American States of Mind

Political Beliefs and Behavior among Private and Public Workers

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Yale University Press
New Haven and London

Published with assistance from the Louis Stern Memorial Fund.

Designed by James J. Johnson and set in Electra Roman type.
Printed in the United States of America by Halliday Lithograph Corporation, West Hanover, Massachusetts.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reinarman, Craig.
American states of mind.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Trade regulation—United States—Public opinion. 2. Capitalism—United States—Public opinion. 3. Public opinion—United States. 4. Truck drivers—United States—Attitudes. 5. Social workers—United States—Attitudes. I. Title.
HD3616.U47R1464 1987 330.12'2'0973 86–26752
ISBN 0–300–03817–8 (alk. paper)

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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Preface

The logic of laissez-faire, or the "free market," we are told with increasing frequency, is the answer. The question, however, is not entirely clear. Government in all its guises, the State, has been rendered suspect; a scant two decades ago, *it* was the answer. If this is true, what did people think and do to make it so? And what do they now make of the change? This book is about political consciousness in America. To be more precise, it is about the political consciousness of a dozen Americans—six private-sector truck drivers and six public-sector welfare workers—in the 1980s.

Our epoch is one in which political issues are known via nightly network newscasts, and citizens' beliefs about them are assessed in the aggregate almost weekly in national opinion polls. We routinely read that Americans believe this or that, that they support one or another candidate or policy, or that the American electorate has "moved to the right." Nearly a decade ago, I was prompted to begin the research reported here in part because I felt uneasy with such characterizations. Now that it is finished (or at least abandoned), I am even more uneasy.

The broad structural conflicts between state and market, workers and management, the little guys and the big guys, do not register clearly in the polls and at the polls. We hear much about welfare spending and taxes, government regulation and the health of industry. But what do such big issues look like in little lives? What forms do they take in the lived experience of *individuals?* I attempt in what follows to look not so much at these issues themselves but at how they appear through the lens of life history. I wanted to discover something about the ways in which work and private life inform political beliefs about capitalism

and democracy and the master conflicts of the 1980s. I wanted to know about how such beliefs, as well as the everyday dissatisfactions and deep democratic values that animate them, come to be expressed in the voting booth. Was it, say, "false consciousness" that led members of the working class to support Ronald Reagan? What, concretely, do people mean when they lash out against "bureaucracy" or "welfare cheats"? What molecules of everyday experience make up the "tax revolt" or the "shift to conservatism" or "health care as a right"?

It is my hope that the people you will meet in the chapters to follow will serve as ideological windows through which to glimpse an array of answers to such questions. Indeed, my twelve subjects were chosen precisely because their beliefs were so varied that they could not help but provide such an array. C. Wright Mills once made a famous yet still neglected plea for the "sociological imagination," in which he argued that in the modern world one cannot understand personality apart from social structure, private troubles apart from public issues, or biography apart from the broader historical flow of which it is a droplet. In a very real sense my choice of problem or topic was inspired by his words. There is another sense, however, in which I have inverted his logic. Mills wanted scholars and citizens alike to understand their situations by paying attention to the ways in which huge institutional structures impinge upon the individual. While I have tried to infuse this work with that sensibility, I have also tried to find in the minute experiences of a few individuals the grand themes of our epoch. Thus, while I have endeavored to understand my subjects as members of a "social class," I have also tried to learn about social class through their biographies. My analysis is an attempt to study the macrolevel issues of a moment in our history by looking at how these are refracted in the microlevel mosaic of a life history.

If this turns out to have been a useful exercise, it will be because of the many people who have given me aid and comfort along the way. Intellectual debts can never be repaid in any real sense, but they can be acknowledged. First and foremost I thank the twelve people who so graciously and honestly shared their time, beliefs, and concerns with a stranger. To say that I am grateful seems a masterpiece of understatement. I hope only that I have done justice to their views.

Through her great wisdom and support, Miye Narkis made all my work much easier, and Lynn Thingvold typed what must have seemed like endless early drafts with great skill and convincingly feigned cheer. Many other friends doubled as mentors: Marc Beyeler, Sharon Carlsen, Jeff Fagan, Victoria Hatfield, Ellen Hickey, David Keown, Tom Koenig, Ron Lembo, Clarence Lo, Pat Morgan, Sheigla Murphy, Judy Rothschild, Grace Schrafft, Susan Shapiro,

Mark Temple, David Wellman, Jack Whalen, and, *dulcis in fundo*, Chris Pugliese. Special thanks are due those who gave the extraordinary gift of their time and critical capacities in reading earlier drafts of this book: Bob Alford, Stanley Aronowitz, Jim Baumohl, Bennett Berger, Bill Domhoff, Jim O'Connor, Frances Fox Piven, and, especially, Rob Rosenthal.

Rosemary C. R. Taylor gave me the chance to test the waters with some of the early research at the 1982 meetings of the American Sociological Association. Troy Duster arranged for me to spend a year as Visiting Scholar at the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California, Berkeley, where I first tried out some of the ideas reported here. I was fortunate as well to have a postdoctoral fellowship at the Alcohol Research Group of the School of Public Health at Berkeley. Although my work there had nothing to do with this book, Robin Room and Connie Weisner provided such support and stimulation that I found it easy to smuggle in my writing in the evenings. Similarly, Dan Waldorf of the URSA Institute in San Francisco kindly looked the other way when this work distracted me from our other research tasks.

The very early stages of the research were supported by a Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. My official graduate school mentors also doubled as friends—no doubt the reason I learned so much from them. Donald R. Cressey gave unstintingly of his time, his sense of the sociological enterprise, and his sharp blue pencils, and in so doing taught me much of the discipline of the writer. Don Zimmerman generously delved with me into issues new to us both and taught me the value of ethnomethodology—a powerful way of seeing social structure under construction in social interaction. My debt to Dick Flacks is evident throughout these pages. His gentle insistence upon building a social science capable of grasping both the mechanisms of ideological domination and the capacities of ordinary people for autonomous thought and self-development has been an essential nutrient in my growth as a scholar and a person. The ideas and the humanity he shared with me for six years in a seminar on political consciousness at the University of California, Santa Barbara, will forever infuse my intellectual and political sensibilities.

I must also thank Gladys Topkis of Yale University Press, whose patience and support throughout gave me the confidence I needed to finish, and Cecile Watters, whose editorial gifts have made this book infinitely more organized and readable than it otherwise would have been.

Finally, I dedicate these pages to my parents. It was my mother's fervent morality that led (in ways of which she did not always approve, yet somehow always encouraged) to my sense of social justice. It was her passion for learning and ideas that (finally) infected me, and her abiding respect for the beliefs of

others that informs both question and method in this book. My father, having tired (remarkably slowly) of political arguments with his son, quoted to me the wisdom of Samuel Butler (1612–80), from which I continue to learn: "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." From him I also gained a sense of craft and an understanding that one gets the job done by staying with it—brick by brick, paragraph by paragraph. What is of value in this work is due to their efforts as well as my own.

1

State and Market in the Public Mind: An Introduction

SOMETHING was happening. No one seemed quite sure what or why, but by the end of 1980 it was clear that the winds of political change were blowing across America. The most conservative president in half a century had won office by a wide margin after frontally attacking a form of capitalist state that not long before had been taken for granted as central to prosperity and stability. This book is about what happened, or, more accurately, about how a dozen citizens *thought about* what happened: how they formed and used their political beliefs, what this had to do with their working and nonworking lives, and why, in the shifting circumstances of the late 1970s and early 1980s, they thought and believed and voted as they did. Before I introduce them, however, it is necessary to sketch the historical context in which they and the issues I asked them to talk about were situated.

Whether the 1980 presidential election was a "critical" election, involving a long-term realignment of the electorate under the Republican party, remains a matter of intense debate. What is not in doubt, however, is that it was a critical juncture in American political life. The period from the end of World War II to the end of the 1960s has been called the golden age of the welfare state (Gough 1979). Whatever else history may deem significant about the first Reagan election, it clearly defined a new terrain for political battle, what Katznelson aptly names the crossroads of state and market (1981, 313). Further, the election resuscitated the nineteenth-century laissez-faire notion that the state is inherently bad for the health of the market *and, therefore,* for the populace. The rival ideology, which had held sway since the 1930s, was that the success of capitalism requires an active state. Roosevelt had convinced even some conservatives that

welfare state liberalism and regulation are the best long-term defenses for private property and free enterprise because they counter the injustices of capitalism and thus defuse criticism. Later Democratic presidents built their coalitions and policies on this foundation, and neither Eisenhower nor Nixon succeeded in shaking it.

The domestic tranquillity and legitimacy forged in the New Deal and brought to fruition in the postwar years had two pillars. The first can be called Fordism. Rather than continue to maximize profits by paying workers as little as possible, many business leaders came to accept Henry Ford's idea that steadily rising wages would not only reduce economic conflict in the sphere of production but also allow more workers to purchase more goods. This strategy broadened the proportion of the population who could participate in mass consumption, thus increasing profits by expanding domestic markets at the same time that it presumably satisfied more human wants (see, for example, Aronowitz 1973; Ewen 1976). The Wagner Act of 1935 helped institutionalize this wage-price compromise between business and unionized workers by legalizing collective bargaining or institutionalizing a "democratic class struggle."

The second basis was the so-called welfare state, perhaps more accurately called the regulatory welfare state, born of the protests of the Great Depression. Following Keynesian economic theory, an array of income support programs was established (Social Security, public assistance, unemployment insurance, and so on) during and after the New Deal. Such programs eased the suffering caused by troughs in the business cycle and stabilized demand by putting a floor under consumer spending. While various forms of government regulation in key industries helped prevent wild swings in the market, the welfare state smoothed enough of the other rough edges of American capitalist society to avert most of the class conflict found in other industrial democracies.

Although the welfare state and the Fordist bargain between capital and labor were instrumental in postwar prosperity, both were predicated upon continued economic growth. The United States emerged from the war militarily and economically unscathed relative to Europe and remained the dominant actor in an expanding world market for two decades. Growth became problematic, however, when, almost simultaneously, the rebuilding Japanese and German economies became competitive, the civil rights movement successfully pushed for expanded state funding of the War on Poverty and Great Society programs, and spending for the Vietnam War began to inflate the U.S. economy. Under the low-growth conditions that began in the late 1960s, inflation began to take a toll on financial markets and the international monetary system. The oil crises of the early 1970s further strained Keynesian macroeconomic policies, and the

"politics of growth" coalition that had governed since the 1940s began to show signs of wear.[1]

The unparalleled economic growth of the postwar years allowed both rising wages and living standards and expanded state services. When this growth faltered, signs of the 1980 electoral earthquake began to appear. Popular expectations for "the good life," or at least a "decent" life, arose alongside the high wages of Fordism and the expansion of the welfare state. But by the mid-1970s, an army of business lobbyists began to argue that the economic costs of such expectations were a fetter on capital accumulation. What amounted to an investment strike began. Rather than invest in research, development, and new factories, many corporations put their capital in low-wage developing nations or into mergers. This further lowered the relative productivity of U.S. industries, exported jobs, and increased unemployment. Many industry organizations began ideological offensives against state regulation and social spending in which government was held to be solely responsible for stagflation (O'Connor 1981). In October 1974, *Business Week* editorialized candidly about the mounting accumulation crisis:

> It is inevitable that the U.S. economy will grow more slowly than it has. . . . Some people will obviously have to do with less. . . . Indeed cities and states, the home mortgage market, small business, and the consumer will all get less than they want. Yet it will be a hard pill for Americans to swallow, the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more. Nothing that this nation, or any nation, has done in modern history compares in difficulty with the selling job that must now be done to make people really accept the new reality.

President Carter beat a Watergate-tainted President Ford in 1976 by campaigning on more or less traditional Democratic themes, even proposing national health insurance. However, declining U.S. predominance in the world market, a continuing energy crisis, balance-of-payment problems, and worsening stagflation led him to change his political tune. What Wolfe has called Carter's conundrum (1981, 200) began before the hostage crisis in Iran. Simply put, without sustained economic growth, the Keynesian macroeconomic formula by which liberalism had traditionally reigned was less and less available to him. By the middle of his term, Carter was sounding more and more like a Republican. He admitted to the nation that austerity needed to be imposed, that an unemployment-riddled recession had to be induced to wring inflation out of

1. For a variety of theoretical perspectives on these developments, see O'Connor (1973, 1984), Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki (1975), Barnet (1980), Castells (1980), Vidich (1980), Wolfe (1981), and Calleo (1982).

the economy. In light of the accumulation crisis, he backed away from even the ideal of full employment, which had become bad for "business confidence" and the "investment climate."

Although such conditions intensified the need for income security from public aid programs, Carter could not overcome the fiscal crisis besetting the welfare state. Corporations were demanding lower taxes as well as fewer regulations in the name of renewed profitability and growth. Nor would the middle class, whose living standards already had been seriously squeezed by inflation, stand for higher taxes. In 1978, the California tax revolt sparked by Proposition 13 began to spawn similar movements in two dozen other states, most of them rife with the raucous rhetoric of welfare state bashing (Kuttner 1980).

By 1980 candidate Carter spoke no more of national health care but instead boasted of his efforts toward deregulation. He also halved capital gains taxes, to the benefit of investors and corporations, while raising Social Security taxes for everyone earning under twenty-eight thousand dollars a year. Even while he nodded at the Democrats' traditional totem of fairness, he seemed to genuflect at the Republican altar of profitability. He failed in his attempt to fight on Reagan's ideological turf and thereby to capture the electoral center. The degree to which Carter's political demise can be blamed on the Iran debacle is debatable. What seems less debatable is that Reagan's margin of victory signaled a shift. Although it was not the revolution the Right quickly claimed it to be, the economic, political, and cultural templates upon which postwar America sat had experienced a jolt that measured jarringly high on the social Richter scale.[2] The welfare state, once held up as the savior of capitalism, was now cast as the villain who was ruining it. The New Deal–Great Society state was symbolically transformed into a Democratic party vice while its elimination, or at least amputation, became a Republican party virtue.

