2,4,5-T was safe to use in the face of the Union's many arguments to the contrary the ACP was repudiating the Union's claims to have a valuable and legitimate contribution to make in the pesticide safety decision-making process. In this sense, the 2,4,5-T conflict took on a symbolic dimension, as it came to represent a far more profound conflict between the ACP and the NUAAW over the right to participate in decision-making. As long as the weedkiller continued to be declared officially safe to use, the ACP was able to assert its legitimate monopoly in pesticide safety decision-making and agenda-setting. Once that declaration of safety was reversed, the Union would have proven that it, too, had an important contribution to make in pesticide safety clearance. It is this wider significance of the 2,4,5-T conflict which explains why the two sides became so deeply involved in what appeared on the surface to be a simple dispute over the safety of a single herbicide.

(iii) A brief resumé of the NUAAW's 2,4,5-T campaign

In spite of the ACP's eighth clearance of 2,4,5-T in March 1979, the NUAAW continued to insist that there was too much evidence suggesting that 2,4,5-T was dangerous for farm- and forestry workers to continue using it. As well as instructing its forestry worker members and recommending to its farmworker members that they refuse to use the weedkiller, the NUAAW presented its case to the Minister of Agriculture, Peter Walker, when he paid a routine visit to the Union's Head Office.

"... the Minister was at pains to stress that he was not an expert in this field and had to be guided by those who really knew - the Pesticides Advisory Committee, who were scientific experts. When pressed, he agreed to the union submitting a paper outlining its worries to the Committee and that he or one of his junior ministers would be delighted to sit in on the discussions."¹

The Union began to compile a dossier on the case against 2,4,5-T and it was at this stage that the issue began to attract mass publicity. Members of the NUAAW, of other Unions, of environmentalist groups, the medical profession, Members of Parliament, and the "ordinary Joe and Jill public" all contributed to the Union's knowledge of 2,4,5-T, as they sent in letters, documents, and made telephone calls daily to the NUAAW in which they related their experiences of working with 2,4,5-T. When the Union's Research Officer, Chris Kaufman, presented the dossier, entitled 'Not One Minute Longer', to the Minister of Agriculture, Peter Walker found before him a detailed refutation of the ACP's case for 2,4,5-T backed up by accounts of individual human tragedies which the Union had attributed to 2,4,5-T useage.

A meeting was then held to discuss the dossier between the Minister, his Junior Minister (Jerry Wiggin), the Chair of the ACP (Professor Kilpatrick) and two NUAAW officers. The meeting was concluded without success for the Union, as the authorities argued that the NUAAW's dossier had failed to place the safety of 2,4,5-T in question. The ACP Chair claimed to be unimpressed with the 'anecdotal evidence' presented in the dossier, and the Minister

"... repeated his unswerving faith in the Committee saying that he had to be guided by men who were experts 'with a worldwide reputation'."²

1 Cook and Kaufman pp. 49-50

2 Ibid. p. 68

The NUAAW refused to bow to this mobilisation of values, and instead continued to attempt to sway the ACP, by holding meetings, in the presence of Peter Walker and Jerry Wiggin, with the ACP's Scientific Sub-Committee (in June 1980) and with the full ACP itself (in August 1980). Although the Union brought their own team of scientists and 'experts' to these meetings, they nevertheless failed to convince the Government-appointed experts to ban 2,4,5-T.

The ACP and the Sub-Committee members rejected the Union's evidence, as documented in the dossier, on the grounds that it was circumstantial and anecdotal and did not therefore establish a firm relationship between contact with 2,4,5-T and cancer or birth defects. The Committee insisted that it could not recommend a ban on 2,4,5-T unless it had conclusive proof that it was dangerous to humans. The NUAAW agreed with the ACP that much of its case had been built upon anecdotal evidence which failed to prove absolutely that 2,4,5-T was carcinogenic or teratogenic. However, the Union maintained that its evidence, supported by animal tests and experiments abroad, was strong enough to justify at least a temporary suspension of 2,4,5-T until its safety could be firmly proven.¹ Meanwhile, the ACP and its Scientific Sub-Committee continued to insist that the herbicide must be regarded as safe, until its alleged dangers were proven beyond any doubt.

A further disagreement developed in the course of the meetings between the NUAAW and the ACP. This concerned the Advisory Committee's view that 2,4,5-T was safe to use, "provided that it was used in the recommended way". The Union regarded this caveat as crucial, for it claimed that the 'recommended use' was often impossible to follow through

¹ Confidential Minutes of a Meeting held between the NUAAW and the ACP's Scientific Sub-Committee on 12 June 1980.

in the 'real world' of pesticide application. Nevertheless, as with the general conflict over the nature of the evidence relating to the safety of 2,4,5-T, the ACP refused to concede to the Union's arguments, maintaining instead that 2,4,5-T was an effective and safe herbicide, providing that it was used as recommended. Peter Walker gave his support to this verdict, assuring the Union once again that the ACP was "... a fine collection of world-renowned scientists and that our system of monitoring pesticides was the safest in the world".¹

The Union responded to its failure to convince the ACP to reverse its decision by issuing a press release which reiterated its concern about the continued use of 2,4,5-T, and which also called for the first time for the task of pesticide clearance to be moved from MAFF to the HSE. The ACP's refusal to accept the NUAAW's position on 2,4,5-T was leading to an increasing disappointment with the entire pesticides safety decision-making machinery.

The meetings between the Union and the pesticide safety authorities were followed by the ACP's Ninth Review of 2,4,5-T which was published in December 1980. The Review concluded with these comments:

"What we have had to consider in this review is whether there is any sound medical or scientific evidence that humans or other living creatures, or our environment, would come to any harm if cleared 2,4,5-T herbicides continue to be used in this country for the recommended purposes and in the recommended way. We have found none ... We shall continue to examine any soundly based new evidence or information. For the present, this Enquiry has strengthened our previous view that 2,4,5-T herbicides can safely be used in the UK in the recommended way and for the recommended purposes."²

1 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. pp. 72-73

2 'Further Review ...' (ACP) pp. 25-26

The Union's response to the Ninth Review was to totally reject it.

The NUAAW's General Secretary, Jack Boddy, made the following statement soon after the Review was published:

"it is a monstrous whitewash ... But the whitewash gets thinner at the ninth time of using and no-one will be fooled this time. Whitewash is no antidote to poison ... I am disappointed that Peter Walker has allowed himself to accept the conclusions of a group of academic scientists and civil servants who have little knowledge of the practical problems of working with sprays. They seem intent on using working people and the public at large as human guinea pigs in a grotesque experiment to prove that 2,4,5-T and dioxin are harmless."¹

The NUAAW continued to campaign against the use of 2,4,5-T in spite of the ACP's apparent unwillingness to reverse its decision. This unwillingness was confirmed in December 1982, when the ACP published its Tenth Review of the herbicide. Although the Review conceded that "it would be practicable and desirable to pursue some further enquiries", it concluded that:

"... there continue to be no grounds for changing our previous advice that formulations of 2,4,5-T herbicides as presently cleared ... do not pose a safety hazard, whether used in agriculture, forestry, the home and garden, or elsewhere."²

At the time of writing the official status of 2,4,5-T remains as it was declared in the Tenth Review. What must be examined now is the nature of the NUAAW's powerlessness both to reverse the ACP's decision on 2,4,5-T and to promote farmworkers' wider interests in being represented on those bodies which discuss and decide upon pesticide safety.

1 Landworker January 1981

2 'Tenth Review of 2,4,5-T' (in the form of an open letter from ACP Chair (Professor Kilpatrick) to the Minister of Agriculture (Peter Walker) dated 13 December 1982) p. 3

(iv) Power and the NUAAW: Obstacles to Achieving a Ban

In seeking to understand how the ACP eschewed the NUAAW's arguments against the continued use of 2,4,5-T and thereby reaffirmed its exclusive authority to set the agenda and take decisions on pesticides' safety, the researcher is confronted with an immediate problem. The ACP is not required to publish an account of its proceedings, one consequence of which is that there are no means by which to understand its decision-making procedures.¹ However, in spite of this limitation it remains possible to analyse the NUAAW's powerlessness to influence the ACP over the questions of 2,4,5-T's safety and workers' representation, because this powerlessness was so much a result of (in)actions and circumstances located outside the boundaries of the ACP's formal decision-making.²

(a) The dissemination of false information

It has been noted that although 2,4,5-T has been in use in the UK since the 1940s, the NUAAW did not begin to campaign against it until the 1970s. Moreover, even when the Union began its campaign there was a gap of some seven to eight years before the Union felt able to take a high profile in its campaign and to make bold assertions relating to the alleged dangers of 2,4,5-T. The time lags and stalling which thus characterised the 2,4,5-T campaign are explained below as being the result largely of insidious and long-term exercises of power which were carried out through the skilful control of information relating to 2,4,5-T.

In effect, the weedkiller was used in the UK for many years without its users being aware of its possible dangers. This was because neither the manufacturers nor the safety regulators took adequate steps to

1 Irwin and Green op.cit. p. 451

2 Cf. N. Polsby 'Community Power and Political Theory' (2nd Edition, Yale Univ. London: 1980) and R. Dahl 'Who Governs?' (Yale Univ., New Haven: 1961) who posit that political power is exercised only within formal decision-making arenas.

test for the herbicide's safety and/or to publicise their results. This inaction resulted in the widely held impression or assumption that 2,4,5-T was safe to use. In this sense it can be argued that the manufacturers and health regulators controlled the users' thoughts and actions. The 2,4,5-T users continued to purchase and use the weed-killer - thus serving the manufacturers' interests - and during this time they were prevented from recognising that they may have been harming their own interests in this process. As long as the thoughts of forestry - and farmworkers were 'controlled' in this way, so too were their actions - which explains why the NUAAW's campaign did not develop for so many years.

