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RULING ELITE THEORIES AND RESEARCH METHODS: AN EVALUATION

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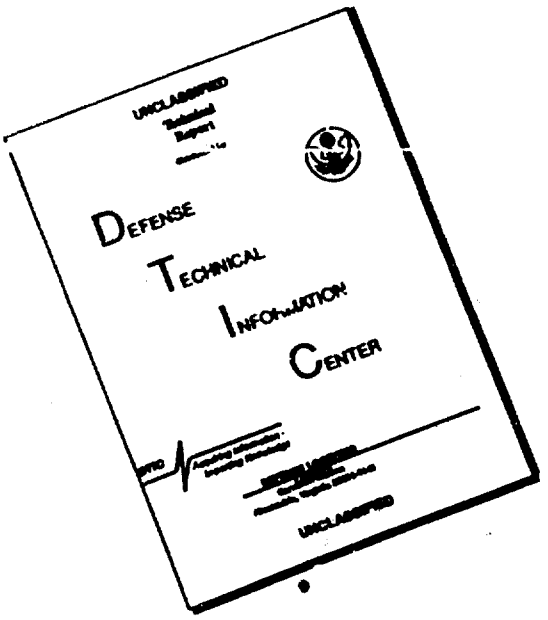

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RULING ELITE THEORIES AND RESEARCH METHODS: AN EVALUATION

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PREFACE

This paper is the first part of an endeavor to move the analysis of political influence further toward the limits of objectivity and precision possible in the social sciences. It does the necessary work of identifying key "schools" of thought and the research techniques associated with these as a prelude to my elaboration of a preferred research approach.

No time is spent in elaborating the reasons why I consider the analysis of political influence to be both important and interesting work for political scientists. The basic reason, hinted at in the text, is that an enormous amount of political analysis rests very heavily upon poorly formulated and often purely impressionistic assertions about the power of visible elements such as the military establishments and the economic "oligarchy." And, of course, the "ruling elite" and "establishment" interpretations of political causality always have a cyclical vogue in the popular discussion and literature.

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This discussion should interest those who believe that there always is a "ruling class" as well as those professing that there never is. It will agree with neither set of affirmations but will provide guidelines to the basis for an empirical examination of this intriguing question.

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RULING ELITE THEORIES AND RESEARCH METHODS: AN EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

There are endless assertions about the political dominance of the "rich," the "landlord class," the "economic oligarchy" and for the Latin American countries, there is a mass of polemical prose about the various kinds of exploitive alliances the wealthy have contracted with the military, the Church, foreign capitalists or foreign governments, and even in some instances with the Communist parties.* In fact, the mood of much political rhetoric and even of many seriously intended works of political analysis scholars is captured by this comment:

> A great many people seem to believe that "they" run things: the old families, the bankers, the City Hall machine, or the party boss behind the scene. This kind of view evidently has a powerful and many-sided appeal. It is simple, compelling, dramatic, "realistic." It gives one standing as an inside dopester. For individuals with a strong strain of frustrated idealism, it has just the right touch of hard-boiled cynicism. Finally, the hypothesis has one very great advantage over many alternative explanations: it can be cast in a form that makes it virtually impossible to disprove.**

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* Alba, V., Alliance Without Allies, New York: Praeger, 1965.

** Dahl, R., "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," American Political Science Review, Vol. 52, June 1958, p. 463.

It is a fact which could easily be documented that the principal implicit or explicit model of national decision-making for many authors concerned with politics, especially in Latin America, has been the ruling elite model with the elite sector based on wealth generally considered as the most influential group within the total elite.

The intention of this essay is to suggest new approaches to the analytical treatment of a simple and important issue: determining the political power of the economic elites. ~~As a first~~ step, it will be necessary to define terms and review the extensive debate concerning the assumptions and methods used by analysts concerned with the general problems of elites and political influence. This will involve a brief review of the writing here termed "classical" elite theory as well as the contemporary approaches to the subject by the analysts of "community power." In the course of intellectual argument, the contours of the three important contemporary "schools" of elite analysis have been determined; these can be labeled the Marxist, stratification theorist, and group pluralist.* We shall use the critical literature to examine the validity of assumptions and research methods associated with each of these approaches to elite analysis.