Of course, the notion that welfare state programs enacted *in response* to

2. Clearly there is more to the Reagan victory in 1980 than this sketch of the state-market core implies. Edsall (1983) finds many elements in what is often spoken of as a simple ideological shift in the electorate: the marriage of ideological (cultural) conservatives and increasingly powerful corporate political action committees; the decline of trade union membership; the diversity of Democratic party constituencies (a source of strength in times of growth but a vulnerability during contraction or crisis); the effects of inflation on tax bracket creep, which pushed many former welfare state supporters toward antistate positions; and the continuing decline in voter turnout among potentially Democratic voters. Shoch (1985) links such diverse developments to the transition to a postindustrial economy, in which one social structure of accumulation, and attendant class configurations and political relations, is being replaced by another. New technologies, for example, have reduced the size and power of unions, while workers' support for New Deal welfare state programs was weakened by postwar prosperity, which made many of them into middle-class suburbanites (see O'Connor 1981). Perhaps the richest critical analyses of the meaning of 1980 are Ferguson and Rogers (1981) and Piven and Cloward (1982). For an intriguing conservative view, see Phillips (1982).

failures of the market were the *cause* of those failures is difficult to swallow. But the important issue is why that notion became appealing to so many. It had not always been so. Throughout the 1950s a residue of affinity for government remained from the successes of the New Deal and World War II. In 1960, the Report of the President's Commission on National Goals found majoritarian support for expanding the size and scope of government and raising the pay of government workers (for example, Wriston 1960). There was also strong popular backing for the Kennedy-Johnson War on Poverty in the mid-1960s. Thus, scarcely a decade before the rise of Reaganism, it credibly could be said that Americans believed that the state not only could but should solve social ills (see, for example, Lane 1962, 190–92).

By 1968, however, the Democrats were hurt by, among other things, the growing schism over Vietnam. Nixon's budding conservative renascence was nipped by a Democratic Congress and the Watergate scandals. But the "crisis of confidence" and "malaise" of which President Carter was soon to speak afflicted both major parties. Government in general seemed increasingly discredited, but particularly, in a context of stagflation and creeping taxation, the welfare state. Without economic growth—to keep the promise of opportunity that is the essence of America and to finance the public programs that sustained those for whom that promise was unkept or broken—politics grew into what Thurow (1980) called a zero-sum game. More demands were made on a state less able to meet them. In a situation of fiscal crisis, one group's successful claim on the state was another's loss. Without growth, the Keynesian consensus cracked, and the liberal-labor coalition that had supported it began to disintegrate.

All this provided fertile political soil for the rise of the Right. In the aftermath of the 1960s, Vietnam, and Watergate, the right wing of the Republican party brokered a marriage between economic conservatives who wanted business to have free reign and social conservatives upset about what modernity had done to "traditional values." As liberalism crumbled, this marriage broadened the popular base of the Right. By 1980, Reagan managed to convince nearly all conservatives and more than a few moderates and weak liberals that the problems facing the United States constituted a crisis not of capitalism but of Keynesianism. The market, he assured the electorate, would solve all America's problems if only the state would get out of its way. His ability to roll back the regulatory welfare state has been constrained and partial, but he has had remarkable success at the level of symbolism. The outsider versus the establishment and the little guy against the powerful are enduring motifs in American culture. Yet, where earlier populists fought against banks and railroads, "Wall Street" or "big business," Reagan managed for the first time to redefine populism as *pro-business*. It did not seem to matter that the market under Reagan was character-

ized by a concentration of capital into larger and larger corporate units while the rates of small-business failure and unemployment reached heights known only in the Great Depression. What seemed to matter most was that for the first time since the 1930s, government was seen by many as a force for evil rather than good. The development of the welfare state was not, as theorists of many stripes had assumed, inexorable.[3]

This attempt at a historical overview surely omits or oversimplifies much of significance. I do not mean to imply that the so-called Reagan Revolution has *unequivocally* triumphed. For instance, Reagan had surprisingly short coattails in his first election and nearly none in his second. His personal popularity did not extend far enough to garner a Republican majority in Congress. This often made for stalemates on foreign policy and legislative issues. For all his self-proclaimed fiscal conservatism, Reagan has run up the largest budget deficits in the country's history.[4] Polls throughout both terms have revealed huge personal approval ratings for Reagan *and* disapproval of many of his basic policies and spending priorities. In a thorough review of recent survey evidence, Lipset and Schneider (1983) show, for example, that Americans back free-enterprise competition but remain critical of its consequences, just as they support government regulation and hate bureaucratic red tape (see also Schneider 1984). If what Reagan signified and accomplished can be seen as a transformation, it was a truncated one. What Antonio Gramsci said of a different society in an earlier era somehow

3. The view that the development of the welfare state is integral to the development of advanced capitalism, once held by scholars of many political persuasions, is now being questioned. See, for example, O'Connor's (1973) path-breaking study on the fiscal crisis of the state; Katznelson (1981) for an excellent overview of this issue vis-à-vis the 1980 election; Skocpol and Orloff (1984) for a historical cross-cultural study that casts doubt on theories that assume the inevitable growth of welfare states in advanced capitalist societies; and Gough (1979) and Offe (1985) for solid, neo-Marxian analyses of the nature of the welfare state under capitalism.

Although it is beyond the scope of this work to analyze the efficacy of regulatory-welfare states in reducing suffering and inequality, it should be mentioned that there is evidence that state intervention in economies does work toward that end. Stack's (1978) research on thirty-two nations found this to be the case, independent of levels of development and growth; and Piven and Cloward (1971) and Jencks (1983) offer similar evidence on the United States supporting this point.

4. By the second year of Reagan's second term, when his sixth record-breaking deficit budget was submitted to Congress, it became apparent that these were, so to speak, designer deficits. Despite attempts to blame them on profligate welfare state liberals, the deficits were largely the consequence of huge increases in military spending. By late 1985, prompted by a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, administration aides began admitting privately to the press that the deficits were a deliberate attempt to saddle future administrations with levels of debt and interest payments that would preclude new federal spending initiatives in the foreseeable future. Deficit spending thus combined with new weapons systems to form a unique tactical Trojan horse for the Right: unable to dismantle the regulatory welfare state legislatively, they could go a long way toward that end budgetarily.

seems apropos: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear." (1971[1930], 276).

Partially hidden within all these recent developments lies a metaissue that, at least since the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century, has been at the heart of Western political and economic thought. It has to do with what I will call *the state-market relation*. The people introduced in the next chapter never spoke of it as such, nor did they entertain the idea that their beliefs and policy preferences had much to do with the grand themes of history. Yet the major and minor political debates that were part of their daily lives were fundamentally about the nature of the proper relation between state and market. Their political talk, I hope to show, was continuous with Rousseau's discussion of the tension between liberty and equality in *The Social Contract* (1761). Although it has been difficult indeed to improve on his finding that neither liberty nor equality can be had without the other, this has not discouraged citizens or scholars from trying to do so ever since.

In the year the American Revolution began, Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations* (1937 [1776]), in which he made an eloquent moral case for the notion that only liberty could yield equality. In contrast to the uses to which his philosophical treatise is now put, Smith saw it as a weapon against the utterly undemocratic feudal and ecclesiastical institutions that controlled commerce and virtually all other forms of social life. To the cheers of the mercantile and industrial class then battling lords and popes, Smith laid out a laissez-faire theology in which only the famed "invisible hand" of the free market was capable of boosting production and exchange, improving the material lot of societies, mediating conflicts, balancing liberty and equality. Capitalists were delighted to see their interests elevated to "natural law." A careful reading of *The Wealth of Nations*, however, shows that the economic actors Smith had in mind were independent artisans and farmers rather than, say, the real estate speculators and conglomerate chieftains who now invoke his work as a weapon in their ideological combat with government regulators and union negotiators. Presaging Marx, who used him to great scholarly advantage, Smith feared that the inequalities of power between owners and workers might lead to something less than the distributive justice and social harmony predicted in his ideal-typical map of a market world.

Whether we look at the world before Smith and Rousseau or after the 1980 presidential election, I want to suggest that politics was and is centrally concerned with negotiating the nature of the state-market relation. From the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, peasant rebellions, riots, and other popular uprisings routinely accompanied recessions (Wallerstein 1976, 20–23).

These have often been portrayed as spasmodic or compulsive mob phenomena rather than rational or strategic forms of political expression (see Rude 1980 for a critique of the former). In a classic essay, British historian E. P. Thompson reinterpreted the bread riots and other forms of primitive protest among eighteenth-century English crowds and found in them an implicit politics. His central concept was the notion of *moral economy*, which I will borrow often in this book to explicate the meaning of the state-market relation and the struggle over it. He defined this as the "popular consensus" about what are and are not legitimate market practices, a consensus "grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community." This moral economy "supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal . . . [which] impinged very generally . . . upon government and thought." Thompson found in early crowd actions some "notion of legitimation" informing the basic beliefs of protesters, notions that "they were defending traditional rights and customs" that were "supported by the wider consensus of the community" (1971, 78–79; cf. Tilly 1985).

American history, too, has been full of fights over the state-market relation and the nature of the moral economy. The United States has not had only one form of democratic state since its inception but rather several successive ones characterized by the varying degrees to which democratic constraints have been imposed upon market mechanisms. In Jeffersonian America, for example, democracy was limited to the propertied, and public policy served largely to protect the market distribution of property. As the have-nots struggled over the years, first for the vote and then with it, in an attempt to make the market fair to the nonpropertied, the laissez-faire moral economy here and there gave way to a broadening of democratic rights. These rights came to be ensconced in norms and later in law and public policy—that is, in the state. Wolfe (1977) argued that there have been six stages of American government, each characterized by a distinct mode of resolving the tensions between capitalism and democracy. These have included an "accumulative state," organized at the dawn of industrialization to facilitate capital accumulation, and, later, "harmonizing" and "expansionist" states that developed in response to the democratic demands made on the market system after immigration and unionization (cf. Macpherson 1977).

Relative to European industrial democracies, the United States has not had a politicized working class or a labor party, and thus the American moral economy is characterized by a relatively undeveloped welfare state. A variety of notions has been advanced to account for this American exceptionalism. These include the absence of a feudal legacy, which might have inhibited social

mobility and thus exacerbated class conflict; a rich and expansive frontier, which served as a safety valve; foreign expansion or imperialistic ventures, which helped sustain growth and mobility; ethnic, cultural, and religious cleavages among an uncommonly heterogeneous working class; and the extension of voting rights prior to the rise of overt industrial class conflict.[5] To these might be added theories of postindustrial domination that stress the cooptiveness of mass-consumption culture. Here the combination of higher living standards and ideological manipulation integrates workers into the middle class and so diffuses more radically democratic demands (cf. Mills 1956; Marcuse 1964). Most of such accounts of American exceptionalism have been criticized if not discredited.

According to Piven and Cloward (1982), a laissez-faire moral economy persisted in the United States long after European nations had moved toward a new democratic moral economy with strong welfare states, and after the granting of voting rights had established political democracy in America. They attribute its staying power to institutional and ideological "walls" (for example, structures of government, cultural individualism) that blocked popular understanding of "the market" as a set of *socially constructed* relations sustained by the state rather than simply as part of the natural order. Such walls developed cracks during the economic crises of the Progressive Era and began to crumble during the depression, when chaotic unregulated competition and speculation led to massive middle-class poverty, putting the lie to the laissez-faire "law" that hard work and the invisible hand would yield economic well-being. The New Deal gave birth to the modern regulatory welfare state and in so doing established more firmly than ever before in American history that because the economy was a *political* economy, subsistence is not a matter for the lone individual to struggle for in an impersonal market.[6] Since then, the federal government has been so much a part of the economy—both in making the market profitable with tax laws, business loans, induced recessions, and foreign policies that protect private investments and in mediating the social impact of market activity by protecting the poor, the sick, consumers, or the environment—that the walls that had for so long symbolically separated state and market lay "in ruins" (1982, 150).

5. For contrasting treatments of American exceptionalism as it pertains here, see Bell (1960), Aronowitz (1973), and Piven and Cloward (1982).

6. Ignatieff (1985) rightly points out that the welfare state originating in the New Deal was not seen as a permanent means of meeting human needs. It had legitimacy in part because so many middle-class citizens found themselves poor, and these people were expected to rise again when the emergency of the depression passed. However, that no formal obligations to the poor are written into the Constitution and that Congress legally could have scrapped New Deal programs at any time suggest that the welfare state is sustained by the momentum of political culture, like the notion of a new moral economy. Another reason welfare state programs persist is that, contrary to folklore, for every dollar spent on means-tested programs for the poor, nine dollars are expended on programs serving the nonpoor (Jencks 1985; cf. Gilbert 1983).

A core theme in Piven and Cloward's thesis is that democratic political rights historically have been used to make the state ensure the right to livelihood or at least subsistence. As the state has increasingly become the locus of demands from both business and the mass public, they argue, we have undergone an "ideological transformation" in which the state's role in sustaining livelihoods *and* profits has become transparent.[7] There is evidence that a new moral economy, or at least one that seriously contends with laissez-faire, has evolved as part of this transformation. Business-backed offensives against the "culture of entitlement" and the "excess of democracy" (for example, Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975) imply that a substantial proportion of the American public believes there are such things as economic rights.

If culture may be understood to be that which is taken for granted, and if that which is contestable falls in the realm of ideology, then the trajectory of the United States in the twentieth century has been toward a moral economy that is not restricted to pure laissez-faire precepts. In 1985, for example, the Conference of U.S. Catholic bishops wrote a pastoral letter, to be read in thousands of churches, arguing that unrestrained capitalism often exacerbates injustice and that economic and social policy should therefore show more concern for the poor. This unsurprising moral appeal, in draft form and prior to publication, provoked surprisingly vociferous opposition from conservative Catholics and corporate spokesmen. The level of outrage from the leaders of the Right made it apparent that they felt capitalism *needed to be defended*, that it could not be taken for granted.

A debate on ABC's "Nightline" (February 14, 1986) offers another telling illustration. Anchor Ted Koppel threaded his way between a banker and a farmer arguing over the crisis of the family farm. The banker concluded that the increasing frequency of farm failures was an unfortunate but necessary part of the market system, and that "Americans have got to be prepared to see a shakeout" in which many "less efficient" farms would "go under." The farmer replied, "I am a *farmer*, not just a commodity. Farming is a way of life as well as an industry." He closed his critique of the administration's imposition of free-market discipline by

7. O'Connor (1978) offers a compelling case for this same point. Because the state has increasingly implicated itself in daily life through policies and spending for both accumulation and legitimation, it has become *the* arena of class (and other) conflicts in advanced capitalist societies. State attempts to rationalize social life to reduce the costs of reproducing the social relations required by the economy (for example, transportation, education, health care) have only increased the visibility of the state in the economy and further politicized hitherto private issues. For O'Connor, the current gamut of localized, particularistic demands on public agencies constitutes a popular, albeit often inchoate, movement to democratize the state—to make it responsive to human and community needs rather than to the imperatives of capital (cf. Crozier et al. 1975; Lindblom 1977; Castells 1980).

predicting that "Ronald Reagan is gonna go down as the Jim Jones of American agriculture."