Whether or not the manufacturers and safety regulators were conscious of their power exercise is unclear. However, from the Union's point of view this was scarcely a relevant issue. The inaction of the manufacturers and regulators (where acting was a hypothetical possibility with predictable consequences), whether conscious or not, helped to prolong the extensive use of 2,4,5-T in Britain, and to stall the Union's campaign against it. The element of 'consciousness' on the part of the manufacturers and regulators was incidental from the point of view of the outcome of their power exercise.¹

Interestingly, similar inaction - with similar results - took place in the US throughout the 1940s, '50s and '60s. Thomas Whiteside reports that:

"The scientific history of the development and formulation of 2,4,5-T from the end of the Second World War to the end of the Vietnam War, is one of reckless effort and grossly inadequate testing. For example, the American military, having developed 2,4,5-T as part of its biological warfare program

1 Lukes op.cit. pp. 23-24 and 50-52

in the years following the Second World War, unhesitatingly employed it during the war in Southeast Asia, spraying twenty thousand tons over both populated and unpopulated areas of South Vietnam, without the Pentagon's scientists ever having taken the precaution of systematically testing whether the chemical caused harm to the unborn offspring of as much as an experimental mouse."¹

Users of 2,4,5-T in the UK were only very gradually alerted to the herbicide's possible ill-effects. At first, it was their own experience of these alleged effects which drew their attention to the possible dangers of 2,4,5-T use. Slowly, information about the tragedies in Bolsover, Seveso and finally Vietnam became available, and this information appeared to corroborate the 2,4,5-T users' own impressions about the weedkiller. After 30 years of using 2,4,5-T, forestry and farmworkers were beginning to find out that continued use of the herbicide might constitute a threat to their interests.

However, even when the Union and its members thus came to recognise that power had been exercised over them, they were still faced with considerable obstacles in the subsequent campaign to promote and defend their interests in occupational health and safety. These obstacles were related once again to the control of relevant information.

On this occasion the manipulation of information was an active, rather than passive, process in the sense that false information was actively propagated. The particular information which was controlled on this occasion did not directly concern the safety of 2,4,5-T as such, but rather the amount of 2,4,5-T in use in the UK. In practice these two issues were integrally related, for as long as the public believed that relatively little 2,4,5-T was being used in the UK, they would also regard the Union's fears about the herbicide as being misplaced,

¹ Whiteside op.cit. p. 31

if not hysterical. Thus, the control of information continued to stall the Union's campaign, as a result of which the campaign did not develop fully until the late 1970s when the true extent of 2,4,5-T use in the UK was finally revealed. Acquiring that true information proved to be a long and arduous task.

In March 1979 the ACP published its Eighth Review of 2,4,5-T in which it stated that an estimated 3 tonnes of 2,4,5-T were used annually in the UK. This, it claimed, represented barely 0.005% of the amount of active ingredients used for UK crop protection. This estimated figure of 3 tonnes was widely circulated so that most people who were concerned with the issue came across the figure and were led to believe it. For example, it was mentioned in September 1979 by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution when it published its enquiry into agricultural pollution in which the UK's 3 tonnes of 2,4,5-T was compared favourably with the 3,000 tonnes allegedly used in the USA each year. A few months later the ACP's figures were quoted once again, this time by the Junior Minister for Agriculture, Jerry Wiggin, who stated in the House of Commons in December 1979 that "... 2,4,5-T accounts for 0.005% of active ingredients used in crop protection in the United Kingdom". And the 3 tonnes figure was reproduced once more when a BBC Horizon programme, transmitted in March 1980, claimed that in Britain "a tiny 3 tonnes" of 2,4,5-T was sprayed each year, as compared to the USA's 3,000 tonnes.¹

In spite of the frequent repetition of the 3 tonne figure, however, not everyone was equally convinced of its accuracy. In particular, Dr Roger Thomas, the Labour MP for Carmarthen, and his two assistants were suspicious of the three tonne figure which appeared to them to be "clearly absurd", given that at least 25 different weedkillers

1 Christopher Riley 'Portrait of a Poison'. Transcript of a BBC Horizon Programme transmitted on 17 March 1980 p. 4

on the UK market contained 2,4,5-T.¹ Moreover, the frequent references to 2,4,5-T in the British Agrochemicals Association (BAA)'s "virulent" defence of the herbicide made it difficult for Dr Thomas to believe that 2,4,5-T's market share was as small as had been alleged.² These suspicions, coupled with a concern over the possible health hazards involved in 2,4,5-T use, led Dr Thomas and his colleagues to pursue further the question of how much 2,4,5-T was being used annually in the UK.

Their pursuit proved to be more difficult than Dr Thomas and his assistants may have originally anticipated. Over a period of just a few months Dr Thomas tabled more than 20 questions in the House of Commons on the use of 2,4,5-T, but he was told repeatedly that

"... only some 3 tonnes of 2,4,5-T was used in British agriculture in any one year (certainly in 1979, the latest year for which figures were available) - an amount so small as to be of no cause for concern."³

Not satisfied with these answers, Dr Thomas decided to investigate the matter through other channels. Figures for 2,4,5-T imports seemed like a useful point to start from, given that the UK no longer manufactured 2,4,5-T and was consequently dependent on imports for its use of the herbicide. Yet when Dr Thomas requested information on 2,4,5-T imports he found that the conceptual categories used in the Overseas Trade

1 R. Thomas, G. Wardell and A. Williams '2,4,5-T Cover-up by the MAFF' The Ecologist Vol.10 nos. 6/7 July-Sept. 1980 p. 249

2 Private correspondence from Dr Thomas to Mr Kaufman dated 4 June 1980

3 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 28

Statistics were such as to obstruct his search, for the statistics did not list 2,4,5-T as a separate category.¹

Dozens of letters were sent by Dr Thomas and his colleagues in their pursuit of information on the use of 2,4,5-T in the UK. Finally, in May 1980 they received information from the Statistical Office of H.M. Customs and Excise which showed that between 1975-1979 total UK imports of 2,4,5-T amounted to 677 tonnes and that in 1979 alone 116 tonnes had been imported. This was 40 times the amount of imports quoted by the ACP.

A few months later a letter from the Minister of State at MAFF, Earl Ferrers, notified Dr Thomas that

"The British Agrochemicals Association have just obtained for us details of the total supplies of herbicides containing 2,4,5-T which were marketed during 1977-79 for eventual use in the United Kingdom. These were in 1977 about 46 tonnes, in 1978 about 52 tonnes, and in 1979 about 58 tonnes of active ingredient."²

In other words, the amount of 2,4,5-T used annually in the UK was roughly 20 times greater than the quantity which had been repeatedly quoted by the ACP and other organisations.³

Where did the 3 tonne figure originate and why was it so readily believed by the different groups involved in the debate over 2,4,5-T? Dr Thomas and his colleagues claim to have identified the "conspirators" behind the propagation of this false information:

1 B. Hindess 'The Use of Official Statistics in Sociology' (Macmillan, London: 1973)

2 Quoted in Thomas et al's article in The Ecologist op.cit.

3 The difference between total imports and total sales is accounted for by exports of 2,4,5-T

"It seems clear to us that the Agrochemicals industry in this country has been guilty of a gross deception of the Government, of Members of Parliament and of the people of this country as to the scale of use of this particular herbicide."¹

Whether or not the agrochemicals establishment consciously deceived the Government and the British public over the use of 2,4,5-T has yet to be proven. It may be that the industry was in fact ignorant of the true total amount of 2,4,5-T being used, just as it may alternatively have been the case that the industry, as well as the Government (and ACP) were aware of the falsity of the 3 tonne figure. Yet, in an important sense the awareness of these different groups as to the 3 tonnes misrepresentation is not a relevant issue: regardless of whether it was known to be untrue, the very use of this figure had a detrimental impact on the NUAAW's campaign.

The 3 tonne figure was important primarily because it was instrumental in justifying the continued safety clearance and use of 2,4,5-T in the UK. According to Dr Thomas, "Clearly the alleged scant use of 2,4,5-T was one of the main reasons for not banning the herbicide."² And, just as the ACP may have cleared 2,4,5-T at least partly because of its alleged scant use, so too the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution "... gave 2,4,5-T a clean bill of health, partly on the grounds that British useage was relatively small".³ By the same token, the NUAAW's public concern over 2,4,5-T's possible health hazards and its attempt at promoting a high profile campaign to have the herbicide banned were made to appear over-reactive and hysterical by the relatively small figure of 3 tonnes. The Union's campaign could thus be discredited by those people who

1 Thomas et al op.cit. p. 250

2 Ibid. p. 249

3 A. Hay 'Red faces (and hot tempers) on 2,4,5-T' Nature Volume 268 p. 97 10 July 1980

wanted to see 2,4,5-T in continued use in the UK, such as the Chair of the BAA, who had portrayed the Union's anti-2,4,5-T campaign as a "witch hunt".¹

What is significant here is that the 3 tonne figure could be used to justify the continued clearance of 2,4,5-T and to discredit the NUAAW's campaign without the user necessarily being aware that the figure was wrong. Moreover, the continued reference to the 3 tonne figure even without the purpose of justifying the herbicide's clearance had the effect of strengthening the ACP's position and weakening the NUAAW's. For example, Christopher Riley in his BBC Horizon programme had used the 3 tonne figure in spite of the fact that the programme was intended to draw public attention to the supposed dangers of 2,4,5-T and dioxin. By publicising the '3 tonnes' he was unwittingly contributing to the Union's difficulties in achieving a ban on 2,4,5-T.