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*Polsby, N., Community Power and Political Theory, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, first explicated the "stratification theory" category. C. W. Mills called the pluralists the "romantic pluralists," The Power Elite, Oxford University Press, New York, 1956, p. 247.

ELITES AND ELITE THEORY

If we were interested in analyzing the political influence of elements of the society called "organized labor" or the "military establishment" or "organized religion," there would be relatively few problems of definition since each of these political participants can be differentiated by characteristics that are clear-cut and above all totally independent of their real or reputed "influence." As soon as the word "elite" is used, however, difficulties arise since there are so many conceptions of what the term ought to mean, especially because of the tendency to circular definition common in this realm of discussion. For example, Lasswell and Learner define the term by stating:

> A great variety of definitions -- contemplative, manipulative, conceptual and operational -- have been and doubtless will be given to the elite category. . . . Most simply, the elite are the influential.*

The author of Beyond the Ruling Class prefers a rather mystical notion of the term:

> Here the term elites refers first of all to a minority of individuals designated to serve a collectivity in a socially valued way. Elites are effective and responsible minorities -- effective as regards the performance of activities of interest and concern to others to whom these elites are responsive.**

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*Lasswell, H. and Learner, D., (eds.), World Revolutionary Elites, 1965, p. 41.

**Keller, Suzanne, Beyond the Ruling Class, 1963, p. 3.

We shall, however, rest content with what is perhaps the simplest and most general definition of the term, a definition which is not dependent on the political use made of the attributes which confer elite status:

> Elite is a descriptive term designating those who hold high positions in a society. Any society will have several special elites -- as many as there are values widely cherished in the society. There may be special elites by virtue of their large shares in such values as knowledge, authority, wealth. The general elite is composed of those who hold large shares in several of its major values.*

From the foregoing general definition, we can say that the economic elite consists of those who have the largest share of the privately-owned economic assts of a society.**

The term political elite means many things to different writers. A very general definition describes the political elite as:

> Those with large shares in the distribution of power -- whether through elective or appointive office, or indeed whether through influence exercized without office.***

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*Dunner, J., (ed.), Dictionary of Political Science, 1964, p. 163.

**Many subtle questions of control versus ownership, State-owned assets, etc., need to be considered when a more complex and subtle operational definition of economic elites is attempted.

***Dunner, J., op. cit., p. 162.

It is obvious that, considered in these terms, every organized society is governed by a "political elite" of some kind since in democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian states there are obviously persons with "large shares in the distribution of power." This obvious fact has led many to speak and write of a ruling elite. But, just what are the meanings attached to this often-used phrase?

Both the "classical" and contemporary theorists who describe and discuss the phenomenon of the "ruling class" or "ruling elite" use the term in two distinctly different ways. One group of writers uses the term "ruling class" to mean that cooperating minorities consciously dominate the society -- this is the conspiratorial hypothesis. The second use of this term refers only to the fact that decisions in society will inevitably be made by minorities within the major social organizations. Here there is no assumption of purposive organization or exploitive collaboration among these different minorities.

Machiavelli's comment is a good example of this latter school of thought:

> . . . any city whatsoever, in whatsoever manner organized, never do more than forty or fifty persons attain positions of influence.*

In 1964, Dahrendorf added little to Machiavelli's statement when he divided contemporary European society into four sectors with the "ruling class" at the apex defined as "those who by virtue of their position in a

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*Mosca, Gaetano, The Ruling Class, McGraw Hill, New York, 1939, p. 329.

given country are able to lay down the law for others, both in the literal and the metaphorical sense."* Note that there is no accusation of conspiracy, only a sense that complexity of institutional structure will mean that decisions are really made by minorities within any social group.