What struck me about this exchange was not so much who won or lost which points but that it took place at all and that the two contenders were presented as having equal claims to credibility. Philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1973) has defined "truth" as that about which a rational consensus might be reached in an "ideal speech situation." Although "Nightline" is some distance from the sort of situation Habermas outlines, it is worthwhile to examine it as an exemplar of the formal public speech situations in our culture that are construed as fair or approximating the ideal. In this light, the pretense of "Nightline" to objectivity required that equal time and legitimacy be granted to the analyses of farmer and banker alike. Such epistemological equivalency implies that what counts for truth in America in the 1980s is something other than uncontested laissez-faire discourse. Our values and our views of what is true and possible and natural now seem to incorporate the visible hands of Keynes and Kennedy along with the invisible hand of Adam Smith. As historian Barrington Moore has put it, "The nineteenth-century notion that society bore no responsibility for the welfare of the population, that it was both especially futile and quite immoral to expect the chief of state to take effective action countering threats to the general welfare, now looks like a minor historical aberration" (1978, 22).

Yet, Moore wrote before Reagan and the New Right rose to political prominence—a rise that was due in no small part to their contrary assertion that the very reforms, regulations, and public programs that have accumulated since the 1930s to protect the general welfare from the vicissitudes of the market are the *cause* of current crises in the market. The Reagan administration has consistently attempted to scale back or eliminate both welfare and regulatory facets of the state and to institute "supply-side" (or, in the older argot, "trickle-down") economic policies that redistribute income upward so as to spur investment. Piven and Cloward argue that these policies fly in the face of the new moral economy that has evolved since the New Deal, and that because so many people have benefited from government programs and regulations, *the state and the new moral economy will be defended*. In broader historical terms, they say this defense will occur because capitalism itself has shown that human action has unlimited potential to transform the world and that, therefore, neither market outcomes nor anything else are understood as inevitable. The historical trajectory they trace thus takes an ironic shape: the market's successes have helped undermine the authority of the traditions of belief that undergird the social order of the market; the very democratic forces unleashed by capitalism are now taming it.[8]

8. I have reluctantly circumvented the reform versus revolution debate running through neo-Marxian work on the capitalist state, which stimulated much of my thinking. That debate too often

When I began the interviews for this book, I wanted to know whether such a defense of the new moral economy was in fact occurring and, if so, what forms it was taking. I soon discovered that this research problem was more easily stated than solved, or even addressed. Throughout the early backlash against the welfare state, the tax revolt, and the Reagan years there remained evidence of support for both the welfare and the regulative functions of the state (Lipset and Raab 1978; Yankelovich and Kaagan 1979; Lipset and Schneider 1983). Even in 1980, as Reagan was being elected by a wide margin, rent control measures were passed in several California cities by many of the same voters who elected him. And, despite the president's best campaign efforts, voters continued to elect Democratic congressional representatives who vowed to block many of the administration's initiatives against the state.

It was not clear, however, that these phenomena constituted an actual defense of an existing moral economy. Whatever the depth of support for the state from the New Deal through the Great Society, surely there was a tradition in America of skepticism toward government (particularly "big government"), and the clear success Reagan had in drawing upon and mobilizing it suggested that such a defense is at least contingent and problematic. The trajectory toward greater democratic economic rights has not been a straight line, nor has support for state intervention remained steady. In the early 1960s, political scientist Robert Lane found a base of support for the state, which, although tempered by notions of limited noninterference, seems remarkable in the 1980s:

> *The government is charged with unlimited responsibility for the general welfare.* . . . Today it is embodied in law (the Full Employment Act of 1946), and [the community], in a rather vague, backdoor fashion, accepts this as approved doctrine. This is part of a more general belief that the government is responsible for discovering and seeking solutions for *all social ills.*
>
> The problems will yield to appropriate government action. . . . [The community] believes that man, through government, can improve his lot in almost any direction; he can change economic laws, and need not be a slave to any circumstance. (1962, 191)

Support for the state looked strikingly different by the mid-1970s. Compare Lane's description with that of Owen and Schultze:

> After conquering the Depression, winning World War II, achieving post-war full employment, and constraining Soviet expansion in the Cold War, the American people had by 1965 concluded that the federal government was an effective instrument for accomplishing important and useful ends. That belief has been sharply eroded in the last ten years—partly because of failures (Vietnam and Watergate) and partly because of semisuccesses (the Great Society and détente) that failed to fulfill exaggerated expectations. Skepticism about government's ability has been accompanied by suspicion about government's intentions. (1976, 1; see also Nie and Andersen 1974 for an important analysis of survey data supporting this point)

Whether one looks at such shifting sentiments toward government, the decline of the Democrats' liberal-labor coalition, the rise of Reagan and the New Right, or the processes of renegotiating the American moral economy that is present in all such developments, it seems safe to say that the legitimacy of the regulatory welfare state from the late 1970s through the mid-1980s has become at least ambiguous. This conjuncture of political-economic problems has prompted theorists of varying ideological persuasions to write of the potential for a "legitimation crisis."[9] This concept is a slippery one, however. Citizens can be dissatisfied with a specific regime, with the basic values or the dominant ideology in a culture at a given time, or with the justice and efficacy of a society's master institutions (Yankelovich 1972; Friedrichs 1980). Moreover, perceptions of all three modes of delegitimation may be widespread and still not lead to any identifiable crisis. The forms of delegitimation *experienced* and the passions attached to them typically vary across the population. History is rife with examples of brutal, corrupt, and unjust regimes and political-economic systems that have limped along for decades with only cultural momentum and the support of key strata on their side.

Just as W. I. Thomas taught us that if people define situations as real they

does not ask whether democratic constraints on the market and reforms that insulate vulnerable groups from it have progressive significance in culture and daily life. Rather, the state as a whole is often seen as inevitably doing what capitalism needs to preserve itself, whether because the capitalist class actually dominates the state (instrumentalism) or because whoever runs the state must meet those requirements (structuralism). This theoretical corpus tends to ask only whether a reform will help preserve capitalism or lead to revolution. It therefore often precludes the analysis of the uses of reforms in present and future struggles and their cumulative significance (see Miliband 1969, 1977; Poulantzas 1973; Gold, Lo, and Wright 1975). For understanding politics at a given juncture, I assume that such issues cannot be assessed in advance (see, for example, Esping-Andersen, Friedling, and Wright 1976; Thompson 1978; Wright 1979; Skocpol 1979). Implicit here is the belief that it is erroneous to read Marx as saying that the transformation of capitalism into socialism would inevitably and everywhere and at each stage occur by revolutionary rupture (see Stephens 1979), and that social-democratic welfare state forms may be preferable to existing forms of communism or to a return to protocapitalist forms.

9. For different slants on the notion of legitimation crisis, see Yankelovich (1972), O'Connor (1973), Habermas (1975), Crozier et al. (1975), Janowitz (1976), Wolfe (1977), Denitch (1979), Thurow (1980), and Castells (1980).

will be real in their consequences, so Habermas (1975) has shown that subjective perceptions of legitimacy are an intrinsic component of objective crises. Between the social-structural roots of problems and their behavioral-political consequences lie the murky realms of perception and cultural articulation. Unless discontent and delegitimation become intersubjectively shared perceptions, they may not register at the social-system level.[10] In this sense, both "legitimacy" and "crisis" remain relative, particularly in a historical context characterized by crisis and change, and depend fundamentally upon the way in which grievances are experienced and expressed. This, in turn, depends upon how issues are framed, organized, and mobilized so that they come to have a specific ideological valence or partisan political charge. Although this work is hardly done democratically, from the masses up to elites, I do not wish to imply that ideologies are simply spoon-fed from above. Historically, popular discontents have taken on a great variety of ideological hues, but they have remained concrete and particular, bonded to specific experiential referents that are embedded in specific life histories. Although elites clearly do try to define issues and/or construct the frames through which problems will be perceived, these must *resonate* with voters in order to be effective (Fromm 1941; Lane 1962; Geertz 1973, 193–233; Mepham 1977; Moore 1978). Citizens more or less actively appropriate such frames and issues into their own political belief systems, or at least act to position themselves strategically among the belief systems extant in the political culture of which they are part (Bourdieu 1977; Wellman 1977; Aronowitz 1981).

All this leads into the somewhat vague arena of political consciousness that will be explored in the dozen depth interviews that follow. If there is conflict over the state-market relation, if the moral economy is being renegotiated, and if political alliances are being built up and torn down accordingly, then both the causes and the effects of such macrolevel phenomena must have their microlevel counterparts in the political consciousness of individuals. If the elites, electoral and otherwise, who are contending for the ideological souls of citizen-voters in this time of transition must make their beliefs resonate with "the people," what

10. I am indebted to Don Zimmerman for pointing out the importance of intersubjectivity in this context. Also, I must offer here an attempt at ideological work that may preempt some structuralist critics. If the forms of consciousness I will be examining may be seen as "false," then what I am proposing to study is how those living within them create their phenomenological "truth." Erving Goffman introduced his book on the organization of individual experience, *Frame Analysis*, by agreeing that such a focus was tacitly conservative in that it did not address, in fact distracted attention from, social-structural concerns. But, he added, "I can only suggest that he who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interests has much to do, because the sleep is very deep. And I do not intend here to provide a lullaby but merely to sneak in and watch the way people snore" (1974, 14). In lieu of such a literate disclaimer I substitute the hope of learning how individual experience is informed by and comes to affect social structure.

do "the people" make of it all? If newspaper headlines and network news stories give us day-by-day, blow-by-blow accounts of political change, and if scholars interpret its objective historical significance, what do such changes look like at the level of *lived experience*, which is where, democratic societies like to believe, all such changes originate?

A Note on Method

Having settled on this general topic area, I was faced with how to organize an investigation that might lead to worthwhile data and findings. The dominant methodological paradigm for the study of political beliefs in the social sciences—structured surveys and opinion polls of randomly selected samples—offers great breadth and generalizability. There is no equal to systematic questions asked of national probability samples for assessing short-term shifts in political attitudes and affiliations.[11] Yet such methods are deaf by definition (if not by design) to the *texture* of belief systems, to the nuance and complexity found in virtually every study that looks up close at the moving target of ideology as it exists in everyday life.

In his classic and now controversial survey of political belief systems, Phillip Converse (1964) found that contradictory beliefs and ideological inconsistencies are often the norm among most segments of the electorate, although subsequent research has shown this to be the product of how existing attitudes interact with the emerging events and conditions shaping the political environment (for example, Nie and Andersen 1974). Yet, in countless conversations about political issues, I had never met people who *thought* they held contradictory beliefs. I became intrigued by the possibility that beneath the objective inconsistencies measured in quantifiable, forced-choice survey questions there might be forms of subjective consistency that were important for grasping why people believe and act as they do. My leanings toward a qualitative approach got a push during a preliminary interview in which I asked a thirty-year-old tenant what she thought about housing problems and the rent control initiative in her city:

> I lived in Hawaii before I moved here two years ago, and landlords there were ripping people off so badly I couldn't afford to live there anymore. Since I've been here I've had two big rent increases—*after* my landlord's

11. The early exemplars of the dominant paradigm and their most sophisticated successors are Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948), Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954), Campbell et al. (1964), Free and Cantril (1967), and Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1976). For important revisionist or critical treatments of the same materials or methods, see Hamilton (1972), Wright (1976), and Gitlin (1978).

taxes were cut in half by Prop 13—and he doesn't do a damn thing to keep the place up. I'm afraid I won't be able to live here much longer either.

> Q: Sounds like you'd be supportive of the upcoming rent control measure then?

No way! Absolutely not. I don't believe in those kinds of controls. It would just be wrong in this country.

As I walked away from her doorstep and down the block, growing more stunned with each step by the distance between her ideology and her material interests, it became clear to me that in addition to my interest in *what* people's political beliefs were, I wanted to know *where* they got them and *how* a response like hers was possible. This called for qualitative methods such as securing life histories and conducting depth interviews.

I have therefore drawn upon a rich and growing tradition of qualitative research on political consciousness and ideology. Although life histories and depth interviews have been used to great advantage by Chicago School sociologists since the 1920s, their use in the study of political beliefs was established by David Riesman (1952) and Robert Lane (1962). Under their close-up lenses, the ambiguities and inconsistencies uncovered in surveys took on new meaning. Lane's largely Democratic working-class men, for example, expressed only tepid support for the welfare state's egalitarian social policies, which they might have been expected to support. Because they subscribed to the American tenet that everyone is created equal, and because they felt there was enough, if not equal, opportunity, they held that each person was the master of his or her own fate. These men had little hope of climbing out of the working class, but their hard work had allowed them to live "better than their parents." Mobility was therefore perceived as possible, so the idea that others might approach their "tenuous hold on respectability" with government aid bordered on a moral affront. For these otherwise charitable men, welfare programs threatened to rob their own efforts of meaning.

The Lane lineage was extended a decade later by Sennett and Cobb (1973). In their study of working-class families in Boston, they uncovered a subtle syllogism that also had to do with the limited permeability of class lines. If success and upward mobility are possible for even some people, then those who do not succeed and move up to the middle class must be responsible for their own failures. In this way the *presumption* of dignity for all was precluded by the *possibility* of dignity for the few achievers. Although these men and women deeply resented the injustices of class society, their feelings got expressed in strange and circuitous ways and their vision of the moral economy was affected accordingly. The fact that at least some of their peers had made it led them to

blame themselves for their own plight. At the phenomenological level, the only antidote they could imagine was continued sacrifice. Thus the very self-prescribed medication thought to heal the "hidden injuries of class" also seemed to inoculate against the appeal of state policies that might mitigate such injuries.