The Union attempted without success to determine whether the 3 tonne figure had been part of an intended act of obstruction to their campaign. Although they were unable to ascertain beyond doubt that it had been intentional, they used the incident to their best advantage. Firstly, they suggested that the ACP had been discredited by its use of such a grossly inaccurate figure, and that this 'mistake' made it difficult to have confidence in other statements the ACP made.² Secondly, the issue of freedom of information in connection with the pesticides clearance machinery was taken up and incorporated in the Union's growing critique of the PSPS. Nonetheless, there was little doubt within the Union that its efforts to promote and defend farmworkers' interests

1 Inaugural Address by Dr Hessayon, Chair of the British Agrochemicals Association 1980-1981 13 May 1980

2 Minutes of the Meeting held between the NUAAW and Scientific Sub-Committee on 12 June 1980

in occupational health had been seriously frustrated by 30 years' experience of using false information.

(b) The Mobilisation of Dominant Values

A second potential obstacle facing the NUAAW when it sought to challenge the ACP over the safety of 2,4,5-T related to the mobilisation of dominant social attitudes which associate scientific expertise with impartiality and correctness, often to the point of infallibility. This association served to enhance the credibility of the ACP and its Scientific Sub-Committee, in contradistinction to which the Union's image as a 'sectional interest' aiming to win 'political gain' from the 2,4,5-T case was used to discredit its case altogether. Implicit in each public reference to the ACP's great knowledge and expertise was a suggestion that the ACP was far better placed than the Union to make pronouncements as to whether or not 2,4,5-T - or any other pesticide - was safe to use. The overall result of this power exercise was that it rendered the NUAAW powerless to influence official decisions concerning the safety of 2,4,5-T.

It is interesting to note in passing that similar attitudes and values were mobilised in the USA when popular opposition to the continued production of 2,4,5-T began to arise in response to the Agent Orange case. Dow Chemicals, at one time the principal US manufacturer of 2,4,5-T, took steps to juxtapose the scientific impartiality of its scientists with the alleged jaundiced motives of the anti-2,4,5-T campaigners. Thomas Whiteside explains how Dow insisted that:

"... objective consideration of the whole 2,4,5-T issue has been obscured by 'emotionalism' and that, in effect, the company has been victimised by what purports to be scientific criticism but is essentially argument of a 'political' nature arising out of the vehement opposition of certain members of the scientific community to the Vietnam war."¹

1 T. Whiteside op.cit.

In Britain a variety of individuals involved in the 2,4,5-T conflict helped to construct the contrasting images of the 'objective experts' versus the 'politically motivated' Union. It was noted earlier that between 1980-1982 the Minister of Agriculture, Peter Walker, repeatedly emphasised both privately and publicly his faith in the decisions of the ACP experts whose scientific abilities had gained them a "worldwide reputation". This was a clear indication that Walker considered the ACP, by virtue of its formal expertise, to be the best possible judge of the safety of 2,4,5-T and that he believed the Union had little part to play in pesticide safety clearance. This preference for the ACP over the Union in terms of their respective suitability to pass judgement on pesticide safety was reiterated on a number of occasions in parliament. It was also stated clearly in a letter from Walker to the NUAAW's General Secretary in which the Minister repeated what he claimed to have told the ACP's Chair, namely that:

"... the Government would not suspend or withdraw the use of any pesticide simply in response to sectional pressures, and without the benefit of a scientific appraisal of the available evidence."¹

A similar stance was taken in the House of Commons by the Junior Minister for Agriculture, Jerry Wiggin. After paying tribute to the country's pesticide safety record which, he said, owed a great deal to the PSPS, Wiggin assured the Commons that 2,4,5-T presented no cause for public concern: "The world-wide opinion of those in the know is that we are worrying unnecessarily."²

1 Private correspondence between Peter Walker (Minister of Agriculture) and Jack Boddy dated 15 April 1980.

2 Hansard volume 977 31 January 1980 Col.1679

The same respect for the PSPS was expressed by the BAA, whose Chairman, Dr Hessayon, referred repeatedly to the 'competence', 'impartiality' and 'objectivity' of the ACP in his inaugural speech in 1980. In his speech Dr Hessayon argued that

"It is not the BAA's desire to discredit the circumstantial evidence and the unrelated facts put forward by the pressure groups. It would be as wrong for us, as an interested party, to try to be the judge on 2,4,5-T as it would be for the ecologist and the trade union researcher. What is required is an objective and impartial assessment and we as an Industry are happy to leave this to the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides."¹

This message was repeated to me personally when I interviewed the Director of the BAA, Mr Tearleach Maclean. When I asked him whether the fact that 2,4,5-T use had been prohibited in 11 countries suggested that it ought to be banned in the UK, Mr Maclean replied:

"Essentially, products should be permitted to be sold, or should be restricted, or banned, on the strength of the scientific evidence reviewed by people with no axe to grind, who are completely disinterested and unbiased - and that's what we have in the Advisory Committee on Pesticides."²

It is interesting to note how the ACP itself mobilised the values surrounding 'scientific expertise' in an attempt to justify and defend its own decisions concerning 2,4,5-T. The ACP drew on the popular values of independence, impartiality and specialist knowledge to build up its own credibility before it launched its attack on the NUAAW's claims. Thus, the ACP described itself in the Foreword of its Ninth Review of 2,4,5-T in the following terms:

1 Inaugural Speech by Dr Hessayon

2 Interview with Mr Maclean held on 6 June 1985

"The Advisory Committee on Pesticides ... is independent of commercial and sectional interests alike. Its independent members bring to the Committee's work not only knowledge built up within their specialist disciplines but also the benefit of close contacts with eminent colleagues in the professions and sciences."¹

The ACP's expertise and independence were then used implicitly to add weight to its refutation of the NUAAW's case against 2,4,5-T.

In particular, the ACP members argued that the Union's case had been based on circumstantial evidence which they, as scientific experts, classified as unscientific and therefore unacceptable.² Implicit in this rejection of the Union's evidence was the suggestion that there was a single correct and scientific approach to the 2,4,5-T issue and that alternative approaches (such as the Union's) were unscientific and incorrect. However, it has been seen that the basic disagreement between the ACP and the NUAAW was not in fact one which required technical expertise for it to be settled. The ACP and the Union conflicted over the questions of how much proof of a chemical's danger was necessary to justify a ban, and what level of human risk would be acceptable to take or to impose on others. It has been seen that the two sides' answers to both of these questions were determined at least partly by their respective social priorities, not simply by their different scientific backgrounds. Nevertheless, by insisting on the 'scientific correctness' of their own position - which demanded absolute proof of danger before a ban could be recommended - the ACP members, as recognised experts in the field, were able to obscure the social dimension of the 2,4,5-T conflict. The dispute was thus made to appear as one between "scientific right" and "political wrong", rather than as one between two equally legitimate social interests.

1 'Further Review ...' (ACP) Foreword

2 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 34

The impact which this repeated mobilisation of values relating to scientific objectivity and infallibility could have on the public was illustrated for me in an interview with a practising farmer.¹ He explained that some years ago his farm, which had used 2,4,5-T, had been visited by the "Government's Committee", which he described as

"... a very august body of ... very high-powered scientists, ranging from various medical people to chemists and botanists and so on. They were a pretty carefully selected committee."

The Committee's visit had been part of a study of 2,4,5-T which later concluded that the herbicide was safe to use. The farmer explained:

"I rather took the view that they knew more about the job than I did; and if they're prepared to say that 2,4,5-T is safe, then it's probably safe ... I feel protected by the Ministry's approval scheme."

When I asked him why he thought the Union was campaigning for a ban on 2,4,5-T, the farmer replied:

"I think it has a political value in that it's a sort of winnable victory ... I think it's just hard on poor, old 2,4,5-T."

The farmer's trust in the ACP's expertise and his dismissal of the Union's case as being invalid because it was politically motivated were borne out by his continued use of 2,4,5-T on his farm.

* * *

The repeated public references to the ACP as a group of educated, objective and creditable experts - in contrast to the sectional and biased Union - had a clear impact on this farmer. Above all, the continued use of 2,4,5-T by him and by many other agriculturalists and domestic

¹ The farmer was a member of the AWB whom I interviewed on 22 October 1984.

gardeners bears witness to the success of the ACP and its allies in exercising power over the NUAAW. By branding the Union as amateur, unqualified, and politically motivated, the ACP and its allies invalidated the Union's claims and thus rendered it powerless to defend its members' interests. As long as this situation continued, the ACP could carry on exercising its control over the entire agenda of pesticide safety.¹

(c) Silencing the Union through the denial of representation

A third and related obstacle which the NUAAW encountered in its efforts to reverse the official clearance of 2,4,5-T was the membership bias of the pesticide safety decision-making machinery. It has been seen that this in itself became a point of bitter contention between the NUAAW and the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides. The ACP and its Scientific Sub-Committee were staffed by MAFF-appointed scientific specialists who were trained in clinical toxicology, pathology, botany, pharmacology, agricultural science and other areas of scientific study, and who were employees of either MAFF or of academic institutions. The explicit exclusion of non-specialists from the ACP meant that those grievances which the specialists disregarded - whether intentionally or not - would be prevented from emerging on to the decision-making agenda altogether. What were the consequences of this crude, but effective, exercise of power over the NUAAW - and how was it sustained?