An important group among these non-conspiratorial ruling class theorists take the functional evolution of society as the reason for rule by minorities and the source of change in the recruitment and occupational composition of the governing minorities. Saint-Simon is a leading example of this school of thought believing that:

> military and theological elements prevailed in medieval society and therefore priests and soldiers stood at the apex of the pyramid, while at the beginning of the 19th century the main functions that were essential to social life were scientific and industrial in character and so political leadership passed to men who were capable of advancing science and directing economic production.**

Nearly a century later, Raymond Aron continued in this perspective by defining the ruling class as:

> . . . sub-divided into five groups: political leaders, government administrators, economic directors, leaders of the masses and military chiefs . . . these five groups correspond to essential functions.***

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*Dahrendorf, Ralf, "Recent Changes in the Class Structure of European Societies," Daedalus, Winter 1964, p. 225.

**Mosca, op. cit., p. 329.

***Aron, R., "Social Structure and the Ruling Class," British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 1, Part 1, March 1950.

Essentially, these uses of the "ruling class" terminology merely attach a label to the elements in the society which in fact make most of the important decisions -- the "political elites." There is no necessary assumption that one particular identifiable and cohesive sector of the polity is being advantaged unduly by the "ruling class" -- note that Aron included "leaders of the masses" among the members -- or that this is a structured, self-aware and communicating group. For that reason, there is little reason to quarrel with this particular use of the term, though one might say that the very term "ruling class" suggests a continuity and coherence greater than that which this group of authors appears to have intended.

Used in this fashion, the ruling elite notion is not rejected by the pluralist theorists though the pluralist school of analysis does emphatically deny the assumptions of the other group of "ruling class" theorists -- those who believe that in most societies power is held by a cooperating and/or organized minority. Marx and his orthodox followers offer one example of this conspiratorial brand of elite theory with the argument that private owners of the means of production must in fact control the State and the society. A later and more complex version of the organized elite point of view was Gumplewicz's statement that the elite of wealth were not alone in rule but that two elites cooperated:

> . . . one of which held governmental and military control and the other exercised industiral, commercial, and financial control.*

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*Gumplewicz, Der Rassenkamph, 1883. Cited in Mosca, op. cit., p. 331.

Writing in 1883, the Italian political theorist, Gaetano Mosca, moved even further from the simple Marxist analysis, declaring simply that

> an organized minority, in spite of appearances to the contrary . . . retains actual and effective control of the state.*

Note that this statement says only that there is a dominant "organized minority" without assuming that the economic elite or any other group necessarily must be participant or dominant in this ruling group. Pareto and Michels also felt some organized minority would dominate any State or complex organization, but neither specified any inevitable social or occupational prerequisites for entry into the ruling class.**

In more recent times, the banner of conspiratorial ruling elite theory was taken up with vigor by the American sociologist C. W. Mills, who in 1956, published his views on the identity and structure of the ruling class in the United States.*** Bolder than Mosca, Pareto and assorted other elite theorists of this genre, Mills clearly pointed to the power elite as ". . . those political economic and military circles which, as an intricate

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*Mosca cites Teorica dei Governi, 1883, in a later work, op. cit., p. 331.

**Pareto, Les Systeme Socialistes, 1902; Trattato di Sociologia Generale, 1916; Michels, Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens, 1911.