Using the same in-depth approach, Lamb (1974) studied ostensibly conservative California suburbanites. He too found political beliefs that did not make sense on the surface. Most members of the twelve families from the affluent Republican stronghold he studied were fans of the free market in principle. But unfettered urban development had encroached upon their little corner of Eden just enough to render their belief in property rights less than absolute, so they tended to favor strong land use and environmental regulations. Some aspects of the new moral economy had seeped into their otherwise conservative belief systems.

In each of these studies as in others in the qualitative tradition (for example, Wellman 1977; Botsch 1980; Berger 1981; Hochschild 1981), surprising ideological patterns were both discovered and made comprehensible by seeing how beliefs originate and operate in situ. If my goal was to understand how political beliefs about state and market worked as part of lived experience in the 1980s, this was the sort of study I had to do. This approach, however, demands a small number of subjects, and as I was not attempting to draw a representative sample, I could not rely on the rules for choosing randomly. I was left with the problem of *which* handful of people to interview.

My choice of subjects was made with a very old question in mind: namely, the relationship between work and class position on the one hand, and political beliefs and behavior, on the other. Social scientists since Marx and Weber[12] have studied this issue, and no doubt others are doing so as this is being written. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of a sociological study of ideology that does not examine beliefs in relation to work experience. I tried to combine this classical theoretical concern with my substantive interest in beliefs about the moral economy and the state-market relation. I conducted field research in an intensely

12. Social psychology has long been the Achilles heel of Marxist theory, in part because his early neo-Hegelian writings were not translated until rather recently and in part because many Marxists and most critics selectively imported from Marx's writings only his ideal-typical, dichotomous model of false consciousness–revolutionary class consciousness. However, in his empirical case studies, Marx argues that the latter develops *in the process* of class struggle and social change, and he identifies various conditions, usually tied to the labor process, that inhibit or enhance that development (for example, Marx 1967, 243–302, 1974). Weber's argument—that status groups, conceptions of honor, and styles of life all complicate and mediate the relation between class membership, consciousness, and political action—is very useful here for grasping the ways in which there is more to lived experience than labor or class position, although surely Marx, too, recognized this.

profit-oriented, private-sector business, "National Delivery Corporation," and, in the belly of the state's bureaucratic beast, in a local welfare office, "City Social Services." After enough visits to learn the lay of these lands and the casts of characters, I selected six workers from each setting for a series of depth interviews. (Like the company, the agency, and the town, the workers have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.)

Aside from asking about their life histories and work experience, I explored a wide range of questions about political principles and policy preferences, many taken from polls and surveys, and the reasoning behind their voting decisions over the past several elections. The overarching theme I hoped to get at was their sense of what may be called the *social charter*. Webster's defines *charter* as a "grant or guarantee of rights, franchises, or privileges from the sovereign power of the state." The notion of social charter thus provides a more accessible handle on what I have been calling the state-market relation and the moral economy.[13] I tried to get at their visions of what was and was not legitimate about the state vis-à-vis the market. Operationally, this meant probing their spending preferences on a variety of government programs and their support for or opposition to various forms of state regulation of the marketplace. By analyzing for each individual and group the links among life history, work experience, and political beliefs and behavior regarding the social charter, I was able to describe features of the social organization of lived experience that help account for what ideologies resonate and why and how beliefs take hold and get tailored, used, and changed to suit the shifting personal circumstances of their holders in the shifting political circumstances of the 1980s.

What can a mere dozen people (and from California!) tell us about political-economic matters? If it is not enough to cite the great insights of Riesman, Lane, and the many others who have followed in their methodological footsteps by garnering a mass of data on a minuscule number of subjects, and if those skeptics of quantitative bent remain unsatisfied after reading that my purpose is to *explore* rather than to test this or that hypothesis or to prove a theory, what can be said? I am not comfortable simply asserting the authority of Margaret Mead (1953, 41–49), who argued that a sample of one will do because all individuals are socialized in terms of their specific culture and thus reflect it; although this is

13. I have borrowed heavily here (and more generally for purposes of defining my problematic) from the works of Richard Flacks (1976, forthcoming). He argues that a "cultural charter" exists in which indiviudals exchange role conformity in the sphere of work for the economic security afforded by a steady job at decent wages. The ends of this exchange, however, are free space and a private life in which one's projects are one's own. While this charter, like my social charter, is nowhere written, the tacit rights and expectations that compose it have been central to the legitimacy of the U.S. political economic system throughout the postwar era. In this light, commitments to private life have a political dimension, and people's perceptions of state and market take on substantive significance.

true, each sample of one offers its own unique reflection. In fact, I feel shy about using the term *sample* at all, for as my friend Donald Cressey reminded me, "You don't have a sample, you've got a bunch. Call them 'a bunch.'"

No pretense of traditional representativeness or generalizability is implied in this book (although I frequently could not avoid the temptation of contrasting the ideas of my subjects with those found in national surveys and polls). It should be apparent to readers, however, when my subjects' views of the social charter are shared by millions of others and when they are anomalous. And because the dozen Americans described below *are* part of a common political culture, both the variations of belief among them and the concerns they share *can* tell us something of value, even if the magnitude of this something among larger collectivities cannot be known without doing additional and very different sorts of research.

Though qualitative researchers pay a steep price in lost generalizability, they get something in return. The particular, idiosyncratic, and local facets of opinions, as well as much of their subjective meaning, are either lost or glossed in large representative samples, whereas these are precisely what qualitative studies bring to center stage. "To an ethnographer," Clifford Geertz has written, "the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements. One may veil this fact with ecumenical rhetoric or blur it with strenuous theory, but one cannot really make it go away" (1983, 4).

In what follows, I have attempted to render the localness of political beliefs—in all their fractal shapes, their stitches and jagged edges showing. My analysis elicits from a small number of subjects a different sort of representativeness through the greater richness of detail of what little *is* observed: the sort of representativeness possible only through ongoing comparisons, constant searches for the negative case, continuous revision of the hypotheses generated, and attention to quibbling qualifications and subtle variations (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Katz 1982). This method, too, then, is capable of identifying links between the local and the world beyond it. It is capable, if used well, of providing what Howard Becker (1970) has called a touchstone for theories grand and otherwise—capable, that is, of showing us how well our abstract ideas about social life work in accounting for concrete social lives. It is for these reasons that "soft" research on small groups of subjects has its place in the scientific mosaic.

Whether this book lives up to such claims is another matter. In chapters 2 and 3, a workplace niche in the market world is described by its workers. One is a former 1960s radical who makes it a point of pride never to vote and who is among the most "procompany" of her coworkers; another is an extreme right-wing born-again Christian who voted against Reagan in 1984 for selling out the conservative cause and whose scathing critique of the corporate profit motive has

led him to embrace workplace democracy. In chapters 5 and 6, a public-sector welfare office is described, and six of its workers are introduced. Among them are a left-wing democratic socialist union leader who favors increased spending for law enforcement and prisons and a yuppie landlord who voted against the Proposition 13 property tax cut and for rent control. If my attempt at "thick description" (Geertz 1973) has been successful, such seeming oddities and what they may imply about political life in the 1980s will be comprehensible.

I have attempted through the use of a reflexive (confessional?) style and the first person singular to let readers in on why I chose to describe what I do and to help distinguish that description from the analyses and inferences I have drawn from it. If my interpretations wander from the points of view of my subjects, their own words can provide a check on how far and in what direction I stray. This approach is based on *my* belief that the only road approaching scientific objectivity is the one passing explicitly through the scientific traveler's subjectivity. To be sure, this is a work of sociological impressionism. But I have tried to make my brush strokes clear so that others will at least be able to see that *I* have made them. This way critics may charge me with poor painting but not forged photography.

9

The Disarticulation of Political Beliefs

WITH scarcely 5 percent of the November 1980 vote in, America's three major television networks projected in nearly perfect unison that Ronald Reagan would win the presidency. The political beliefs of the populace, the anchormen all proclaimed, had shifted dramatically to the right (cf. Burnham 1981; Ferguson and Rogers 1981). Reagan and a chorus of conservative commentators immediately proclaimed their "mandate" to radically curtail the social charter that had evolved over the past half-century. The people described in this book contributed in different, often paradoxical ways to the voting tallies on which these proclamations were based. This chapter begins with a look at the patterns in their electoral decision making. It then ties together various strands of analysis and speculation on how the *means* of articulating and measuring political beliefs affects the meaning they are taken to have and what this might imply for the future of American politics.

How did the ideological affinities and estrangements described in earlier chapters manifest themselves in political behavior? I have discussed my subjects' basic values, beliefs, and policy preferences, their community activism or lack of it, and their very different styles of resistance at the workplace. But for better or worse, the preeminent mode of political participation and expression in the United States is electoral. How, then, did these twelve workers translate their values into votes—particularly votes affecting the social charter?[1]

1. Dozens of increasingly sophisticated studies of voting behavior have not taken us all that far toward answering such questions. On the lack of progress and on deficiencies in theory, see Niemi and Weisberg (1976), and Wright (1976).

Clearly there is no methodologically sound way to determine how representative my dozen respondents are, and they could never stand as a true sample of the 1980 electorate even if randomly selected. Yet, as most large-scale representative surveys suggest, in-depth research on a small number of cases is valuable for exploring *how* beliefs come to be expressed in behavior. Such exploration seems critical because, given the apparent lack of support for a conservative mandate among ten of my twelve subjects, I am left with political behavior that is puzzling indeed. For if, despite their net affinity for the laissez-faire moral economy, the values of the new moral economy were alive among the NDC workers, then how did the registered Democrats Ventura, Larson, and Bustamante come to vote for Reagan in 1980? Similarly, if the CSS workers were all more or less committed to the new moral economy under explicit attack by Reagan, how could leftists Wilson, Mullavey, and Palacios fail to cast an effective vote against him in defense of their vision of the social charter? If the mandate inferred by Reagan from the margin of his victories in some sense was, to borrow from Gilbert and Sullivan, skim milk masquerading as cream, then answers to these questions are essential for understanding the masks involved.

Table 1 shows my subjects' voting behavior across four elections, two statewide and two presidential, from 1978 through 1984. The clearest pattern is the consistently liberal voting of the public-sector respondents. Across issues and candidates in each of the elections their votes constituted a consistent defense of the post–New Deal social charter. The CSS workers all rejected Proposition 13 cutting property taxes and Proposition 9 cutting income taxes (both billed by their backers as a means of striking back against government and the welfare state as well as lowering tax rates). Home owners and renters alike also supported local rent control initiatives in both 1978 and 1980. There were three reluctant votes for President Carter in 1980 as well as two admittedly symbolic or protest votes for the more leftist Citizens' party candidate, Dr. Barry Commoner. Chente Palacios did not vote in 1980, in part because he had moved and found it difficult to reregister and find a new polling place and in part to protest the effort it would take just to choose among "bought and paid for" contenders. In 1984, all voted for Mondale except Kurt Wilson, who was "so disgusted by Mondale's attempt to move to the right of Reagan on Nicaragua and foreign policy issues" that he left the presidential column blank on his ballot. The only ostensible exception to the liberal voting pattern was Marc Driscoll's "no" vote on Proposition 11, the proposed state tax on oil companies. Marc, who found the muddled complexity of much legislation an impediment to democratic politics, rejected this measure because "it wasn't clear." He had supported Carter's similar national windfall profits tax, however, and noted that his vote implied no opposition to the idea of taxing or regulating the oil industry. In short, they each voted, year after year, in favor of a strong welfare regulatory state, a new moral economy.

TABLE 1 Voting by Individuals and Groups on Selected Issues and Candidates—1978, 1980, 1982, 1984

	1978			1980			1982					1984
	Proposition 13 "Tax Revolt" Property Tax Cut	*Local Rent Control*	*President*	*Proposition 9 State Income Tax Cut*	*Proposition 11 "Tax Big Oil"*	*Local Rent Control*	*Governor*	*Senator*	*"Bottle Bill" Mandatory Container Recycling*	*Nuclear Weapons Freeze*	*President*
NDC											
B. Schmitt	Yes	/No/[a]	Reagan-R	Yes	No	/No/	Deuknejian-R	Wilson-R	No	No	Richards-AIP[b]
G. Larson	Yes	/No/	Reagan-R	No	Yes	/No/	Deuknejian-R	Wilson-R	Yes	Yes	( )
R. Ventura	Yes	Yes	Reagan-R	No	Yes	Yes	Bradley-D	Wilson-R	No	No	Reagan-R
J. Bustamante	No	/Maybe/	Reagan-R	No	Yes	/Yes/	Bradley-D	( )	Yes	Yes	Mondale-D
S. Jones	( )[a]	(Yes)	(Anderson-I)	( )	(Yes)	(Yes)	(Bradley-D)	( )	( )	(Yes)	( )
J. Demski	No	Yes	( )	No	Yes	Yes	Bradley-D	Brown-D	No	Yes	Mondale-D
CSS											
R. Jamison	No	/Yes/	Carter-D	No	Yes	/Yes/	Bradley-D	Brown-D	Yes	Yes	Mondale-D
M. Driscoll	No	Yes	Carter-D	No	No	Yes	Bradley-D	Brown-D	Yes	Yes	Mondale-D
C. Palacios	(No)	(Yes)	(Commoner)[b]	(No)	(Yes)	(Yes)	(Bradley-D)	(Brown-D)	(Yes)	(Yes)	Mondale-D
M. White	No	Yes	Carter-D	No	Yes	Yes	Bradley-D	Brown-D	Yes	Yes	Mondale-D
K. Mullavey	No	Yes	Commoner	No	Yes	Yes	Bradley-D	Brown-D	Yes	Yes	Mondale-D
K. Wilson	No	Yes	Commoner	No	Yes	Yes	Bradley-D	Brown-D	Yes	Yes	( )

a. Symbols: ( ) = did not vote; preference, if any, indicated.
/ / = could not vote—rent control on city ballots only; preference indicated.

b. Bob Richards, American Independent party (ultraconservative); Dr. Barry Commoner, Citizen party (democratic socialist).

Little of this liberalism or consistency was found in the voting patterns of the private-sector subjects. Buford Schmitt was the only one whose votes were uniformly conservative. He even voted against Reagan in 1984 for not being conservative enough:

> He didn't do what he promised to do. His shooting down of the Libyan planes was just a macho show which he hasn't followed up on. He's put us further in debt than any other president in history. . . . He should've gotten the Academy Award for his grandstanding at the Republican convention. He was appealing to Americanism and patriotism and that shouldn't have been the issues. It should've been his record, which wasn't very good. In fact, he didn't do what he said he was gonna do—lower taxes and balance the budget, and so forth.