The NUAAW argued repeatedly in its 2,4,5-T campaign that any safety clearance of the weedkiller which depended upon it being used in the ACP's "recommended way" was invalid, because this recommendation could not always be followed through in practice. For example, while the ACP recommended that workers avoid direct contact with the herbicide, the

1 'How Many More?' AAWNTG (AAWNTG, London: 1983) p. 24
P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Poverty' (Oxford Univ. Press, New York: 1970) p. 45

Union insisted that this was far easier to say within the confines of a committee room than it was to carry out in the field.

The NUAAW maintained that:

"There are so many ways of getting splashed or drenched by the chemical. Before use, the chemical has to be diluted. It is very difficult to pour from a five-gallon drum into a half-pint beaker without splashing. Then, while the diluted mixture is being carried in a knapsack sprayer, it can easily seep from the top and leak down the bearer's neck. Operators may well be walking forward through areas which have already been sprayed. Their boots, especially if they are leather, become saturated. It is difficult, often impossible, to detect where the spray has settled..."¹

Even when the worker was provided with protective clothing (which was not usually the case), the Union claimed that contamination was possible.

"It is common for the spray to get under face masks, gloves and visors. It is also common for operators to transfer the herbicide to their ordinary clothes when they remove their protective gear after spraying. And what if the operator sneezes? Is there any way of using a handkerchief without putting themselves at risk?"²

Moreover, although the official recommendation was to use 2,4,5-T when there is no wind blowing,

"Workers will tell you that in their experience the spraying is done on days when the weather is too bad for jobs like haymaking - which means in a lot of cases that it is windy."³

Yet the ACP's make-up was such that there were no workers' representatives on the Committee to point out and to stress the extent of these practical difficulties to the experts while they were taking their decisions. Instead, the experts were able to overlook the daily events - such as sneezing or a sudden gust of wind - which made 2,4,5-T such a potentially dangerous chemical to use.

1 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 53

2 Ibid. p. 54

3 Ibid. p. 53

This oversight on the part of the ACP was critical, for its own clearance of 2,4,5-T was heavily dependent upon the provision that the chemical would be used "in the recommended way".¹ In the ACP's lengthy Ninth Review of 2,4,5-T there are repeated references to the Advisory Committee's view that people will not be harmed by 2,4,5-T - "if it is used for the recommended purpose and in the recommended way",² a view which the committee had stated in its earlier, Eighth Review of 2,4,5-T.³

The NUAAW's concern over the problems inherent in this crucial provision which the ACP had applied to the alleged safety of 2,4,5-T led it to publicise as widely as possible its belief that "... the conditions envisaged by members of the PAC (ACP) ... are impossible to reproduce in the field".⁴ By emphasising this point the Union hoped to prevent the ACP from shifting responsibility for 2,4,5-T related dangers from the committee itself on to the 2,4,5-T user. The Union recognised that the ACP's repeated connection between safety and 'proper use' might enable the authorities to 'blame the victim' for any ill-effects which resulted from 2,4,5-T use: that is, the victim could be accused of not having handled the substance 'properly' and could thus be held responsible for his or her suffering. By insisting instead that the 'recommended use' was impossible to follow in the 'real world' of pesticide application, the Union hoped to redirect responsibility back on to the ACP.

However, the ACP was able to continue deflecting such responsibility, in spite of the Union's manoeuvre. At the meeting held in August 1980

1 R. Van den Bosch 'The Pesticide Conspiracy' (Doubleday, New York: 1978) p. 29

2 'Further Review ...' (ACP) pp. 7, 17, 19, 25 and 26

3 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 51

4 'Not One Minute Longer' NUAAW p. 3

between the NUAAW and the ACP the Union had accused the Committee of not taking account of risks such as accidents, abuse or misuse of chemicals. The ACP replied to this allegation in its Ninth Review of 2,4,5-T in December 1980:

"... we are neither unaware of, nor indifferent to, problems which can arise from abuse, misuse or neglect. However, these are not problems for our Committee alone; nor does action on them necessarily fall within the scope of the PSPS."¹

By first linking all possible 2,4,5-T related health problems to the user's misuse of the chemical, and then denying any responsibility for such misuse as might occur, the ACP was able to conclude its Review without fear of recrimination, by stating that 2,4,5-T was perfectly safe to use, as long as it was used 'in the recommended way'.

Thus, the main effect of the ACP's membership bias was to prevent the NUAAW from putting forward its views on 2,4,5-T in the decision-making arena and thereby to have an opportunity of influencing official decisions on the weedkiller's safety. The Union attempted to overcome its powerlessness in this sphere by arguing at every opportunity that, not only did it have a legitimate contribution to make to debates and decisions on pesticide safety; but also that workers had a 'democratic right' to be represented on bodies such as the ACP. Yet these arguments failed to win any support from the Government or ACP, as this Chapter has shown.

Instead, the Government responded to the Union's demand to be represented in health and safety decision-making in two equally hostile ways. Firstly, as the last section has explained, the Government undermined the Union's claims to have a valuable contribution to make by labelling

1 'Further Review ...' (ACP) p. 17

it 'biased', 'politically motivated' and 'amateur'. Secondly, the Government disposed of the Union's claim to have a 'democratic right' to representation by ignoring the claim altogether. By nullifying the Union's demand in these ways - and particularly through the second device - the Government was able to prevent the demand from becoming an issue for resolution in the relevant decision-making institution, namely parliament. This exercise of power over the Union was made possible by the manner in which the relevant resources of power were distributed and used by the protagonists in the conflict.

The Government's ability to define the terms of its conflict with the NUAAW - in terms of 'expertise' rather than 'democratic rights' - stemmed chiefly from its access to what Robert Dahl refers to as the resource of "legality". This resource derives from one's closeness to the law and to law-makers, which in turn can provide one with the ability to influence official policy-makers and policies. *Ceteris paribus*, the closer one is to the policy-makers, the greater will be one's influence over them.

By virtue of its location in Parliament, the Government was able to a relatively large extent to set the policy-makers' agenda for debate: it could thus prevent any discussion over the non-issue of workers' claimed rights to representation in the ACP. Meanwhile, the NUAAW lacked the necessary resources for countering the Government's influence in the Commons. It had neither economic nor electoral resources with which to capture the attention of Opposition or backbench MPs (as seen in Chapter Five). Nor did the NUAAW have access to the resource of 'social standing' or popular credibility which would have provided it with an image of respectability which in turn would have made it an organisation 'to be reckoned with' in parliament. Instead, the NUAAW represented

the country's farmworkers - a labour force still regarded by many people as a group of simple country bumpkins. As a result of this image of backwardness - combined with its lack of other resources - the NUAAW was unable to gain the necessary respect for its demands from the House of Commons. Thus, the inequality of resources between the Government and the Union meant that the demand for workers' representation scarcely became an issue in the parliamentary arena.

In spite of its powerlessness, the Union continued to argue both for the need and the right of farmworkers to be represented on the ACP. Not surprisingly, these repeated demands failed to bring the Union the desired opportunity to promote its members' interests. Moreover, and somewhat ironically perhaps, the more the NUAAW insisted upon its right to influence pesticide safety decisions, the more firm the ACP became over the alleged safety of 2,4,5-T - as though by insisting on this issue the ACP was asserting its sole right to decide on all such matters.

III. The NUAAW's 'Alternative' Campaign to Ban 2,4,5-T: No application without representation

The leaders of the NUAAW recognised even before the publication of the Ninth Review of 2,4,5-T that as long as the Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS) remained intact and the ACP continued to be the sole arbiter of the weedkiller's safety, there would be little hope of promoting workers' interests relating to an official ban on 2,4,5-T. Consequently, the Union decided to launch an 'alternative' campaign to end 2,4,5-T use in the UK, a campaign whose success would not depend upon the ACP's cooperation.

The NUAAW planned its campaign (which it ran concomitantly with its 'official' campaign via the ACP) with considerable care. In particular,

it sought allies who would not have been expected to have associated the ACP's scientific expertise with infallibility or incontestability. This meant that the Union would concentrate on its political and occupational allies; and on groups and individuals who had had direct or second-hand experience with 2,4,5-T and were of the opinion that, like other pesticides, it might be too dangerous to be used.

In seeking the assistance of these potential allies for its 'alternative' 2,4,5-T campaign, the Union drew upon one of the few resources which were available to it - solidarity. Robert Dahl defines 'solidarity' as "the capacity of a member of one segment of society to evoke support from others who identify him as like themselves".¹ Dahl suggests that the basis for such identification might be similarities in occupation, social standing, religion, ethnic origin, or racial stock. In the case of the NUAAW's 2,4,5-T campaign the 'solidarity' which was drawn upon was based upon shared experiences (of 2,4,5-T or similar substances) and common occupational interests (in health and safety). This resource, which drew a number of diverse groups into a defence of the NUAAW's position, proved to be the Union's most effective power resource to have been uncovered in this study.

The first step in the Union's attempt to 'ban' 2,4,5-T unofficially was taken in November 1979 when the NUAAW Executive instructed its members in the Forestry Commission and strongly advised its farmworker members not to use 2,4,5-T - in spite of the ACP's eighth clearance of the weed-killer earlier that year. This gesture of defiance towards the expert Advisory Committee was relatively successful, mainly because so many of the workers involved had had first- or second-hand experience of 2,4,5-T and did not require much convincing as to its potential hazards.