***The Power Elite, op. cit.

set of overlapping cliques, share decisions having at least national consequences . . . ."* And three years later, Floyd Hunter's Top Leadership, USA concluded that somewhere between 100 and 300 persons constitute the power elite which runs the United States.**

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO THE ANALYSIS OF ELITES: SCHOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Mills and Hunter in different ways do in fact personify the link between contemporary social-political analysis of elites and the more classical conceptions of organized minority rule just reviewed. The common element is the assumption that there is somewhere in nearly every political community -- be it country, state, or city -- an identifiable minority that makes most of the important decisions that shape the lives of the majority. And once this assumption reigns, the primary task of research on the subject of political influence is to determine who constitutes this crypto-government. Before joining Mills in the quest for the national ruling class, Hunter had already succeeded in ferreting out the collaborating minority behind the scenes of power in a major

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*Mills, ibid., p. 29. Mills also notes with typical color: "The top of the American system of power is much more unified, much more powerful . . . the bottom much more fragmented, impotent, than is generally supposed by those distracted by the middling units of power which neither express such will as exists at the bottom nor determine the decisions at the top."

**Hunter, Floyd, Top Leadership, USA, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959.

American city. The title of his well-known work,* Community Power Structure, is coincident with the name given to an important area of research within political sociology which, since the 1930s, has produced an abundant literature on the local "ruling classes" of numerous imaginatively renamed American cities (Yankee City, Jonesville, Middletown).**

We return then, after the historical excursion into the classical approaches, to the three contemporaneously relevant "schools" of elite theory mentioned at the outset of this essay: Marxist stratification theorist, and pluralist. The Marxist assumptions have already been mentioned in passing and can best be summarized as postulating that in all pre-socialist societies the owners of the means of production (economic elites) will in fact constitute the ruling element. The stratification theorists, in addition to their basic assumption that a single effectively ruling minority exists, make four detailed "assertions . . . about power":***

1) The upper class rules in local community life.

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*Hunter, Floyd, Community Power Structure, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953.

**Bell, Wendell, et al., Public Leadership, San Francisco: Chandler, 1960, offers the best bibliography of work in this area, listing more than 100 community power structure studies, pp. 196-228.

***Polsby, op. cit., pp. 8-11. Polsby's examples and documentation for this scheme of propositions are worth reading for further insight on the implicit theory. It is worth noting that the differences between Marxist assumptions and those of Polsby's stratification theorists are hard to clearly identify since most "stratification theorists" implicitly assume that the "wealthy" rule.

2) Political and civic leaders are subordinate to the upper class.

3) The upper-class power elite rules in its own interests.

4) Social conflict takes place between the upper and lower classes.

An illustration of these propositions in the form of conclusions to a study of an American community is the following comment about "Middletown":

> If, however, one views the Middletown pattern as simply of concentrating and personalizing the type of control which control of capital gives to the business group in our culture, the Middletown situation may be viewed as epitomizing the American business-class control system. . . . The business class in Middletown runs the city.*

It bears repeating that if almost any Latin American or developing country were substituted for "Middletown" in the above or for the "local community" in Polsby's remarks just quoted, the basic assumptions of stratification theory would correspond almost exactly to the preconceptions of many American scholars and journalists concerned with Latin American affairs, and the Marxist Left's assumptions about politics. For that reason, the pluralist critique of this approach to political analysis is of direct interest.

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*Lynd, Robert and Helen, Middletown in Transition, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1937, p. 77. Cited in Polsby, op cit., p. 16.

For the pluralists, the basic unifying assumption is that "nothing categorical can be assumed about power in any community."* This more open-ended approach to analysis rejects the assumption of the stratification and Marxist schools that some ruling elite must exist and asks not "Which clique controls this community?", but rather, "How are political decisions made in this community?" Mills correctly stated that this denial of the existence of an effectively dominant ruling class and the corollary assumption that a balance of social and economic forces diffuses power in politics is one of the oldest strands in American political thought. John Adams, in 1805, voiced the basic prescriptive endorsement of a pluralist polity: "The nation which will not adopt an equilibrium of power must adopt a despotism. There is no alternative."** And, much of the American political science literature written since the beginning of this century relies implicitly on pluralist assumptions.***

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*Polsby, ibid., p. 113. For an excellent discussion of the pluralist approach, see Chapter 6, pp. 112-121.