Buford's dissatisfaction did not, of course, tempt him to turn Democratic. When I asked him in January 1986 whom he had voted for, Buford paused and said, "Oh, his name escapes me at the moment. Used to be on the Wheaties box. Richards . . . that's it, Bob Richards, the candidate of the American Independent party." He characterized his vote as a "protest": "I knew he didn't have a chance, . . . but I wanted to show Reagan that there were people who were conservative and who weren't going to be fooled by him."

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, Joe Demski's votes were nearly as uniformly liberal. But the four NDC workers in between present voting histories that are more difficult to grasp. Sally Jones expressed some liberal preferences, but continued to abstain in protest. The other three joined Buford in voting for Reagan in 1980, although only one of them leaned toward conservatism on other issues and candidates. Greg Larson, for example, voted for Reagan and the Republican candidates for governor and senator and, like these candidates, favored Proposition 13 and opposed both rent control measures. Yet unlike these candidates, he voted against Proposition 9 and for the tax on oil companies, the bottle recycling bill, and the nuclear freeze. In a follow-up interview in 1983, Greg said he had "soured" on Reagan because he had "screwed" working people while "rattling sabers." To whom was he looking in 1984? "Nobody. I don't even know who's running yet. I just know I wouldn't vote for Reagan again."[2] In a subsequent follow-up interview after that election, his view had softened. He told

2. Greg's turnaround on Reagan during his first term and the subsequent softening of his criticisms were mirrored in poll findings. After a year in office, a Yankelovich/*Time* magazine poll found a majority doubting Reagan's trustworthiness, opposing his military spending, and hoping he would not seek a second term (*San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, March 21, 1982). After eighteen months in office, a *Los Angeles Times* poll (August 8, 1982) found that a third of Reagan voters "would not support him again." This tendency was strongest among blue-collar workers, union members, and middle-income groups whose switch to Reagan in 1980 was critical to his winning. At the midpoint of his first term, a Gallup poll showed that six times as many voters favored

me that Reagan was "not doin' all the things I'd like," but that he was, "well, all right." Greg, however, was not inspired enough one way or the other to vote: "I just didn't make it, kept puttin' it off. I almost got down to the feeling that you don't really have any choice—like it was all cut and dried before you even voted."

José Bustamante voted against Proposition 13 and Propostion 9 because he felt they would "hurt the schools," even though he felt he paid unfairly high taxes compared with the wealthy and even though his own children were in Catholic schools. He voted in favor of the tax on oil companies, the bottle bill, the nuclear freeze, and the Democratic candidates for governor and senator, who felt the same way. He also favored rent control, although it was not on the ballot in his district. Why then, in 1980, did this lifelong Democrat vote for Reagan? In July 1981 he told me he thought Carter had not shown "enough initiative on his own" and that he was "always backing down":

> I got really disillusioned with Mr. Carter. . . . My philosophy is . . . if someone gets in there you gotta give 'em a chance. No matter who it is, you know, you gotta see what they're gonna do. And [Carter] just went on and I just got disillusioned with him. . . .
>
> Q: So at some point you decided to vote for Reagan?
>
> Yeah. The way I felt about it is that, let's give somebody else a chance. It couldn't get any worse, or it couldn't get screwed up any more than it already is. . . . What's to say this guy [Reagan] might [not] turn out halfway decent or whatever?

By April 1983 José was again disillusioned. He found Reagan "not looking out for his own people" (Americans in need) and "spending too much on the military and not enough on other things." Too many people were "still out of work" despite the Reagan recovery. José felt that "if things don't change, I don't think he oughta run again. I know I won't vote for him." Indeed, in 1984, he returned to the Democratic camp he had been in his whole life and voted for Mondale.[3]

cuts in military spending to balance the budget than cuts in social programs (*Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1982). Obviously, none of this apparent dissatisfaction proved consequential by the end of Reagan's term. He captured most of the senior vote (despite his attempts to cut Social Security), half the blue-collar and union vote (despite union busting, plant closures, lower wages, and high unemployment), and a majority of women (despite his cuts in social services affecting women, his jocular, cowboyish style, and his militarism, and despite Democratic attempts to win the alleged gender gap with a female vice-presidential nominee). See, for example, Robert Bendiner, "Reagan an '84 Dewey?" (*New York Times*, March 20, 1984); G. Gallup, "Reagan Agenda Gets Mixed Review," (*Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1984).

3. I am duty bound to readers—and particularly to José Bustamante, whom I value as a person as well as a most helpful respondent—to report that as of a follow-up interview on January 14, 1986,

Rudi Ventura offered a good many antigovernment anecdotes in each interview and invoked them as the reason for his vote for Proposition 13. He also supported Reagan in 1980, and Republican candidates for governor and senator. Yet he opposed the Proposition 9 tax cut as too damaging to the necessary services government must perform, voted for rent control in 1978 and 1980, and for the tax on oil companies. In 1984, Rudi again voted for Reagan, although this time he was alone among his five coworkers. He did so, he told me, because Reagan is "no worse than anyone else" and because Mondale had been "trying to win by putting a woman in there." After twice voting for America's most conservative modern president, was he a confirmed Republican? Unlike the more conservative Schmitt, Rudi believed that Reagan deserved his support because he "doesn't back down," "means what he says," and therefore, "scares Russia." But beyond this he seemed to have little sense of loyalty to a conservative cause or party. He still voted "for the man," still saw all politicians as "bought and paid for," and still thought we need the state to take care of people "who hustle and still can't make it." Rudi was a foreign policy hawk and at most a lukewarm liberal on the welfare state, but he did not see himself as an unequivocal part of any broad mandate.

If the 1980 election was in fact a watershed election signaling a radical shift back to laissez-faire precepts, there is little clear evidence of it among these three Democratic switchers. It may be fair to put Ventura mostly in Reagan's camp, but neither Larson nor Bustamante supported much of what Reagan stood for in 1980, and neither voted for him again.

Reagan's margin of victory in 1984 clearly suggests that others, if not these men, came to support Reagan or continued to do so. Whether this was due to his personal appeal or his policies is still hotly debated. In 1981 it was possible for political scientist Walter Dean Burnham to argue that for the mass of voters, the 1980 election "had become a question of throwing Jimmy Carter and the Democrats out with whatever alternative was available. In a room with only two exits, people will surge toward one, wherever it leads, if the other is blocked in some way" (1981, 109). For a time it was possible to say that economic distress, a failed incumbent, and an unknown "lesser evil" with clear convictions and promises of profits aplenty could account for Reagan's first victory. Exit polls and postelection surveys found about two in five Reagan voters citing simply "the need for change" as the basis of their votes, whereas only about one in five cited his conservatism. Reagan's short coattails and the Democratic gains in Congress in 1982 also lent credence to the argument that 1980 did not constitute a true realignment of the electorate under the Republican banner.

José had no recollection of having voted for Reagan in 1980. When I probed him about my recollection of his statements to the contrary in our earlier interviews, he explained that "I thought [Reagan] might be a nice change, but I've never voted Republican. I liked some of the things he was saying, but when it came right down to it, I couldn't do it." In fairness to him I must note the possibility that he misconstrued my 1981 questioning and was thus offering a hypothetical set of answers rather than an account of his actual voting behavior. After checking both transcript and tape, however, and after much anguish and advice, I decided to quote José exactly as I had recorded him.

Yet, the resounding win in 1984 demands further accounting. It is well beyond the scope of this work to address, much less settle questions about the real meaning of Reagan's 1984 landslide, but it is important to note two factors that clearly played a part. First, as early as 1983 and even after the election, poll after poll showed that it was possible for a majority of voters to oppose many if not most of Reagan's policies, or even to believe that his foreign policies were dangerous and his domestic policies unjust, and still like him personally as a leader. Thus we saw the remarkable if common phenomenon of voters voting for a candidate with whom they fundamentally disagreed for perceived lack of an attractive alternative. Most analysts, I think, would agree that both Reagan's victories show that a candidate's convictions need not be fully endorsed for him to be popular; they need only be strongly felt and clearly articulated. Whereas both Carter and Mondale tried to move to the ideological center, to distance themselves from the once heartfelt liberalism they had come to see as a campaign stigma, Reagan took the ideological gamble of staking out a more radical right-wing stance. Whatever its substantive appeal, its relative clarity seemed alluring by comparison (as Greg Larson put it, "At least he's sayin' *somethin'* ").[4] More on this below.

Second, it seems critical not to overlook the other, related ingredients in Reagan's winning electoral stew—abstention and defection—which tell us something about our political life at this moment in history. Chente Palacios was a leftist who had long been disappointed with the choice of candidates and disheartened by the results of U.S. elections. Even if he had overcome such feelings and found his new polling place in 1980, he either would have joined Wilson and Mullavey in voting for the Citizens' party candidate or voted for the Socialist party candidate as a protest over the absence of genuine alternatives. Here he was in agreement with his more moderately liberal CSS coworker, Marc Driscoll, who voted Democratic yet derided the two-party system as offering "a distinction without a difference."

Both Sally Jones and Joe Demski also abstained—Sally entirely and Joe in 1980 when he could not bring himself to vote *for* Carter. As much as he detested Reagan, Joe felt it would be "immoral" to imply approval of Carter's creeping Republicanism with a positive vote. Thus, Sally's frequently leftist beliefs as well

4. See, for example, Robert G. Kaiser, "The Democrats Are Missing One Small Thing: Convictions," *Washington Post Weekly*, November 28, 1983, and Ross K. Baker, "Party Realignment (Continued)," *New York Times*, October 14, 1984.

as the consistently leftist beliefs of Joe and Chente did not yield a single effective vote against Reagan in 1980. Similarly, Kurt Wilson could not bring himself to vote for Mondale in 1984, despite his antipathy to everything Reagan stood for and everything his policies would mean. His voice too was lost. For what seemed to these voters good solid reasons, abstention became the best moral choice.[5] When seen as drops in the larger political stream, however, the significance they intended was swallowed up by the significance that would be inferred from their nonvotes, namely tacit support for, or at least the absence of opposition to, a candidate and policies they passionately opposed.

A related point may be made with regard to defectors. In 1984, Buford broke ranks with the Republican party to register a protest vote. Although his choice was both sincere and strategic, there is no reason to believe it will be noticed much less pull Reagan further to the right. In 1980, both Karen Mullavey and Kurt Wilson defected from the Democratic party. Neither felt "right" about voting for Carter, a man who barely had won their tepid support in 1976 and who in their view had consistently failed to defend Democratic principles and backpedaled toward the political center for most of his term. Despite their knowledge of the damage Reagan would likely do to the welfare state—evident to them from his two terms as governor and his campaign rhetoric—they could not in good conscience cast a positive vote for Carter even to effect a negative vote against someone, as Karen put it, "far worse." They were caught in the two-party catch-22: they saw no real competition, so they in effect contributed to Reagan's win by failing to vote for his only real competition.

The forms of reasoning behind abstention and defection evident here suggest a proposition about the *expression* of political beliefs that is discouraging for democratic processes. At best, the act of voting does not necessarily constitute an articulate rendering of even limited preferences, much less basic beliefs; at worst, the two-party system as it currently operates can seriously distort voters' intentions. The delegitimation implicit in the actions of the abstainers (and, arguably, of a substantial proportion of America's largest party, what Burnham calls "the party of nonvoters") is lost to view for all intents and purposes.

5. According to the Elections Research Center of the U.S. Census Bureau, voter turnout has been declining steadily since 1960, when it was 62.8 percent, through 1980 when it was 52.6 percent, and even the 1960 figure was well below that of comparable industrial democracies. See, for example, G. Gallup, Jr., "There'll Be More Voters" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, October 15, 1984). These figures do not include those eligible but unregistered to vote (*New York Times*, November 10, 1982). Poor turnout was often interpreted in the past as a sign of consensus and basic satisfaction, but that view is now changing (cf. Nie et al. 1976; Wright 1976; Burnham 1980, 1981). The accounts of my abstaining subjects, as well as declining turnout and poll data showing steep drops in party identification, suggest that this reinterpretation is warranted.

Similarly, the delegitimation expressed by Buford, who defected from the Republican party for more conservative pastures, and by Karen and Kurt, who left the Democratic fold for a democratic socialist third party, is also lost. Although these two types of dissatisfaction with electoral choices had drastically different ideological implications, they are much alike in their lack of political implications for the larger political arena. To be true to their beliefs, these voters had to make themselves inarticulate if not mute.

To be sure, these examples of electoral reasoning may be some distance from those of the mainstream electorate. My subjects in both groups were in certain ways atypical. It is doubtful, for example, that one or two of every six welfare workers could be called socialists of any stripe and equally unlikely that one or two of every six truck drivers would be born-again evangelicals or place themselves to the right of Reagan. Each group also voted somewhat against the grain in 1984—the CSS workers showing more support for Mondale in 1984 than they had for Carter in 1980 and the NDC workers being less apt to vote for Reagan again than they had been four years earlier.

If we hold aside the abstainers and defectors, however, and listen only to those in both groups who voted for one of the two mainstream candidates, no clearer expression of legitimacy is heard. For at least two of the four NDC workers who voted for Reagan in 1980, there was little if any *intention* of endorsing the bulk of his policies. Larson and Bustamante never understood their vote for Reagan as signaling a shift in party loyalty, and neither Larson nor Ventura felt much loyalty to the Democrats from which they might shift. The same point can be made about the Democratic voters at CSS. Ron Jamison may have been a committed old-line Democrat, but the others made it clear that theirs were reluctant anti-Reagan votes rather than positive votes of support for Carter or Mondale and their policies.

The idea that political participation through voting is in itself a measure of legitimacy may be quite misleading to judge from the degree of disarticulation evident among these dozen citizens. Although their voting patterns were different, members of both groups shared a conviction that their political ideas lost something in the voting booth (it was almost as if the lever that marked the ballots served as an ideological scalpel, severing voting behavior from the beliefs that animated it). All one need do to test this empirically is to talk with voters at length about what they believe and how they bring their basic values to bear upon their ballots. If other investigators also find this to be so, then the celebration of democracy in America that began before Tocqueville and is repeated each time network anchormen close their coverage of another election will come to sound increasingly anachronistic.