1 R. Dahl op.cit. pp. 229-238 and 246-248

The Union took the decision to pursue this unofficial ban on 2,4,5-T beyond the confines of its own membership in late 1979 when it received an unexpected fillip. As the Union began to prepare its dossier on the hazards of 2,4,5-T (which it later presented to the Minister of Agriculture), it found itself being "bombarded" with telephone calls and letters of support. Some of these came from NUAAW members, but many also came from members of other Unions, environmentalists, local authority workers, politicians, doctors and members of the general public - all of whom had experience, knowledge or an interest in 2,4,5-T. This unforeseen upsurge of popular interest in the 2,4,5-T issue influenced the NUAAW's approach towards the future of its campaign. It realised that a considerable section of the public at large who had been alerted to the 2,4,5-T issue by radio, television and newspaper reports would be sympathetic to the Union's case, regardless of the ACP's pronouncements. In particular, the simultaneous publicity being given to the infamous Agent Orange case in the USA inspired many people to take note of the Union's campaign and to support its efforts to bring an end to Britain's use of the "deadly weedkiller".

As a result of the campaign's reception, the Union leaders decided to make full use of the support which it had so far generated, by spreading the campaign "in all sorts of new directions":

"This meant, amongst other things, attempting to mobilise the weight of the labour movement, from branch, district and trades council level up to convincing the TUC General Council to call for a ban on 2,4,5-T. It meant also bringing the issue before parish, town, district and county councils, before the House of Commons and the European Commission and anywhere else where the case could be put for suspending the use of the weedkiller that may be killing more than weeds."¹

1 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 51

The NUAAW began putting the 2,4,5-T issue forward through these diverse channels, concentrating particularly on the opportunities provided by its links with the rest of the labour movement. Following the NUAAW's instruction to its Forestry Commission members to stop using 2,4,5-T, the General and Municipal Workers' Union (GMWU) and the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) adopted a similar position, with the former also pressing the TUC for a meeting of the unions affected to discuss 2,4,5-T. Sustained pressure for such a meeting came from the unions whose members were involved most closely with 2,4,5-T use: the NUAAW, the GMWU, the TGWU (all of whom had members in the forestry industry), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) (some of whose members used 2,4,5-T to clear railway tracks of weeds), and the Association of Scientific, Technical and Management Staffs (ASTMS) (whose laboratory staff had had possible contact with 2,4,5-T). By the time the TUC's Social Insurance and Industrial Welfare Department coordinated the meeting (29 January 1980) three more unions had joined the five mentioned above. These were the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE), the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the Institute of Professional Civil Servants (IPCS) (some of whose members served the PSPS). The outcome of the subsequent meeting was a TUC call for a further review of 2,4,5-T by the ACP, and a demand that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)'s Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances (ACTS) carry out an independent investigation of the weedkiller.

It was at this point that the Junior Minister for Agriculture, Jerry Wiggin, asserted his belief that the British public was "worrying unnecessarily" about 2,4,5-T. He insisted that the expert Advisory Committee had reviewed all of the available evidence on 2,4,5-T and had found the weedkiller to be safe; like the ACP, Wiggin saw little reason

reason to carry out yet another review, given that there was no new evidence to be reviewed.

The TUC refused to be silenced by this rebuff, and decided instead to add its voice to the NUAAW's call for a ban on the use of 2,4,5-T in forestry work. Two weeks after the TUC had taken this decision, the General Council agreed to extend its demands even further. On the strength of the arguments put forward by the NUAAW and the GMWU - who pointed out that 2,4,5-T was equally a threat to farmworkers, workers in local authority parks and gardens, railway workers and fireworkers - the TUC General Council committed itself to achieving a total ban on British use of 2,4,5-T.

Other influential groups and organisations joined in this call for a ban on the herbicide, including the Labour Party (after an initial reluctance to do so) and the Scottish TUC. Assistance in the campaign extended beyond mere verbal support, however, especially (although not only) among those groups which had had contact with 2,4,5-T in one form or another. Local authorities in Somerset, Avon, Nottingham and South Yorkshire imposed bans on the use of 2,4,5-T within their areas. Railway workers and local authority workers in areas which had not banned 2,4,5-T joined others in refusing to handle 2,4,5-T. A short time later British Rail suspended the use of 2,4,5-T pending further enquiries into its safety; and the European Commission then announced that it would launch a study of the substance, bringing the issue on to a continental platform.

The number of local authorities which banned the use of 2,4,5-T rose steadily, reaching 74 by January 1981. Their action was followed by British Rail's complete ban on 2,4,5-T use and similar action by the National Coal Board, the national Water Authorities, and hundreds

of private gardeners. The impact of these localised bans on 2,4,5-T use in Britain was augmented considerably in December 1980, when the TUC General Council voted unanimously to take steps to prevent 2,4,5-T from being imported by Britain. Given that the manufacture of 2,4,5-T had ceased in Britain in 1976, it was hoped that the TUC's embargo would have the effect of reducing the ACP's review and clearance of 2,4,5-T to the status of an academic exercise without any practical impact. As well as instructing dock workers to refuse to handle any 2,4,5-T imports, the TUC conducted an inquiry into which countries the weedkiller was being sent from. The purpose behind this was to contact the relevant unions in 2,4,5-T manufacturing countries with the aim of convincing them to launch similar campaigns in their countries against the continued production and use of 2,4,5-T.

Britain's anti-2,4,5-T campaign achieved two notable international successes. The first occurred in February 1981 when the European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions within the EEC (EFA), which represented some 2 million workers, responded to the NUAAW's lobbying by voting in favour of a ban on 2,4,5-T. The second achievement involved successful pressure by the TUC and in particular by the NUAAW in West Germany which was believed to be the largest supplier of 2,4,5-T to Britain. Following international publicity and campaigning on the 2,4,5-T issue - which West German environmentalists in particular took a great interest in - the West German Government imposed a ban in September 1981 on the domestic sale and use of 2,4,5-T. This step did not, however, signify an end to West German production and export of the herbicide, which meant that the British Unions continued putting their case forward in West Germany. Links were forged with West German Unions which in turn pressed their Government for a total ban on 2,4,5-T. Their pressure

proved to be successful, for in September 1983 the TGWU was able to report that all European manufacture of 2,4,5-T had ceased. Only New Zealand remained as a significant supplier of 2,4,5-T to Britain.¹

How successful was the NUAAW's defiance of the expert Advisory Committee? In spite of the Union's vigorous campaigning and the TUC's supportive action, the herbicide continued to be used in Britain, particularly by domestic gardeners. The Union remarked in 1983 that:

"... as sales to industry dropped, the manufacturers, who did not produce but formulated the 2,4,5-T in Britain, began to concentrate their sales pitch onto domestic users. Many amateur gardeners continue to use products containing 2,4,5-T."²

These remaining users of 2,4,5-T have been able to obtain supplies of the weedkiller in spite of the TUC's embargo for two reasons. Firstly, there are considerable stockpiles of 2,4,5-T in Britain. Secondly, although transport workers followed the TUC's instructions to black 2,4,5-T at the docks, the TUC was not able to bring all imports of the chemical to an end "because of the ingenious way importers found to get the chemical through".³ This included the packaging of the pesticide in containers with misleading labels and the importing of it by light aircraft.

Yet the continued use of 2,4,5-T in Britain should not obscure the considerable successes of the campaign. The power which accrued to the Union as a result of its access to and use of 'solidarity' was unprecedented in its history. Major industrial users of 2,4,5-T, such as British Rail, bowed to the pressures of the growing number of anti-2,4,5-T campaigners and the movement had achieved an international dimension within a few months. In sharp contrast to its campaigns for

1 Landworker January 1981, March 1981, September 1981, December 1982, September 1983

2 Landworker September 1983

3 Ibid.

higher wages or for tied cottage abolition, the NUAAW's efforts to put an end to the use of 2,4,5-T met with a high level of support from a number of diverse and influential groups.

Confirmation of the NUAAW's wider success among the public at large was provided by the Director of the British Agrochemicals Association, Mr Tearleach Maclean. When I asked him whether the industry had been harmed by the anti-2,4,5-T campaign he replied:

"I would think yes, because I think the public ... will see quite a bit written about the sale of a product which is alleged to be all these nasty things, while we're taking the line that the product continues to be cleared and therefore we'll continue to sell it. That, I think, will be seen by the public as a very hard-nosed, callous sort of attitude. To that extent, yes, I think the industry has been harmed."¹

Nevertheless, in an important sense the NUAAW's campaign was a failure. For although in the space of a few years and with the use of solidarity with other groups the Union had successfully convinced numerous 2,4,5-T users to stop using the weedkiller, it nevertheless failed to achieve an official ban on 2,4,5-T. While the NUAAW may have brought a degree of discredit to the agrochemical industry and achieved a significant drop in 2,4,5-T sales in Britain,² the Advisory Committee on Pesticides was relatively unscathed by the campaign, to the extent that it remained steadfast in its decision over the safety of 2,4,5-T.