**Adams, John, Discourses on Davila, Boston, Russell and Cutler, 1805, pp. 92-93; cited in Mills, op. cit., p. 242.

***Some examples: Bently, Arthur, The Process of Government, 1908; Herring, Pendleton, The Politics of Democracy, 1940; Key, V. O., Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups, 1942; Polsby, op. cit., pp. 112-113, cites numerous other general and empirical studies in contemporary research based on pluralist assumptions.

Surprisingly for thirty years there was comparatively little intellectual debate about the important and contrasting analytical constructs employed by the political scientists mainly concerned with national parties and pressure groups and the sociologists who were becoming ever more elaborate in their locally oriented community power analyses. But in the mid-1950s two research trends led to a clash and the beginning of a new phase of pluralist analysis and serious methodological criticism of the stratification-minded sociologists.

The first trend was an increase in the number of political scientists who undertook empirical studies of urban politics beginning with a pluralist set of assumptions and found that their research conclusions contrasted sharply with the broad trends of thinking resulting from the community power structure studies done by the sociologists, whose work they had read in the hope of obtaining valuable guidance.* At the same time, entry of the stratification-oriented sociologists into the field of American national politics and the conclusions reached by the most well-known resulting contributions (Mills and Hunter) made a wider circle of political scientists aware of the predispositions of this type of analysis. To those whose speciality had

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*In the preface to his critique, Polsby comments that in preparation for the New Haven study Who Governs?, he "began to reread more carefully the leading community studies, looking for leads and hypotheses . . . Dahl and Wolfinger did the same, and . . . all of us reached the conclusion that previous studies of 'community power' as they were usually styled, would not help us as much as we had hoped and expected." Polsby, ibid., p. vii.

been the study of Congress, the Presidency, or the national pressure groups, the conclusions drawn by the stratificationists seemed misleading and inaccurate -- at best.

TECHNIQUES

A brief survey of the range of research techniques used in the contemporary analysis of political influence will be helpful both as a step toward the elaboration of the pluralist critique and as a prelude to my presentation in a separate essay of several preferred methods for assessing the political power of economic elites. Several scholars have provided excellent analytical surveys of research techniques, their application and the main trends of conclusions reached.*

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*Such surveys include the following: Rossi, Peter, "Community Decision Making," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 1, March 1957, pp. 415-443. Rossi categorized the approaches as follows:

a) Analysis of the characteristics of decisionmakers (class, mobility. . . .);
b) " . . . central attention to the partisans of issues. . . .";
   1) analysis of potentials for power and influence
   2) influence reputations
   3) "studies of particular issues in which influence or power have played a part in the determination of the outcome"
c) "decisions as [the] reference point, seeking to understand the choices of decisionmakers as the outcome of relatively complex processes."

Bell, Wendell, et al., op. cit., employed the categorization of techniques used on p. 15. Polsby, op. cit., discussed mainly the reputational versus case method.

The following chart explicitly connects the three schools of elite analysis with the specific research techniques they employ. Obviously the many studies of

TECHNIQUES USED BY THREE "SCHOOLS"
OF CONTEMPORARY ELITE ANALYSIS

(X - some use is made) (XX - main technique employed)

	Pluralist	Stratification	Marxist
1. Historical/deductive		X	XX
2. Positional-formal leadership	X	X	X
3. Reputational		XX	
4. Decisionmaking/event analysis	XX		

community and national power employed a variety of formal and informal techniques that would defy any attempt at systematic categorization, but the broad relation of techniques to schools is nevertheless possible because of the heavy dependence of each school on one particularly often-used method. The Marxist authors inevitably observe the society in the past and present and draw their usual conclusions -- a research approach designated here as the "historical-deductive" technique. Some stratification theorists also have used this method quite extensively (notably Mills), but most of the more elaborate investigations have relied heavily on the "influence reputation" approach, while the pluralists mainly use the analysis of specific political decisions. Having used these specialized terms, we shall now briefly describe the evolution of these research approaches.