The Embeddedness of Beliefs

Critical readers may now be wondering how much of this disarticulation is really new and noteworthy and how much is merely the lament of a Democrat disappointed with elections in the early 1980s. In this section I will try to show that there are very good theoretical reasons for believing that beliefs *by their nature* do not easily lend themselves to consistent and categorizable expression and measurement. I will also argue, however, that there are observable features of this epoch—the political technology with which beliefs are made publicly available and the historically specific experiences and modes of discourse from which they are forged—that make this particularly so.

The nuggets of electoral reasoning described above seemed quite rational from a subjective point of view, and yet they led to sometimes unexpected and often ironic voting behavior. José the liberal Democrat, for example, voted for Reagan in 1980 not because he was drawn to the right but because he felt pushed from the left—a core theme in his comments being his disappointment over Carter's failure to help the poor. More important, without understanding José's understanding of the way corporate power influences candidates and why, in part for that reason, he felt the need to dissociate himself from politics, it would be difficult to make sense of his decision to simply "give somebody else a chance." The meaning of this vote and many others discussed in this study are indecipherable apart from the values, reasoning, and situation of which they are part; and these in turn are indecipherable apart from the life history or biographical context in which they are inevitably embedded.[6]

Attempts to infer ideological meaning from isolated opinions or lone policy preferences are fraught with similar difficulties, as was clear in each of the twelve biographical sketches. To look, for example, at Ron Jamison's response to a poll question on growth control regulations, one might not guess he was a lifelong liberal Democrat and thirty-year member of the Sierra Club and that he opposed such regulations only because he felt they inhibited the production of housing for the poor. Ron reasoned from what he felt were liberal values and arrived at what is usually taken as a conservative poll response. Ideological principles, then, do not necessarily imply anything in practice about specific issue positions. Whatever partisan political valence an opinion may have for its holder is neither apparent from nor intrinsic to its expression.

6. A useful discussion of the problem of the embeddedness of economic action is offered by Mark Granovetter, who writes, for example, that "what looks to the analyst like nonrational behavior may be quite sensible when situational constraints, especially those of embeddedness, are fully appreciated" (1985, 506). His insights apply equally well to political action.

This point came crashing home to me when I was tabulating my subjects' responses to poll questions on public security spending. Preferences on police and prison issues have been found to fall neatly along the traditional liberal-conservative continuum (see, for example, Citrin 1978). Yet Kurt Wilson, a committed democratic socialist, local union president, and the most consistent leftist among the public-sector six, opted for *more* spending on police and prisons. When I asked why, he explained that the "capitalist crisis" was increasing social hardship and, therefore, violence and crime, that working people were "most often the victims," and that despite his opposition to the existing distribution of property and privilege ultimately defended by the police and to many of their methods, he felt obliged *as a radical* to support increased spending for police. He applied a similar logic to the prison question. He worked with "crazies" everyday and was acutely aware of both the need for institutions and the damage they can do. Thus he favored more spending for prisons in the hope that they might be made "less brutal and dehumanizing." Interestingly, two of his liberal coworkers preferred less spending on prisons precisely because they saw such institutions as "brutal" and "dehumanizing."

At the opposite ideological pole was Buford Schmitt who repeatedly stressed the need for "law and order" and saw "protection" as one of the very few legitimate functions of the state. Yet he favored *less* spending on police because "liberal judges just let all the criminals go anyway" and less spending on prisons on the grounds that they were too much like "country clubs" that "we wouldn't need if we used the death penalty more often, as we should."[7] Here Buford reasoned from what he very much believed were right-wing premises; and if his issue positions were being tallied into an ideological scale he would have liked very much to be scored on the conservative end. Kurt, on the other hand, would be equally misunderstood in the opposite direction.

The fact that I was doing a content analysis of a mere twelve transcripts rather than a regression analysis of twelve hundred questionnaires gave me no greater ability to predict these opinions on the basis of their holders' party identifications, self-professed ideologies, or other beliefs. These last examples were taken from the person in each group with the most consistent ideology, the two respondents whose beliefs seemed to have been subject to the most constraint or to be most likely to cohere with one another. The fact that the others, more apt

7. To hear Schmitt lament lenient jurists and the lack of punishment, one would not imagine that the United States had been on the biggest binge of incarceration in its history—more than doubling the prison population since 1970. For a solid analysis of criminal justice policy shifts and the ideological debates that shaped them, see Currie (1985).

to entertain conflicting or multiple belief systems, were at least as likely to offer such misinterpretable responses, suggests the strong possibility that the ideological valence and political implications of a given belief can be quite autonomous from its expressed form, whether a poll or survey response or a vote.

These illustrations and others I have given throughout the case studies show that the fluid features of beliefs that make them difficult to grasp analytically are integral to the subjective significance and intended political meaning attached to them by their holders. In fairness it must be said that my colleagues who design polls and surveys make no pretense of taking such things into account or of measuring the full complexity of opinions and policy preferences. Indeed, it may be argued that at the aggregate level there is little *need* to know all the intricacies of context and reasoning that help account for *why* any one citizen believes this or that and what this may signify about U.S. politics, because citizens are asked only for a thumbs up or a thumbs down on a limited array of limited issues and candidates. Thus, the need is only to know how many up and how many down. Yet, if the data offered here are any indication, it is also fair to suspect that such aggregate frequencies can mean more, less, and other than what they are often taken to mean.[8]

One important reason for this is that political beliefs are embedded phenomena; they are context-dependent in various ways. To the extent this is so, then the traditions of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology have much to offer in the way of a theoretical sensibility about them. Drawing on both these schools of thought, Wilson (1970) outlines an "interpretive paradigm" in which definitions of the situation, roles, norms, meanings, and actors' senses of social structure are all seen as negotiated in the course of the ongoing interpretive procedures of everyday interaction. Within this paradigm verbal behavior indicates or indexes the particular context in which it occurs. In this sense political beliefs are, in Garfinkel's (1967) phrase, "indexical"—they take their meaning from the concrete elements of the interactional context in which they are evoked and uttered. They are "occasioned" rather than stable phenomena (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970) and so may well not constitute an ideology per se even if they appear rigorously consistent. Rather than being a predictable feature of everyday consciousness, beliefs are more likely to remain amorphous and inchoate until elicited.[9]

8. I cannot here do justice to the methodological debates that have raged for years over what surveys measure, how well, and with what effects on the responses they call forth. Survey scholars have grappled in great detail and with some success over such problems. See, for example, the useful text by Schuman, Presser, and Rossi (1981) on experimental evidence regarding the effects of question form and context.

9. Cressey and Elgesem (1968) offer related insights on how working police officers are often conflicted over whether to enforce the "law enforcement ideology" or the "adjustment ideology" in a given trouble situation. More generally, the contextual sensibility I have tried to develop here about political beliefs has been theorized by Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel (1981), who argue for a cognitive understanding of social order, and against both collectivism and individualism in method. They propose instead the promising notion of "methodological situationalism" so as to be able to integrate micro- and macrolevel analyses.

From the interpretive point of view, ideological consistency—usually defined in terms of formal, abstract ideologies, party platforms, and political theories—may not be empirically warranted in everyday life. Converse's (1964) classic study, based upon a cognitive perspective, found that few members of the electorate hold political beliefs that are consistent, at least in this formal or abstract sense, with one another. At least ten of my subjects supported this finding. I did not find, however, that their inconsistencies had anything to do with the lack of cognitive sophistication many analysts believe is necessary to organize rationally political information into consistent belief systems. In examining beliefs in detail and closer to how they operate in daily life, I found various forms of rationality behind most inconsistency. In a general theoretical way Egon Bittner makes a strong case that inconsistency *is* rational, even cognitively sophisticated. He shows that in contrast to "the outlook of common sense," any archetypal ideology seeks "a unified and internally consistent interpretation of meaning in the world," which simply will not serve its holder well under ordinary circumstances:

> One of the most widely accepted ideas about culture and normatively governed conduct in complex social setups concerns the existence of a heterogeneity of enforceable cognitive and evaluative standards. The objects and events that an ordinary person encounters, recognizes, judges and acts upon in the course of his everyday life do not have unequivocally stable meanings. This is not to say that recognition, judgment and action are not normatively governed, but that the ordinarily competent person is *required* to use practical wisdom to interpret the relevance of a rule to a particular instance of the typified situation to which it presumably pertains. . . .
>
> The ordinarily competent person . . . must know that what under some circumstances could be a lie may in the next context be a required expression of tact; and he must be able to live with such ambiguities in relative comfort. (1963, 930)

Through Bittner's theoretical frame, the ambiguity, ambivalence, and contradiction so visible in my subjects' accounts look rational rather than anomalous. The exigencies of the everyday world virtually demand multiple value systems, although with respect to political beliefs it seems likely that some

historical contexts (for example, the days of "dealignment" in the early 1980s) as well as some situational contexts (such as the locker room at NDC) make more forceful demands than others (say, the depression or a union meeting at CSS). In this light, it is less puzzling to find that Marc Driscoll's views ranged from those of a moderate Republican to those of a populist Democrat and that Greg Larson's ideological proclivities ran the gamut from social Darwinism to social democracy. In contrast to Converse and cognitive dissonance theory, my subjects' accounts of their lives and beliefs suggest the proposition that contradictory experiences impose logical and psychological constraints of their own, under which seemingly conflicting values make sense. Bittner drew upon totalistic ideologies to make his point, but Becker and his colleagues reached much the same conclusion in their study of culture and socialization in medical school:

> People find it possible to maintain two sets of values between which there are possible contradictions and incompatibilities, at the same time. Immediate situational pressures constrain behavior in the present and play an important part in shaping the values participants make use of. But this influence need not have any effect beyond the situation in which it operates. Values operate and influence behavior in situations in which they seem to the actors to be relevant. When that relevance is not clear, the values are not used and others, more appropriate to the problems to be faced, are brought into play. But this does not mean that the original values are gone forever. Instead, those values may simply lie dormant, ready to be made use of as soon as an appropriate situation presents itself. (1977, 430–31; see also Edelman 1977)

After reading a draft of this book, my colleague Rob Rosenthal wrote to ask, "So what *are* you saying about ideological consistency and how people's beliefs relate to the liberal-conservative continuum?" We had spent hours together in fascination over Converse's belief system surveys, so I had to confess to him that I was trying to say several things that do not add up to a simple answer. My data suggest that the continuum may be useful as one analytic typology, but that it is a precarious act to place a belief on a single point along it. Some of my twelve were more consistent and thus easier to place in liberal or conservative camps than the others, but even the most consistent ideologues of the Left and the Right hold anomalous beliefs. Some were more consistent than they looked in strict liberal-conservative terms, others less. Some said they were conservative and appeared so on many issues, but held many radical-left beliefs as well. On most issues most of my subjects' beliefs were neither consistent nor easy to place along the continuum. Indeed, their beliefs seemed to sit simultaneously on points along several different continua. If these twelve are any indication, the liberalism-conservatism index is but one dimension of belief systems among many and therefore misses as much as it measures.[10]

I rummaged through two theoretical closets looking for tools that would help organize the vagaries of valence I had uncovered. In the first, I found Marx's work and a concept of ideology defined as a system of ideas and beliefs that distort or misrepresent contradictions in the social world in ways that serve the dominant class (Larrain 1983). The ideal-typical belief systems that are said to characterize epochs may fit this definition. I found, however, that the belief systems of situated actors often serve, for example, contradiction containment functions (for example, Wexler 1983; Geertz 1973), which allow them to compartmentalize or otherwise manage what they may well recognize as unjust or injurious to their interests but which they feel, often accurately, they are powerless to change. Insofar as beliefs are resources developed or left dormant, honed by or harbored from experience, and invoked or withheld by stance-taking actors who have purposes in their immediate circumstances, then however mystifying of social structure they may be by "objective" or historical standards, beliefs as *practices* are not reducible to ideology in the traditional Marxian sense (cf. Larrain 1983; Wexler 1983; Geertz 1973, 193–233).

In the second, I found the interpretive perspective of interactionists, ethnomethodologists, and cultural anthropologists summarized above. This helped force my attention to the social processes by which ideological consistency is *situationally achieved*. This was as true in my formal interview situations as it seemed to be at the workplaces where my observations were informal. Each time I probed for an explanation of what appeared to be a contradictory opinion, my respondents provided one; and in each instance their reasoning produced not only the appearance of consistency among beliefs and continuity of values but a critical explication of their meaning. When situations call for it, people strategize and struggle to achieve the sense and the appearance of consistency. Whether prompted by a problem at work or a probe from me in their living rooms, inconsistencies to which attention was called provided occasions for what Berger has called ideological work:

10. In a very complex analysis of qualitative interviews, Neuman (1981) identifies two discrete dimensions of political thinking—differentiation and integration—and makes a clear case that ideological consistency can stem, for example, from mere repetition of slogans rather than from deduction from abstract political principles. Thus, consistency may not reflect cognitive complexity, just as cognitive complexity may allow differentiation that leads to *in*consistency. He argues that to grasp the nature of belief systems a more sensitive method than forced-choice surveys are necessary. See Phillips (1982) on how modern populism and cultural conservatism demand a reformulation of the liberal-conservative typology.

> Local social contexts can usually be relied upon to generate (by interactions with their larger environments) unanticipated conditions or situations that further exacerbate the practical ambiguity of ideas, make them difficult to "live up to," and hence make the ways in which they will be interpreted difficult to predict or anticipate. . . .
>
> Ideas are human creations, and they are created *for purposes, in contexts, and are definable in time and place,* by living people who invested themselves in *these* (rather than *those*) ideas for discoverable reasons. . . .
>
> If they have to, [people will] accommodate their ideas to recalcitrant circumstances, while at the same time they attempt to maintain some semblance of consistency, coherence, and continuity in what they believe they believe they believe. That is what ideological work is all about. (1981, 16–22)

Although Berger's is a study of the "microsociology of knowledge," he is always sensitive to how, for example, "local social contexts" interact with their "larger environments" and to how humanly created ideas are "definable in time and place" and take their form from "recalcitrant" and other "circumstances." For me this leads back toward a Marxian perspective from which situations are themselves seen as situated in historical and social-structural context. This suggests the possibilities for an *interpretive Marxism* capable of doing justice to both the historically contingent and the situationally contingent aspects of beliefs and behaviors. From this perspective, structurally situated actors bring mutually informing material and identity interests to bear upon their purposes in more or less emergent interactional contexts. It seems to me that there is nothing intrinsic to the ethnomethodologists' notion of indexicality that prevents it from incorporating such broader facets of context. Similarly, there is nothing intrinsic to historically grounded, neo-Marxian studies of cultural practice that prevent analysis of microcontexts. If both theoretical stances hold that human actors produce the world through their material and symbolic practices, then a structurally informed indexicality could take into account features of an actor's habitus (such as work-life relation) that influence both the sorts of situations in which the person is likely to become enmeshed and the frames through which these will be perceived.