The ACP's firm refusal to ban 2,4,5-T in spite of popular attitudes towards the weedkiller was of crucial importance because it represented the ACP's persistent assertion of its authority in the field of pesticide safety. The 2,4,5-T issue had become a struggle between the Union and

1 Interview with Mr T.D. Maclean on 6 June 1985

2 Stockbrokers Wood Mackenzie & Co., who are heavily involved in the agrochemical sector, suggest that 2,4,5-T herbicides' market share in 1985 is virtually negligible. Telephone conversation June 1985.

the Government-backed authorities over which of the two groups was best qualified to pass judgement on issues of occupational health and safety. The ACP's unequivocal safety clearance of 2,4,5-T, repeated in its Tenth Review in 1982, marked its continued insistence that it was the sole legitimate authority on pesticide safety. The Union's continued publicity concerning 2,4,5-T's possible health hazards represented its equally unwavering challenge to the ACP's assumed monopoly of authority in deciding over pesticide safety. The fact that the Union was unsuccessful in making this challenge suggests that its access to, and use of, solidarity in the 2,4,5-T campaign failed to bring with it access to other power resources which could have been used in the wider campaign for workers' representation. In particular, the Union was unable to acquire the social standing which would have been necessary (given farmworkers' electoral and economic weakness) for convincing parliament to give the Union a voice in the pesticide-safety decision-making process.

The symbolic importance of the 2,4,5-T conflict was not simply recognised in retrospect by the two sides. On the contrary, both sides were at all times highly conscious of the wider issues involved in their conflict - a factor which helps to explain why they had each been willing to take such strong measures over a single herbicide. The NUAAW for its part was convinced that the Government

"... simply dared not ban 2,4,5-T. The implications would be obvious. Other pesticides would be suspect, the whole rickety system of pesticide regulation and control in Britain would come under attack, the confidence placed in the system would be lost."¹

1 Cook and Kaufman op.cit. p. 74

The Government commented similarly on the 2,4,5-T conflict in private correspondence between Agriculture Minister Peter Walker and a Labour MP, Geraint Howells. In his letter dated 27 May 1980, Walker wrote:

"It would be very easy for me to ban 2,4,5-T in response to these pressures, but to do so would have important implications. Such action would undoubtedly lead to pressure upon Ministers to follow a similar course on every future occasion on which allegations were made against any particular pesticide. It would undermine the credibility of our expert Advisory Committee upon which successive Ministers have relied heavily for many years. And it would virtually mark the end of our Safety Scheme which has ensured that our record in the safe use of pesticides is second to none."

When I asked Jerry Wiggin, MP (who was Junior Minister for Agriculture in 1980) why the Government had not given way to the Union's demands in order to avert the subsequent controversy, he replied in a similar vein:

"For two very good reasons, the first being that if it had given in it would have admitted the system is in some way wrong, which it definitely didn't admit - in my view completely rightly. You have to have a system that enjoys the confidence of the user and the producer alike. I believe the system is very good, so if we had given in ... we would have acknowledged that the system is not very good. That's the first and most important thing. Secondly, it would have been a serious hindrance, because the chemical is a very useful thing ..."¹

The most forthright depiction of the 2,4,5-T dispute as a conflict over much wider issues was offered in 1981 by the then Chair of the BAA, Dr Hessayon.

"If we give way on 2,4,5-T the unions will then go on to campaign against another chemical and then another. We are engaged in a power struggle for control over the industry which we cannot afford to lose."²

1 Interview with Jerry Wiggin, MP, on 6 June 1985 (my italics)

2 Dr Hessayon, quoted in 'How Many More?' p. 6

The two sides in the 2,4,5-T conflict - those in favour and those opposed to its continued use - were thus sharply aware of the high stakes involved in their dispute. If the authorities or the agrochemical industry had announced suddenly that there was sufficient evidence of 2,4,5-T's hazards to justify a ban or suspension on its use, then the ACP would have been discredited because of its clearance of the herbicide on as many as ten previous occasions. Such an event would call into question the reliability of the entire Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS), thus adding force to the Union's demand for an overhaul of the entire pesticides clearance system. Insofar as the ACP did not reverse its previous judgements on the safety of 2,4,5-T, and thus did not relinquish its exclusive authority over pesticides safety matters, the NUAAW's campaign must be seen as a failure.

The Union's inability to assert itself as a legitimate participant in pesticide safety decision-making has been underlined by the provisions contained in the new Food and Environment Protection Bill (shortly to be an Act). The Union had developed a detailed critique of the PSPS during the course of its 2,4,5-T campaign which it publicised during the Bill's parliamentary passage with the intention of influencing the Bill's contents. In particular, the Union criticised the non-statutory nature of the PSPS; the secrecy involved in the ACP's deliberations; the conflict of interests involved in MAFF's dual responsibility for agricultural efficiency and safety; and, most important of all, the absence of workers' representatives on the relevant decision-making bodies.

The final version of the Food and Environment Protection Bill has in fact taken account of the first two of these four criticisms. The PSPS is soon to become a statutory scheme once the Bill becomes

an Act, and results of agrochemical companies' safety tests on their products will become more widely available. However, neither of these two developments are attributable to the Union's campaigning. The first is almost entirely the result of pressure on the British Government by the EEC which objected to the voluntary nature of the PSPS on the grounds that

"... it amounts to an informal cartel enabling the manufacturers to restrict price competition and unfairly block cheaper parallel pesticide imports from Europe."¹

The second reform, which improves public access to the information on which the ACP bases its decisions, is the outcome of successful pressure politicking by the Campaign for Freedom of Information in conjunction with a number of sympathetic MPs. The facts that the BAA itself was demanding greater 'openness' on the part of the industry² and that recent developments in the USA had resulted in the widespread availability of information on pesticide tests in that country contributed substantially to the success of this particular campaign.

However, from the point of view of the Agricultural and Allied Workers' National Trade Group (AAWNTG) of the TGWU, the Food and Environment Protection Bill failed to address the most important issue of all - namely the creation of a system of workers' representation within the pesticide clearance scheme which would give them an opportunity to promote and defend their interests in securing adequate levels of occupational health and safety.³ Throughout the Bill's parliamentary passage the Union has been unable to introduce such a measure into the legislation largely because it lacks social standing and other relevant sources of influence in the House of Commons.

1 Guardian 23 August 1984 'For Safety's Sake Makers Get Tough'

2 BAA Annual Report 1983-84

It might be tempting to argue that the Union ought to have by-passed parliament in its campaign for workers' representation, just as it had by-passed the Advisory Committee on Pesticides in its earlier pursuit of an unofficial ban on 2,4,5-T. By appealing to selected sectors of the public at large, so the argument might go, the Union could reproduce the successes which it achieved over 2,4,5-T. However, such an argument fails to take account of the fact that a major reason for the success of the 2,4,5-T campaign lay in the great publicity which it received. In particular, the widely reported Seveso disaster and, even more so, the Agent Orange case, brought an awareness to the British public of the potential hazards and horrors involved in pesticide use, especially 2,4,5-T. The sensationalism which surrounded 2,4,5-T could not readily be reproduced and applied to the seemingly more mundane issue of workers' representation which, in any case, required the reasoned assent of political decision-makers rather than supportive piecemeal action by the wider public. For positive action to be taken on the demand for workers to be represented in pesticide safety decision-making the Union depended above all upon a sympathetic audience in parliament. The absence of such an audience during the passage of the Food and Environment Protection Bill has meant that the farmworkers' Union remains relatively powerless to protect the health and safety of its members, many of whom are daily exposed to potentially dangerous pesticides.

CHAPTER SEVEN: POWER, POWERLESSNESS AND THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

There are two important conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing analysis of political powerlessness. The first and perhaps most outstanding conclusion is that farmworkers have been almost wholly powerless to promote and defend their occupational interests within the authoritative processes of value allocation that were examined. The second is that the approach to studying political powerlessness which was proposed in Chapter One is both methodologically viable and theoretically useful. Whether or not the advocated approach can be applied successfully to further case studies can be determined only by carrying out further empirical studies along similar lines.

In Chapter One it was posited that in order to determine the full extent of Q's political powerlessness it would be necessary to begin with a conception of what constituted Q's interests. It was suggested that a study of political powerlessness must then aim at determining how far these interests are promoted and defended through the relevant value allocating institutions. Where the specified interests are found not to be promoted and/or defended, the researcher would be called upon to determine why that was the case.

Chapter One noted that an explanation of the non-satisfaction of Q's interests would require research at two levels. Firstly, where Q's interests are discussed and decided upon within a given institution, the researcher can establish that Q has successfully promoted its interests. Yet, insofar as the decisions taken within the institution affect Q's interests adversely, the researcher must determine why Q is powerless to defend its interests: or, as the pluralists put it, the task is to establish why Q is powerless to 'prevail in the decision-making

process'. The second level of research pertains to those cases where Q's interests do not appear on the institution's formal agenda. In these situations the observer must locate the obstacles to Q's promotion of its interests as they have been defined by the observer. (Where no such obstacles can be found, the observer must recognise that his or her original conception of Q's interests is misguided.) In some cases Q may be seen to respond to its powerlessness to promote its interests by promoting instead its more limited interests - in which case the observer must also establish how far Q is able to defend these limited interests which appear as Q's subjective desires.

The obstacles which might prevent Q's promotion and defence of its objective and subjective interests fall into two categories. The first includes conscious and unconscious exercises of power over Q, where power is defined as any (in)action which contributes significantly to the harming of Q's interests. By casting the definitional net this widely the present study has been able to include as an exercise of power a host of processes, including prevailing in voting; nondecision-making; controlling information; and remaining silent or inactive. The second category of obstacles is closely related to the first: it involves the manner in which resources of power are distributed and used. Power resources may be distributed in such a way as to provide certain groups (T) with privileged access to these resources, while denying to other groups (Q) comparable access. Where T uses its access to power resources skilfully, it will be able to satisfy its interests, even at the cost of preventing Q from satisfying its interests. It is Q's lack of power resources which ensures its powerlessness to withstand such exercises of power.