What is meant by the "historical-deductive" method is essentially self-evident. Almost all of what is now considered "classical political theory," including the elite theorists reviewed earlier, was written by means of this rather simple technique. An intelligent observer uses history (facts), his sensitivity, and his pen to fashion a complete or partial portrait of society. This technique is and will continue to be widely and creatively used and the products of such work can provide important information and insight. But there are, of course, very serious dangers of subjectivism and self-fulfilling hypothecation in such work, and this, in fact, explains the effort of the social sciences to move toward additional and more explicitly "objective" research techniques. In the case of classical and contemporary Marxist writing, for example, it is often quite obvious that the initial assumptions and constructs of the author strongly condition the analysis and conclusions.

A second approach uses the rather straightforward method of determining who occupies the formal positions of authority in different sets of institutions -- economic, military, and political. The long-accepted legalist tradition of political analysis stopped at this point and assumed that actual roles and functions corresponded with the formal positions. A realization of the limits of this simple positional technique has long been widespread and, for that reason, information of this kind is now usually gathered merely as a necessary preliminary to the asking of further questions.

It is worth noting, however, that social scientists are willing to assume that in some types of institutions, position corresponds to real influence even though they do not make the same assumption about other institutions in the same society. Most notable is Mills, who is willing to accept formal leadership position in business and military organizations as equivalent to having power within them, but simultaneously views members of congress and assorted other government officials occupying the highest formal positions of political authority as able to influence only "middle levels" of decision.* Numerous studies of the business and military elites rely for their data on the assumption that formal authority is real authority.** Yet, little effort seems to have been made to explicate the reasons this assumption seemed warranted in the case of such organizations, or analyze the characteristics of different types of organizations which might explain the reasons why position corresponds with authority in some but not others. There is also a large body of literature on the social background and structure of elite groups which has relied on formal leadership positions for the basic information on the

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*Mills, op. cit.

**For a discussion of some of these and bibliographic references, see Wendell Bell, op. cit., pp. 6-10.

identity of the elites.*

The "reputational" technique of influence analysis was developed precisely because of the patent shortcoming of these first two methods. This third research technique sought to identify the elites of a community or an institution by eliciting the:

> opinions or judgments of other members of the society who tell the researcher who they think the leaders are. The researcher then uses some criterion of consensus to decide which persons appear to be operating as leaders in the community.**

This is done in several ways: random samples of the population are asked to identify the community's leaders; a list of formal leaders from the major institutional groups is asked to name the most influential persons or those whom they would consult if they wanted to accomplish some task in the community;*** and, third, an

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*For example, the generalizations in Matthews' The Social Background of Political Decision-Makers, New York: 1954, are far less interesting and significant if one believes Mills and views the formal leaders Matthews selected only as agents for the real elite, whose social background therefore remains to be investigated.

**Bell, Wendell, et al., op. cit., p. 13.

***For example: D'Antonio, W. and E. C. Erickson, "The Reputational Technique as a Measure of Community Power. . .," American Sociological Review, June 1962, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 362-376. This article attempts to reply to some of the criticisms levied against the reputational technique by Wolfinger and Polsby and should be read by those interested in assessing the debate.

initially selected panel of experts is asked to name the "most influential persons;" those named are, in turn, asked to do likewise through one or more successive stages until the persons most often named by all the groups are designated the most influential. This is termed the "snowball" or "cobweb" sampling method.* Besides these differences in the process of obtaining informants, Bell comments on the different types of questions asked in this search for the ruling elites:

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*See Bell, op. cit., pp. 13-15. An example of this approach applied to the finding of a national elite is F. Hunter, Top Leadership, USA 1959. Bell describes the procedure used by Hunter:

1. The selection, with the aid of four judges, of the 106 most influential national organizations from a tentative list of 1,093.
2. A questionnaire sent to the leaders of the 106 organizations, asking, among other things, for their opinions about other powerful associations, and for the names of five national leaders considered to be of top influence in national policymaking.
3. A request to the secretaries of the Chambers of Commerce and Community Chests in all cities in the country with populations exceeding 100,000 for five names of persons in their communities considered to be top public leaders.
4. Several waves of questionnaires or interviews with the persons nominated as top leaders in order to obtain their opinions on the adequacy of the list of top leaders compiled by the previous methods.