I have tried to show that there is much disarticulation of political beliefs and that this stems in part from their embedded, emergent, and therefore indeterminate character. In the foregoing theoretical digression, however, I derived a perspective that calls for attention to the ways in which such characteristics are historically informed and specific. I now want to describe some features of our current political culture that make what Berger calls "the practical ambiguity of ideas" particularly acute and that both lead to and exaggerate the disarticulation of political beliefs.

The Social Construction of "Public Opinion"

For more than a century there has been a debate over production technology. Marx, Lenin, and many others who opposed capitalism's tendency toward exploitation, alienation, and degradation of both labor and nature were great admirers of its revolutionary technology. Technology's ill effects, according to this school, stemmed from its ties to the capitalist system of social relations in which the surplus generated by labor was privately appropriated and used to further exploit and even replace workers. Once these social relations were replaced by socialism, they imagined, this great productive technology could be put to progressive use, reducing human toil and poverty. The technology itself was seen as politically and socially *neutral*. Against this view, others argued that technology was fundamentally predicated upon reducing the importance of human skill and effort (for example, Braverman 1974). Thus, the machines *themselves* as developed under capitalism embodied a system of social relations that degraded human labor and alienated people from the very processes that produced what they needed to live. Technology, then, could not simply be put to nonexploitative use, for technology was *not neutral* (see Aronowitz 1978, 1981).

I hope the same sort of debate is now emerging over how the stuff of political life—policy ideas and candidates, parties and platforms—get produced, and I want to argue that the "not neutral" position with respect to production technology is an apt metaphor for modern politics. Two-party elections, computerized direct-mail fund-raising, mass media, and the marketing and advertising and campaign image consultants spawned by them, as well as voter surveys and opinion polls, together constitute the hardware and software of modern *political technology*. It is decidedly not neutral insofar as it embodies a system of sociopolitical relations in which the values, beliefs, preferences, efforts, and intellectual capacities of the citizenry tend to be expropriated and degraded by it.

To be sure, nostalgia for the egalitarian participatory democracy of nineteenth-century town meetings tends to paint a romantic patina over our political past. George Washington most assuredly did not sleep everywhere, and the political elite of preelectronic eras no doubt could manipulate public opinion with the best of today's master image makers. Moreover, participatory democracy of lore has obvious limitations in the age of national states and international corporations and markets. Such objections cannot, however, erase evidence suggesting that modern political technology has contributed to the erosion of mass political trust, efficacy, and participation in and identification with our political institutions.

At the dawn of the media age, David Riesman noted clinical symptoms of "technological unemployment in politics" (1952). If we had begun to see the end of ideology, he seemed to say, then it had its dark side. The paradigm-setting studies of the American voter in the 1950s began large-scale research on electoral decisions with methods developed to measure consumer choice among competing brands of product. While advancing the scale and scope of knowledge, the drive toward measurement precision in these studies also tended to narrow the operational definition of the political, so that the meaning of democracy came more and more to be seen as the choice between two competing elites (cf. Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1964; Gitlin 1978). The portrait of a passive electorate sketched in these studies bears scant resemblance to the informed active citizenry of democratic theory found, for example, in Thomas Paine's writings and *The Federalist* papers. People voted out of habit rather than rational reflection. Low enthusiasm was often taken for high satisfaction, and the resulting low-temperature political culture was frequently conceived as a positive sign since predictable party attachments and the absence of passion lent themselves to order and stability (for example, Lipset 1960; Huntington 1968). The increasingly ritualized major-party competition of the postwar era made for just enough voter participation to legitimate top-level decisions without stirring up much fuss. Meanwhile, research on electoral behavior, focusing its considerable methodological prowess on the determinants of such voting, helped structure an intellectual debate in which voting patterns *stood* as politics.

Most political writers inferred from all this that whatever cleavages remained in U.S. society were safely incorporated by political parties and that a basic consensus reigned. By the 1960s this inference seemed shaky. Mann reviewed some two dozen empirical studies of democratic political systems and found "not a value consensus which keeps the working class compliant, but rather a lack of consensus in the crucial areas where concrete experiences and vague populism might be translated into radical politics" (1970, 436; cited in Lindblom 1977). As was the case with most of the NDC workers, ambivalence can make for a muffled voice, so that what is heard sounds like real rather than residual conservatism.

Alford and Friedland (1974) reviewed the dominant traditions in political sociology and found that insufficient attention had been paid to what they described as a "dialectic of mass participation and electoral impotence." The potential instabilities of increasing democratic suffrage, they demonstrated, had been tempered by the growth of nonpartisan offices and bureaucratic-administrative agencies, and the power of the executive branch over the legislative. In the process of fostering a stability of sorts by managing overt conflicts, these

developments in political infrastructure reduce popular identification with political institutions. Democratic struggles for universal suffrage and for a government that insulated the populace from the most severe swings of the market succeeded in changing the structure of the state; the resulting state structures, however, in turn succeeded in changing if not capturing the terrain on which such struggles were fought (see also Mills 1956; Esping-Anderson, Friedland, and Wright 1976; Kesselman 1982). What such trends have meant for political culture and process was well expressed in *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* by Murray Edelman:

> Mass publics respond to currently conspicuous political symbols: not to "facts," and not to moral codes embedded in the character or soul, but to the gestures and speeches which make up the drama of the state.
>
> The mass public does not study and analyze detailed data about secondary boycotts, provisions for stock ownership and control in a proposed space communications corporation, or missile installations in Cuba. It ignores these things until political actions and speeches make them symbolically threatening or reassuring, and it then responds to the cues furnished by the actions and the speeches, not to direct knowledge of the facts.
>
> *It is therefore political actions that shape men's political wants and "knowledge," not the other way around.* The common assumption that what democratic government does is somehow always a response to the moral codes, desires and knowledge embedded inside people is as inverted as it is reassuring. This model, avidly taught and ritualistically repeated, cannot explain what happens; but it may persist in our folklore because it so effectively sanctifies prevailing policies and permits us to avoid worrying about them. (1964, 172–73: emphasis added)

Is this any different than the politics of any other society or era? Although it is probably true that Edelman's points might be made about many societies, past and present, current political culture in the United States seems so different in degree from the past as to constitute a difference of kind. Although published more than two decades ago, Edelman's thesis seems even more true today (even his examples sound strangely current). Leaders with access to mass media, now more than then, shape and even create "public opinion" by naming the issues and crises about which people come to have opinions. Political events are experienced, if at all, at third hand. "Newsworthy" events are defined if not staged by elites, interpreted by other elites and journalists, and then reinterpreted by editors whose job it is to sell news. Although such news must be cast so as to fit the existing frames and experiences of the public and hence cannot be manipulated any way its authors please, those with media access seem to have dispropor-

tionate ability to construe if not totally construct its significance. If Edelman's argument has even some merit (and I believe it has much), then the beliefs and preferences thought to make up "public opinion" are hardly naturally occurring democratic phenomena.

Public opinion seems to me constructed in a second and more subtle way by the mechanisms that purport to measure it. Political attitude surveys and opinion polls have proliferated in the last decade to the point where they are a central feature of political culture. No other society has had its pulse taken so often on so many issues. Polls were always routine news items for what they purportedly told us about ourselves, but now all the major television networks and many major newspapers and magazines have their own polling arms. Major political candidates would sooner do without substantive policy advisers than campaign pollsters—indeed, for many the pollster *is* the substantive policy adviser. Back when the Gallup poll was the only game in town, Blumer (1948) asked if "public opinion" actually existed apart from what polls elicit and measure, and wondered whether such opinions were measured as they are organized and operate empirically in social life. Although polls have certainly grown in both precision and prestige and have made more information about everyone available to everyone, I have yet to find an adequate answer to his question.

In fact, the oddities and anomalies, concealed consistencies, and vagaries of valence I found in my subjects' accounts of their beliefs, as well as the multiple possibilities for disarticulation and misinterpretation that occur when these are severed from their context, lead me to believe that Blumer's critique must be broadened. I think that the polls, surveys, ballots, voting tallies, and media reports on them that make up the political technology that makes "public opinion" available to us as such all in some measure expropriate the means of making meaning and alienate us from the voice with which we speak in political life. This process entails at least four stages:

1. *Decontextualization:* The policy preferences, political beliefs, and behaviors of individual citizens are abstracted by means of forced-choice questions from the biographies, life strategies, value systems, forms of reasoning, and social settings in which they originate and "live" and in relation to which they derive their particular meaning and significance.
2. *Aggregation/Analysis:* Once abstracted, such newly constituted units of political significance are quantified into aggregates and reorganized so that they become emblematic of social categories (for example, race or region) and trends, the empirical character or even existence of which prior to these procedures is unknown.
3. *Inference/Interpretation:* Mass media and political leaders then reanalyze, reabstract and report, in accordance with *their* purposes, aggregate findings and trends as phenomena occurring independently of the procedures that have produced them, attributing to them one or more meanings and locating them structurally as properties of one or more social categories or groups. One core consequence is the further construction and negotiation of political reality in which the role of those said to be the authors of that reality becomes at best increasingly limited and at worst lost altogether.
4. *Recontextualization:* Such measures of, and trends in, public opinion—having been rendered socially available as "facts" scientifically arrived at and signifying something "objective" about "voters" or "the public"—become part of the political culture from which they were said to have originated; thus, as part of the social world, these facts influence not only the political behavior of elites toward the electorate but also the various contexts and processes from which the original individuals derive the very political self-understanding and knowledge shaping preferences, beliefs, and so on.[11]

I offer these stages as a stop-action look at the routine procedures of modern political technology most of us take for granted. Through such a lens it is easier to see how what are implicitly or explicitly understood to be the autonomous acts or attitudes of individuals are more likely the artifacts of our means for apprehending them. I do not mean to suggest (speaking of ideological work) that we who study and interpret public opinion may as well stare at ink blots or read tea leaves as peruse our printouts. There are regularities in aggregate patterns of belief that do have social meaning apart from the individual idiosyncrasies and interpretive anomalies to which I have pointed. Yet I have been so struck by the radical differences between the responses found in my own earlier survey work and the more discursive statements of these depth interviews that I think we know far less about what political beliefs are and mean than we think. If so, one way to learn more is by methodological reflexivity, by remaining alive to the ways in which our methods (to say nothing of our theories) both affect and effect our findings. It may be that Edelman's inversion of democratic theory has its parallel both in the polls and at the polls.

11. In formulating these four stages I have benefited greatly from the theoretical work of Dorothy Smith (1974, 1978). Todd Gitlin's study of the role of mass media in "the making and unmaking of the New Left" was also instructive, for example: "The process of making meanings in the world of centralized commercial culture has become comparable to the process of making value in the world through labor. Just as people *as workers* have no voice in what they make, how they make it, or how the product is distributed and used, so do people *as producers of meanings* have no voice in what the media make of what they say or do" (1980, 3).

Debased Discourse

I have tried to describe some of the ways in which political beliefs can be disarticulated, manipulated, mismeasured, and misinterpreted through the processes of political technology. There is another feature of political culture that should be mentioned, and it has to do with the loop back from technology to citizenry: what are voters given in the way of content? On what sorts of debate and discussion of what manner of political ideas do we develop our positions and preferences in the first place? Of course, here one comes up against the chicken-or-egg dilemma in that it is difficult to say whether the technology or the content come first. It seems preferable to understand them both as part of a whole.

A theme running throughout the comments of each of my subjects was the perception of a poverty of real choice among candidates and policies. Each seemed to take it for granted that all candidates simply said what they needed to say to get elected and that the nature of mass media politics unfortunately demanded this. Although none of the twelve ever used the term, I submit that each was commenting upon the *debased discourse* that characterizes modern American politics. If, as I have tried to show, all political beliefs are contextual or indexical in both the situational and the historical senses, then surely debased discourse constitutes a core feature of the metacontext from which my subjects' beliefs were derived. It was bound up with their strategies for dissociating themselves from politics and for protesting the absence of alternatives via abstention and defection to third parties, which in effect led to electoral disarticulation. It also makes measurement of beliefs and preferences still more precarious insofar as measurement presupposes that political terms have invariant meanings when such discourse makes it less and less likely that political terms have any clear meaning at all.

Examples of debased discourse abound. Issues are made into slogans suitable for the six-second quip on the nightly news, the principal means for knowing candidates. That technology then turns slogans into issues when, for example, media commentators discuss not so much the problems besetting the country as campaign tactics.[12] Our leaders often succeed or fail on the impression-management abilities of their media consultants. Personality tends to replace principle, so that voters must become armchair psychoanalysts. Campaign contributions replace party participation as the means of getting a message across. Positions and platforms are not sculpted to the contours of the crises we face; rather, the crises

12. If "to speak less than discursively is to sloganize," then virtually all news reports and survey responses distort to the degree they prevent by definition discursive ("adult") speech; thought, premise, reasoning, inference, and so on are all eclipsed by the eliciting and presentational devices (Gibson 1980, 100).

we face are sculpted to suit what will "sell in Peoria." Religion becomes a public relations resource; a candidate's proximity to religion (rather than his distance from it) stands as a "good selling point." A logic of electability rooted in marketing theory is the axis along which political discourse is organized.

None of this is necessarily new. Diggins (1984) and Bellah and his colleagues (1985, 27–51), for example, argue that such debasement really began not when the mass media emerged but when the modern politics of liberal capitalism and self-interest triumphed over the classical politics of virtue and community. For them, the trouble did not start in the television age; that age was merely the extension by technological means of a process that began in the nineteenth century, when Democrats justified patronage and Whigs rationalized private greed. Whenever it began, the result has been if not the "lost soul" of American politics (Diggins) at least the loss of a "common language" with which to speak of the larger good (Bellah).