In the second part of the thesis this approach to political powerlessness was applied to experiences encountered by the agricultural

workers' Union in its efforts to promote and defend farmworkers' interests in earning high wages for short hours of work; in living in housing which is independent from employment; and in enjoying a reasonable standard of occupational health and safety. As well as establishing the usefulness of the proposed approach, the empirical study served to highlight some of the weaknesses in the pluralist approach to power and powerlessness.

For example, the pluralists posit that a lack of one type of power resource is compensated for by an abundance of another, and vice versa. The implication of this view is that although a given group may be unable to prevail in one issue area, it will be able to prevail in others. The evidence of this study is that, contrary to this pluralist belief, power resources are cumulative and concentrated in such a way as to provide the farmworkers' Union with access to a relatively small number of significant power resources, as a result of which the Union has been unable to 'prevail' in any of the issue areas looked at.

Although the National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers (NUAAW) was not found to be "entirely lacking in some influence resource",¹ its deprivation of power resources in four crucial areas was sufficient to prevent the Union from successfully promoting and defending each of the interests which are outlined above. The Union was seen to be badly off in its access to organisational resources; economic resources (in the sphere of job control, or labour market strength); political resources (in the sense of parliamentary levers and allies); and social resources (in relation to farmworkers' collective social standing).

1 R. Dahl 'Who Governs?' (Yale Univ. Press, New Haven: 1961) p. 228

Chapter Three examined the organisational weakness of the agricultural labour force, focussing on the low level of Union membership among farmworkers and the resulting poverty and relative impotence which has historically characterised the Union. This organisational infirmity was attributed largely to farmworkers' inability to control or manipulate the labour market which, together with their physical isolation, has served to inhibit many farmworkers from joining the Union or from participating in activities such as the Overtime Ban of 1984.¹

Chapter Four illustrated how the combination of farmworkers' organisational and labour market weaknesses has prevented the NUAAW from winning high wage increases through the AWB. The lack of organisational and economic resources was related to the farmworkers' repeated low wage awards in the sense that their dual deficiency of power resources denies them one of the most important devices usually available to workers for the promotion and defence of their interests, namely strike action. It is the great unlikelihood of farmworkers' going on strike, combined with farmers' tight control over the labour market, which have led the Independent Members of the AWB to define 'reasonable' pay awards in terms of employers', rather than workers', interests.

Farmworkers' lack of parliamentary levers and allies was studied in Chapter Five. This chapter revealed that, during the period under examination, farmworkers' electoral marginality was compensated for

1 This workplace powerlessness of the agricultural workforce has been studied in detail by Howard Newby. In particular see:
 H. Newby 'Agricultural Workers in the Class Structure' S.R. Volume 20 1972
 H. Newby 'The Changing Sociological Environment of the Farm' Farm Management Volume 2 No.9 1974
 H. Newby 'The Deferential Worker' (Penguin, Harmondsworth: 1979)
 H. Newby 'The Low Earnings of Agricultural Workers' J.A.E. Vol.23 1972

by one parliamentary resource, namely the presence in the House of Commons of a handful of sympathetic Members of Parliament. The vulnerability of this resource to opposing forces explains why the Labour Government's tied cottage reform was so limited. Moreover, the transitory nature of the resource in question means that even such limited reforms as the Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976 will not necessarily always be forthcoming from parliament.

Finally, farmworkers' poor social standing was noted in Chapter Six. The image of farmworkers as being a backward and unsophisticated group of workers was seen to have prevented the NUAAW from influencing political decision-makers, especially in areas which allegedly require formal training and intellectual sophistication, such as pesticide safety.¹

In contrast to farmworkers' paucity of power resources, agricultural employers were shown to have access to sufficient resources for the NFU to be able to promote and defend its members' interests with considerable success. The NFU's organisational strength, noted in Chapter Two, derives largely from its high membership level. The NFU's members, many of whom are wealthy farmers, provide the NFU with solid financial support, which in turn is used for the NFU's many campaigns. Moreover, the members also confer collectively upon the NFU a legitimacy which is lacking in the NUAAW, which springs from the NFU's ability to claim to speak for the country's entire population of farmers.

Agricultural employers have access to important economic resources, too. Firstly, the role of agriculture in the national economy and the part played by agricultural capital in preserving that role provide

1 There is a certain irony here: while there are too many farmworkers for the agricultural workforce to enjoy a significant degree of labour market control, there are too few of them to wield 'indirect' political clout through an electoral resource.

farmers with a significant degree of influence in political institutions such as parliament and the AWB. Secondly, the farmers' tight control over the agricultural labour market (which is indirectly proportionate to farmworkers' ability to strike) has provided agricultural employers with a major power resource. At times they have benefited from this resource without taking positive action to mobilise it - as, for example, in the regular and tacit influence over the AWB's Independents which this resource provides to the Employers' Side of the Board. At other times this resource has been mobilised overtly and successfully - as in the case of the farmworkers' Overtime Ban when employers' threats of dismissal prevented most farmworkers from taking action in support of their wage claim.

Employers' parliamentary resources contrast similarly with those of agricultural workers. Although both groups are electorally weak, the employers' access to organisational and economic resources combine to provide them with considerable parliamentary resources. These include strong and lasting contacts with local MPs in rural areas; social and political ties with the 100-odd agriculturally-oriented MPs at Westminster; and a more broadly based relationship with the many MPs of all parties who view maximum agricultural production as a crucial element for a healthy economy.

Thus, contrary to pluralist hypotheses, the conflict of interests which exists between agricultural employers and workers, as defined in Chapter One, is built upon a highly unequal distribution of those power resources which are necessary for each side to promote and protect its respective interests.

A similar inequality of power resources was found to characterise the conflict of interests over pesticide safety regulation which divides

farmworkers and the Government (and, in particular, the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP)). Chapter Six showed that the inequality of resources which exists between these two groups is at least as vast as those inequalities located in Chapters Four and Five. For example, the Government was able to set the parliamentary agenda because of its access to the resource of 'legality' while the NUAAW's lack of economic, organisational and parliamentary resources, combined with farmworkers' low social standing, left the NUAAW with no means by which to influence parliament over the issue of workers' representation in pesticide safety decision-making.

The one significant and effective resource which farmworkers were found to have access to was identified in Chapter Six. This was the resource of solidarity. However, although the Union used this resource skilfully in the 2,4,5-T campaign, it is not a power resource which is often available to the Union. Farmworkers can only draw upon solidarity when they are attempting to promote and defend interests which coincide with those of other groups, and when this coincidence of interests is recognised and acted upon by these other groups. The issue of solidarity between working-class groups is a subject to which an entire thesis might be devoted - here it can only be observed that the resource of solidarity is somewhat chimerical and, as such, it is not always a reliable resource of power.

A second area in which the pluralist approach to power and powerlessness was challenged was that concerning the 'second face of power'. If this concept had been neglected in the present case study important experiences of powerlessness would have been overlooked entirely. As a result of such an oversight, farmworkers' apparent silence in formal institutions of value allocation, or their consent to pursuing

only their limited interests, would have been mistaken for satisfaction with the status quo and consensus with the decision-makers - instead of being recognised as the outcome of diverse exercises of power.¹

For example, in Chapter Four it was seen that demands for 50% pay increases were repeatedly mobilised off of the AWB's agenda. By referring to the Union's demands as 'unreasonable' and 'unrealistic' at every available opportunity, the AWB's Independent Members forced the Union to retreat from its original demands in the preliminary stages of each year's negotiating process. In certain years this mobilisation of values prevented the 50% demand from being raised even during the Board's 'preliminary' discussions. This occurred when the Union's Annual Conference voted to enter negotiations with a claim for a 'substantial increase' rather than for a specified target of 50% in anticipation of certain defeat if the latter claim were made.

This anticipation of failure was strengthened further by the Independents' frequent observation that the Union had always failed in the past to achieve such high pay increases. By emphasising the Union's history of powerlessness in this way the Independents encouraged the NUAAW to desist from demanding high pay awards - for to continue to make these demands was portrayed as an unnecessary waste of everyone's time.

Similar values relating to 'realism' and 'reasonableness' were mobilised during the NUAAW's campaign for tied cottage abolition. Demands for the abolition of the tied cottage system were raised more often by radical Labour MPs than by the Union because of the power which had been exercised for many years over the Union by Labour Party

1 P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Decisions and Nondecisions' APSR Vol.57 1963

P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'Power and Poverty' (Oxford Univ. Press, New York: 1970)

P. Bachrach and M. Baratz 'The Two Faces of Power' APSR Vol.56 1962

'moderates'. However, even this assistance from the Union's more radical allies proved ineffective, for the radicals' demands were quelled, too, by prompt accusations of unreasonableness or political irresponsibility.

In Chapter Six dominant values were once again shown to have been mobilised against the interests of farmworkers. The Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP)'s reputation for impartiality, expertise and virtual incontestability was strengthened by repeated references to these qualities by the Government and by the ACP itself. Meanwhile, the NUAAW was tainted with labels such as 'amateur', 'politically motivated' and 'hysterical' which discredited its case against the ACP's monopoly of decision-making rights in matters relating to pesticide safety.