> In some studies, informants are asked simply to say who are the "leaders". . . . In others, they are asked specifically to name leaders in particular fields, such as national politics or local affairs. And sometimes the question is couched in terms of influence to discover who affects the decisions on community problems.*

And, this brings us to the heart of the pluralist critique of the reputational method. The pluralists assert that there is no necessary connection between the reputation and the reality of influence -- there will be influential persons who are not known, and relatively well-known persons who have little or no hand in making any important decisions. But more importantly, the pluralists contend that in many cases influence is fragmented, divided among different groups so that there is no one ruling elite and that the reputational technique does not offer a means of discovering the pattern of relations between issues and influential persons.**

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*Bell, ibid., p. 14. See also pp. 14-21 for a description of several representative community power studies based on the reputational method.

**Polsby, op. cit. (1959), p. 232. Wolfinger, "Reputation and Reality in the Study of Community Power," American Sociological Review, October 25, 1962. This article makes the additional point that the reputational technique assumes power in a community to be a rather permanent attribute of those named -- rather than a characteristic that might change from year to year.

This problem of issue specific versus general influence was noticed and commented on by some of the sociologists engaged in community power studies. Agger, in 1956, called for a revision of the basic assumption that "political behavior . . . on the part of activists, is general rather than a specialized phenomenon."* And, in 1957, Peter Rossi, having applied the reputational method and evaluating other studies which used it, noted:

> . . . in the case of Hunter's study (1953) the range of issues with which the power structure concerns itself is delimited by example. The implication is left that there are few areas of community life in which the power structure does not take a hand. The total set of issues is unspecified and hence the impact of the power structure on the life of the community is hard to asses. . . Granted that power is wielded and influence exists . . . the question still remains as to the proportion of all decisions affected this way. The method of collecting examples probably emphasizes the efficacy of the power or influence structure. . .**

Other examples of similar criticisms are the comments by Robert Dahl in a theoretical article on "The Concept of Power" where he argued that generalized judgments about "power" or "influence" are meaningless unless an effort is made to assess the range and kinds of decisions over which persons or groups had "influence."*** And James March made a similar point stating:

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*Agger, Robert, "Power Attributions in the Local Community," Social Forces, Vol. 34, May 1956, p. 31.

**Rossi, Peter, "Community Decision Making," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 1, March 1957 pp. 429-430.

***Behavioral Science, Vol. 2, July 1957.

> the evidence that exists indicates that the influence relationship. . . varies according to the subject matter under consideration.*

This literature of criticism leads to the fourth analytical technique -- decision or event analysis. The influence of persons or social groups is to be determined not by formal position, or mere deductive analysis, or "reputation" but by undertaking an investigation of actual decisions reached within the political system and deducing from the patterns of participation and success in influencing the outcome who was influential in particular types of political decisions. Outstanding as an example of the application of the decision method is Robert Dahl's 1961 study of three important conflicts in New Haven, though there are also several other important works employing this method.** Dahl selected three different types of political problems (political nominations, urban redevelopment and educational policy) and did thorough case studies of a number of particular conflicts within each of these general "policy areas." The study found that indeed there were relatively few

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*March, James G., "An Introduction to the Theory and Measurement of Influence, "American Political Science Review, 49, (June 1955), pp. 431-451.

**Dahl, R., Who Governs?, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961. Banfield, C. E., Political Influence, Free Press of Glencoe, 1961. Prethus, R., Men at the Top, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. (Prethus used both the decision and reputational techniques in this study.)

persons who participated actively and wielded influence over those important political decisions but the pluralist hypothesis that influence is usually specialized rather than general was borne out:

> . . . fifty different individual actors initiated or vetoed policies in all three (issue-areas). However, only three leaders initiated or vetoed policies in more than one issue-area.*

The pluralist analysis of political influence, then, proceeds by selecting a number of issues in different realms of public policy for close analysis and asking three questions: who participates, who succeeds, who gains and who loses as a result of the decision.** The decision analysis method, it should be noted, is adaptable to any political system because it does not make any confining initial assumptions about the structure of leadership, but at the same time does not preclude the possibility of finding that there is, in fact, a cohesive elite.

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*Dahl, ibid., p. 181.

**Polsby, op. cit., pp. 123-138, suggests these three questions and specifies what he means by them. For our purposes the meanings are indicated by the words themselves. Polsby suggests a research plan as follows: "First the researcher should pick issue areas as the focus of his study . . . secondly, he should be able to defend these issue areas as very important in the life of the community . . . thirdly, he should study actual behavior . . . fourth, researchers should study the outcome of actual decisions within the community." p. 121.

CONCLUSION

This survey has clearly taken the pluralists' side and concluded that this "school's" criticism of the Marxist and stratification theorists is valid. It now seems appropriate to briefly comment on some of the intrinsic difficulties the pluralists' preferred research technique poses. The method can only be applied where some type of visible conflict over policy occurs. But there might well be political systems where such overt conflict is lacking or is stage-managed either because "the control of the elite is so great that overtly there is no disagreement" or "a ruling elite might be so influential over ideas, attitudes, and opinions that a kind of false consensus will exist. . . ."* A closely related type of problem that may tend to obscure or dampen real conflict is what Carl Friedrich and then later, Simon, have called the "rule of anticipated reactions" meaning that:

> the influenced may behave in accordance with the anticipated decision never expressed of the influencer; and the influencer will seldom issue commands that he knows in advance lie outside the zone of acceptance of the influenced.**

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*Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," op. cit., p. 468.

**Simon, H., "Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Political Power," Journal of Politics, Vol. 15, 1953, p. 515.

Such problems are of course especially relevant to dictatorical environments or those political situations where an oligarchy has acquired skill in rule by ostensibly democratic means. Nevertheless, the comment made by Dahl seems suitable to dealing with these two kinds of problems -- he notes that it is only the examination of "a series of concrete cases where key decisions are made" that permits any observer to conclude that either of the above situations do in fact exist in given political systems and that this would then constitute evidence suggesting the existence of a conspiratorial/collaborative ruling elite of some consequence.*

A perhaps more serious problem is the selection of political decisions for analysis. Quite obviously, no scholar will be able to study all the important political issues and the conflicts that occurred, for example, within a presidential term or during the regime of a certain party or during some historical "period." How then can a sample of "policy areas" and specific issues be selected so that some general conclusions about political influence can be reached? There are two possible answers to this: First, for the scholar mainly concerned with the simple question of whether there is or isn't a cohesive ruling elite in a given political system, a rather small sample of issues will be adequate provided the outcomes have important consequences for the

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*Dahl, R., 1958, op. cit., p. 468.

community, because if it can be demonstrated that there were different sets of successful participants in even a few important matters, the hypothesis of one ruling elite is already disproven. For the scholar interested in the influence of a specified political group (e.g., the economic elite) a similar argument can be made: the selection of several political conflicts the outcomes of which were of great importance to the group being studied and an evaluation of the group's success in such cases should provide a fairly reasonable basis for estimating that group's political influence without examining every instance of conflict. Of course, one difficulty remains, if the group is very influential in policy areas removed from its ostensible sphere of direct interest or if one is interested in its general political influence, this method of decision sampling may not be adequate. Another paper will present a general approach to the analysis of economic elites' political influence which argues for the concurrent use of three methods -- two from among the four here discussed, and a third which attempts to provide an objective measure of the comparative political success of different groups.