The mobilisation of values explored in Chapters Four, Five and Six was not the only form of nondecision-making that was located in the study. Further types of nondecision-making were examined, including the use of procedural biases - for example, the practice of keeping AWB members apart from one another throughout negotiations so as to keep conflict covert and thus to facilitate 'compromise'. Devices such as this were found to have been employed - like the mobilisation of values - in order to keep certain issues off of the agendas of relevant institutions. The prevalence and effectiveness of this sort of power exercise suggests that the pluralist approach is wrong to concentrate exclusively on 'who prevails in formal decision-making', and to dismiss as part of the 'background' the power exercises which determine which issues will be formally discussed and decided upon within a given institution.¹

These non-formal exercises of power are not confined to the mobilisation of specifically institutional biases. As Chapter Four illustrated,

1 Nelson Polsby in particular adopts this approach. N. Polsby 'Community Power and Political Theory' (Second Edition. Yale University, London: 1980) pp. 120-121

power can be exercised altogether outside of an institution and yet have serious implications for the power relations which exist within it. The use of parliamentary power resources to secure Professor Dickson's removal from the AWB, as well as the agricultural employers' assertion of their power in the market place during the workers' overtime ban were examples of how this might occur. In neither case could the NFU's actions be deemed a 'background' to the AWB's operations: instead, they were distinct exercises of power which, by enabling the employers to set the AWB's agenda, profoundly influenced the power which was then exercised within the AWB.

Although the pluralist approach is criticised here for its refusal to acknowledge the existence of a 'second face' of power, this does not signify a wholesale rejection of the pluralist argument in favour of studying 'who prevails' in formal decision-making. For example, by looking at the process of prevailing in the AWB's formal decision-making, it was possible to establish that farmworkers were often powerless to defend even their limited interests (for example, in 10% wage increases) because they lacked access to the relevant power resource (access to information). Pluralists are criticised here not because they point to the significance of the formal decision-making process, but because they fail to recognise that there are other important loci of political power which warrant academic inquiry.

The present study has thus used the notion of a 'second face' of power to discover the nature of farmworkers' powerlessness and at the same time to highlight specific weaknesses in the pluralist view of power and powerlessness. However, in doing this it has identified a serious problem in the 'second face' approach as it has been put forward by Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz. In particular, their refusal

to include unobservable phenomena in a study of powerlessness was found to be an unhelpful constraint. The case study revealed that if the student of powerlessness begins with a heuristic conception of what constitutes Q's 'objective' interests - as opposed to Q's subjective desires - then s/he will be able to include in his or study important power relations which otherwise would be overlooked.

This point was illustrated most clearly in Chapter Six. If the 2,4,5-T controversy had been approached solely from the perspective of farmworkers' subjective (i.e. observable) desires, then it would have been necessary to argue that for 30 years it was in farmworkers' interests to use 2,4,5-T despite its possible health hazards - for this is what their (observable) behaviour and desires between 1940-1970 would suggest. Conversely, having begun with a recognition that subjective desires do not necessarily correspond with objective interests, it was possible to discover that farmworkers' behaviour - as well as their very thoughts concerning 2,4,5-T - were the outcome of exercises of power. This view of the situation developed from the heuristic premise that regardless of farmworkers' actions, their objective interests are in refraining from pesticide use until the given pesticide is proven safe. Having noted the discrepancy between farmworkers' behaviour and their objective interests, it became necessary to seek out the specific form of power which had apparently been exercised to prevent farmworkers from acting on their interests. Historical analysis revealed that power had been exercised over the 2,4,5-T users through the withholding of information concerning the possible dangers relating to 2,4,5-T use.

Chapter Six was also able to explore other ideas raised in Chapter One - in particular the notion that power can be exercised unconsciously

and through inaction. It was argued that the withholding of information on 2,4,5-T constituted an exercise of power over farmworkers irrespective of whether it entailed any positive action on the part of the 2,4,5-T manufacturers and safety regulators (who hypothetically could have provided the relevant information) and regardless of whether these groups were conscious of their power exercise. This contention was based upon a view of power which embraces any (in)action which contributes significantly to the harming of Q's interests. Chapter Six demonstrated that one advantage of using this perspective on power in a study of powerlessness was that it enabled the observer to understand more fully the obstacles which prevent Q from satisfying its interests, and so to recognise the steps which would have to be taken for the future promotion and defence of these interests.

The empirical study also explored the relationship between 'power' and 'responsibility' which had been discussed in Chapter One. This relationship was studied in most detail in Chapter Five, in connection with the Labour Government's reluctant exercises of power over the NUAAW. The Government was portrayed as having little option but to moderate its proposals for tied cottage reform, chiefly because of the procedural constraints under which it operated and the skilful exploitation of these constraints by the NFU. (The constraints which are referred to here concern the Government's small majority in parliament and its need for support from moderate MPs in order to secure the passage of any legislation.) In the absence of any significant 'free will' on the part of the Government, it could not be held morally responsible for its exercise of power over the NUAAW. In spite of this the Government can be attributed with causal responsibility for, regardless of its 'inability to do otherwise', the Government effectively

assisted the NFU in preventing the NUAAW from promoting farmworkers' interests in achieving extensive tied cottage reform. To the extent that the Government contributed to the frustration of farmworkers' interests in this way, it is regarded as having exercised power – and must be held (causally) responsible for doing so.

* * *

The evidence of the second part of this study suggests that farmworkers' workplace powerlessness, as identified by Howard Newby, has been compensated for neither by any significant strength in formal institutions of value allocation, nor by farmworkers' alliances with external agents such as the Labour Party. Indeed, to a large extent farmworkers' powerlessness on the farm is the direct cause of their powerlessness in formal arenas. Most notably, the powerlessness of the Workers' Side of the Agricultural Wages Board is a direct consequence of farmworkers' organisational and labour market weaknesses. Given this relationship between occupational and institutional powerlessness, it would be misleading to suggest that farmworkers can hope to gain dramatic improvements in their conditions of work by concentrating on formal political action rather than, for example, on direct action.

This is not to suggest that the Union has failed to achieve any gains through its participation in political decision-making. The NUAAW concluded its 60-year old tied cottage campaign with the introduction of a significant measure of reform which, while leaving many problems intact, did bring a new sense of security to the lives of many farmworkers. Similarly, although the 2,4,5-T campaign failed to bring about a formal ban on the herbicide, the NUAAW achieved a significant reduction in the UK's use of 2,4,5-T through its informal links and alliances with external groups. The important point, however, is that successes such

as these are not attributable to farmworkers' access to long-term and durable resources of power. On the contrary, in a sense these successes were something of a fluke, in that they were achieved through the fortuitous presence in Parliament of two sympathetic MPs at the time when tied cottage reform was being discussed; and through the development of the tenuous resource of solidarity, involving groups who happened to share farmworkers' interests in banning 2,4,5-T because of their own experiences with the weedkiller.

It may be that the NUAAW's merger with the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) will improve farmworkers' access to longer-term power resources over the coming years by underpinning the two resources mentioned above. Firstly, the merger with the TGWU has brought farmworkers access to over 25 sponsored MPs, which marks a clear numerical advancement over the one MP which the NUAAW had previously sponsored. Although the 25 TGWU MPs may not be committed as intensively to promoting farmworkers' interests as was the NUAAW's MP (for the simple reason that they have to concern themselves with the interests of all TGWU workers) their presence in parliament may provide the Agricultural and Allied Workers' Trade Group with an opportunity to develop stronger parliamentary links than it has hitherto enjoyed.

The second possible resource which may be developed and deployed following the merger of Unions is that of solidarity. The Union's new organisational links with other groups of workers belonging to the TGWU has provided it with a formal and lasting basis upon which to build a resource of solidarity. The development of this resource in cooperation with transport workers, dock workers, local authority workers and other TGWU members might prove to be of great use to farmworkers in future years, particularly given the occupational interests

which some of these groups share. Whether or not this potential resource can be developed and used remains to be seen.

Until now the history of the farmworkers' Union has been one of outstanding powerlessness, interspersed with occasional successes and minor breakthroughs. This powerlessness has been experienced for the greatest part of a century, as a result of which it has formed a large part of the image and self-image of the agricultural labour force and its Union.

Recent developments in the social and economic make-up of Britain suggest that the powerlessness with which farmworkers have become so closely identified has begun to spread to other groups of manual workers. In what appears to be a bitter parody of Marxist analysis, the agricultural labour force may have become the 'vanguard' of the British working-class insofar as its experiences of labour market weakness, isolation, poverty and insecurity are becoming a new way of life for many British industrial workers.¹ Just as the role of the agricultural worker in the British economy was superceded in the 18th and 19th centuries by that of the industrial worker, so now the industrial workforce is being weakened by economic trends which are forcing Britain away from its 200-year old industrial base and towards a service economy. One result of this development has been an apparent movement towards 'deference' and docility among a substantial section of the traditionally militant industrial working-class.

If the supercession of industrial workers by service workers is part of a long-term trend, rather than being a temporary phenomenon caused by current government policies, then industrial workers will have much to learn from the farmworkers' experiences of powerlessness.

1 Steve Carr 'Changing Patterns of Work' (Workers' Educational Association, London: 1984)

But the question of whether or not industrial workers will follow in the agricultural workers' footsteps cannot be answered within the confines of this study. The main concern here has been to analyse the nature of political powerlessness and, in so doing, to contribute in some small way towards the improvement of farmworkers' conditions of work.

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B. ARTICLES

Abbreviations:

APSR	American Political Science Review
ASR	American Sociological Review
BJLS	British Journal of Law and Society
JAE	Journal of Agricultural Economics
PS	Political Studies
S	Sociology
SR	Sociological Review

Apart from the more scholarly articles cited below, a number of articles from the following newspapers have been used:

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