I suggest that these processes have in the 1980s taken a quantum leap forward, if that is the word. As noted earlier, part of Reagan's initial appeal had to do with the clarity of his radical-right platform in relation to Carter's failed attempts to move toward a Republican-leaning center while still speaking enough traditional Democratese to retain the support of liberals. Such clarity, however, should not camouflage the shrewd marketing magic behind its success. This became perfectly clear, so to speak, in 1984. Reagan's campaign strategists designed what they called an "operation," tellingly titled "the Great American Fog Machine," which would "fog the issues with images" (cited in Germond and Witcover 1985). Having approached new Orwellian heights in his first term by labeling the MX missile a "peacekeeper" and appropriating the auras of many political and folk heros whose policies were opposed to his (Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Bruce Springsteen are a few examples), Reagan in the 1984 campaign surpassed these by proclaiming, to cite but one case, that rising poverty rates were declining. The campaign's guiding spirit was a vacuous smoke-and-mirrors nationalism as outlined in a June 1984 strategy memo by top Reagan adviser Richard Darman: "Paint RR as the personification of all that is right with, or heroized [sic] by, America. Leave Mondale in a position where an attack on Reagan is tantamount to an attack on America's idealized image of itself—where a vote against Reagan is, in some subliminal sense, a vote against a mythic 'AMERICA.'"[13] A political culture that consists of such tactics draws not from James Madison but from Madison Avenue.

13. The memo was disclosed by Goldman and Fuller (1985). A prototype of the "misspeakings" for which Reagan became legendary was contained in David Shipler's article, "The View from America" (*New York Times Magazine*, November 10, 1985): "Important national perceptions can be

Were the Democrats any less likely to debase discourse? Hardly. While Mondale strategists claimed that huge rallies and the "pizzazz factor" were consciously sacrificed to the laying of an "issues foundation" in "classroom-like settings," they quite unselfconsciously spoke of better camera angles and the appearance of "conviction" and "passion" on the front page of the *New York Times* (September 16, 1984): "The use of such settings as school gymnasiums rather than outdoor sites is intended to cast him as, well, the more accessible candidate." It was as if they had discovered the pitfalls of the logic of marketing and the electability trap only to use them to design a cleverer sales gimmick. Mondale himself admitted as much in his postmortem address to the AFL-CIO, when he attributed his crushing defeat to "a failure in marketing and packaging."[14]

Hitting on the record deficits of Reagan the fiscal conservative may have seemed a natural tactic, but coming from Democrats long perceived as profligate welfare state spenders, it seemed to yield only more disbelief. By avoiding a defense of Democratic party traditions of social and economic justice on the debatable assumption that the electorate had shifted to the right, both Carter and Mondale tailored their policy rhetoric to the center-right. It may be that in the process they lost both overall credibility and the support of the Democratic Left. This timidity tacitly let Reagan and the New Right choose the terrain of battle. It was a terrain on which the Democrats were ill equipped to succeed; instead of "letting Reagan be Reagan" and criticizing him for it, the operative goal seemed to be to out-Reagan Reagan. Pollster and Democratic consultant Patrick Caddell put the point starkly in a speech on why the Democrats could not win without articulating a clear vision of their own: "In any contest between the ersatz and the real, the real will win every time."

After failing miserably with such a strategy in two national contests, a reorganizing Democratic party seems at this writing to be more than ever

shaped by a well-turned phrase or dramatic image, even when the underlying facts are in doubt. Describing Soviet intentions, for example, President Reagan . . . used a quotation that he ascribed to Lenin: 'We will take Eastern Europe. We will organize the hordes of Asia. And then we will move into Latin America and we won't have to take the United States; it will fall into our outstretched hands like an overripe fruit.' It turned out to be a phoney, contained in a 1958 book by Robert Welch of the John Birch Society" (36). Habermas speaks of such tactics as "a manipulation of mass loyalty which is both perfected and passed off as respectable, administered by political parties. . . . At an earlier stage it was still said that the parties . . . procured the *acclamation* of the voting public. That is a touchingly old-fashioned expression for the staged performances, barred against all spontaneity, which run according to scenario and bring literally everything under control. . . . *that* was the new quality which the last American presidential election attained—with an actor playing a president whose office is increasingly restricted to presenting this office to the outside world as fictive reality" (1985, 97).

14. Mondale's speech was quoted by Richard Reeves ("It Wasn't the Medium, It Was the Message," *San Jose Mercury News*, February 26, 1985). See also the *Washington Post* article under the headline, "Mondale Says His TV Image Caused Defeat" (February 19, 1985).

indentured to the logic of electability. Democratic National Committee chair Paul Kirk told state leaders in November 1985 that to win back power they had to stress "the shared aspirations of average Americans," by which he meant "the unifying common interest themes of family, of work, of education, of fiscal pragmatism and economic opportunity, of equality and competitiveness, of patriotism and a more secure future." Such themes emerged not from party principles or national need but from public opinion research on what would sell in the age of Reagan. Conspicuously absent from his list were many themes Democrats have stressed since Roosevelt. There are no signs in the party mainstream that future presidential candidates will gamble as Reagan did in 1980 on staking out a clear ideological claim. How much the "shift to conservatism" became self-fulfilling when the Democrats acted as if it were a fait accompli is difficult to know. What is less difficult to know is the effect on political discourse, captured here by Norman Birnbaum: "Political debate about economic issues, within the Democratic Party and between the Democrats and Republicans, has become an exercise in staying off the point. It is not simply a matter of a public cretinized by vapid slogans, misleading definitions and fraudulent rhetoric. The purveyors of this stuff have already cretinized themselves" (1984, 197).

One critical link between modern political technology and debased discourse is campaign finance. The notion that massive spot advertising on television is the sine qua non of electoral success is now unquestioned truth in political circles. In addition to reducing platforms to media-sized morsels and character and career to split-second images, television advertising requires massive campaign contributions. A recent report by the Center for Responsive Politics showed that between 1974 and 1984 the costs of a congressional campaign increased fivefold and for a senate race sixfold. In the same period the number of corporate political action committees (PACs), whose primary function is to disburse contributions so as to influence politicians, grew by more than 1,700 percent—outnumbering labor PACs ten to one—and increased their campaign spending by a factor of ten. Meanwhile the proportion of campaign financing that comes from small donors dropped by half. To be competitive in national politics, then, candidates must attract large contributions. At a minimum this inhibits them from taking the sort of stands and running the kind of campaigns that might alienate large contributors. And such stands and campaigns, in turn, inhibit untold numbers of voters from political learning and genuinely partisan participation.[15]

15. The research report of the Center for Responsive Politics was summarized in "The High Cost of Campaigning" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, December 17, 1985). Successive reports by the California Fair Political Practices Commission support the same point for state and even local races, in which campaign spending doubled between 1978 and 1982.

What sort of political culture does all this money underwrite? News articles commenting upon how often candidates slander each other are commonplace in every election season. In one of these, a campaign consultant explained the trend by saying, "Because there is so much skepticism, campaign managers find it easier to make a credible negative point rather than a positive point. It's the suspicion abroad in the land about politicians."[16] A fair description, but his theory puts the sociological cart before the horse by claiming that skepticism and suspicion are the source of negative political advertising. A similar debasement is evident in the television ads for or against various ballot initiatives. A sampling of California political advertising during the last week of the 1982 election campaigns showed scenes of a flowing mountain stream while a narrator asserted that a water conservation initiative will cause the state to "run out of water"; a uniformed police officer claimed that gun control is "too dangerous"; and an esteemed physicist who helped invent the atomic bomb told voters that an advisory plebiscite recommending a verifiable bilateral freeze on nuclear weapons would *lead* to nuclear war. I am not convinced that it is sociologically necessary to explore class, sex, race, and voter psychology in order to understand why citizens might wish to "tune out" or "turn off" politics after listening to a confusing barrage of such ads.

These anecdotes are offered to illustrate the proposition that changes in political technology and culture—television advertising, corporate PACs and campaign financing, media pseudoevents, computerized direct-mail fund-raising, and platforms designed according to marketing strategies—have commodified and debased political discourse and that this helps account for the low regard in which more and more voters, including *all* of my respondents, hold politics and politicians.[17] If the name of the game is maximizing market share

16. "A Nasty Campaign—Insults and Cynicism" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, November 1, 1982). In an earlier article on campaigns an insider similarly observed that "the race has boiled down to money and paid media. It's a shame but the candidates are caught in a vicious cycle. . . . They have to purchase the attention of the voters. That in turn imposes a heavy financial burden, which requires adjustments in schedule to raise more money to buy the time." The point was underscored by pollster Mervin Field: "The American public really doesn't hold the process in high esteem anymore. The whole wisdom has become 'Dump it on TV' and everything has become slick and artificial" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, October 10, 1982).

17. When money and media push out party and populace, political trust and party identification will suffer; this in turn facilitates dealignment among the electorate. See, for example, Nie et al. (1976) on the "principled rejection of parties," and Himmelweit, Humphries, and Katz (1981) who show that declining party allegiance in Britain was not due to indifferent and inconsistent "floaters," but to the political context within which voters decide. Nie and Andersen's (1974) insightful reanalysis of American voting through 1972 shows that inconsistency was not due to enduring characteristics of the public because levels of consistency *increased* among low-education voters who grew disenchanted in the late 1960s.

With respect to the term *discourse*, note that Willis and Corrigan take to task discourse theorists and semioticists for assuming that discourses exist apart from subjects. Like Althusser's subjectless history, they claim, such theories smuggle in an assumed working-class passivity by showing only how discourses structure experience. If it is "idealist" to assume volition, surely it is idealist "to posit a discourse abstracted from the historic and continuing social relationships which . . . make it observable at all" (1983, 87). Willis and Corrigan show, as I have tried to, that working-class cultural forms are capable of "turning back," mocking, or resisting what they call "hegemonic discourses." Among my subjects, it is possible to see what is taken as alienation, low political trust, or cynicism about politicians as strategic forms of dissociation, and thus, perhaps, an inchoate "counter-hegemonic cultural form."

across social groups, then the process is the same whether Democrats or deodorants, presidents or pickles are being sold. When the goal is "product name recognition," then we will see crossover politicians just as we have seen crossover popular music that blends rock and country or jazz in order to sell records to many audiences. In the commodity form, both politics and music must soften the sharp edges of ideals and sever roots in order to sell to new segments. This is troubling insofar as political "consumers" tend to garner less and less information about how the world works and might be made to work better, or what role they might have in either.

Even if we correct for any tendency toward caricature in this description, commodified politics and debased discourse remain. They make understandable my subjects' practice of political alienation, their low trust and lack of loyalty to parties, and their shared assumption that the two-party system offers only a Tweedledum and Tweedledee choice between different candidates beholden to the same corporate plutocracy. I cannot here demonstrate which part of the process came first, but it is at least arguable that a dynamic of debased discourse, ideological drift, electoral dealignment, secondary debasement, and so on characterizes American political culture. For my subjects as least, the perception of politics as corrupt seemed to support their strategies for dissociation manifest in weak party identification and low political trust. Politicians, Democrats in particular, seemed to perceive this sort of phenomena more broadly in terms of dealignment and attempted to redress it via a market share–electability calculus, which in turn required the very same large campaign contributions, elite ideological drift, and manipulation of increasingly vague symbols that contributed to voters' negative perceptions in the first place.

If all such phenomena are somehow of a piece, then who can blame, say, Sally for her refusal through five elections to even listen to news of politics, much less vote? Was Chente's decision to jog instead of find a new polling place some kind of aberration? Is it so puzzling that most of the others in both groups—liberal, conservative, or a little of both—held politicians in a contempt so taken for granted that it no longer entailed affect? Who can blame Greg or José for skipping to the sports section or for not having much desire after a ten-hour day to

delve into the political quagmire of the front page to retrieve consistent issue positions about which they might again feel a partisan clarity? Is it an act of political irrationality to avoid the labor involved in sorting through the half-truths and hyperbole, the pap and the propaganda, in order to forge truly informed decisions and take a stand behind one of the major parties when experience suggests it matters little anyway? Given their views of the American political system, perhaps what begs for explanation is not the way they voted but the fact that they did so at all.

A Curious Convergence: Notes on the Democratic Current

In drawing this analysis to an end, I want to return to the core questions raised in the beginning about the American moral economy or social charter. What can be seen of the political landscape by gazing simultaneously through all twelve of the windows my subjects provided? Two themes stand out for me. Although neither was explicitly named as such by any one subject, each of them talked around and about both. My terms for these are *democracy of work* and *populist delegitimation*.

I chose the awkward term *democracy of work* to distinguish it from the more commonplace *workplace democracy* because what I heard was a longing broader and deeper if more ineffable than that. But I do mean the term to encompass fully the principles of workplace democracy—having a real say over the pace of work, how it should be done, who supervisors ought to be, and how they should supervise. In private and public sector alike, all these workers were certain, though not at all in immodest ways, that they knew how to do their jobs better than those who directed them, that they could solve problems better than "management" without increasing costs or decreasing productivity. They were neither asked for their knowledge nor listened to when they offered it.[18] Even the

18. See Moberg (1980) on the drop in the 1970s in the percentage of people reporting satisfaction with hours, pay, security, their interest in their work, and the opportunity to develop their abilities. A recent Hart poll found that half its national sample believed that if workers chose managers and set policy, performance would improve; two-thirds would prefer to work in employee-owned firms; three-fourths favored consumer and community representation on corporate boards; and that a presidential candidate advocating such changes would be preferred two to one. These findings cut across the liberal-conservative continuum, but were strongly and inversely related to class (see Hart et al. 1975; Rifkin 1977). There is also evidence that morale, commitment, and productivity all increase under participatory management. See the *Harvard Business Review* for case studies and surveys since 1965; Weatherly (1981) for a list of such articles; *Monthly Labor Review* for research showing that employee-owned firms achieve higher productivity; Conte and Tannenbaum (1978) on how productivity rises in proportion to democratization; and Martin (1983) for the same evidence on public agencies. However, Weatherly shows the obstacles to participatory management in public agencies (for example, political unpopularity of welfare has led to managerial toughness, high turnover, worker resistance owing to lack of control over resources by even management, and thus perceived high costs in effort relative to cloudy benefits).

few who had doubts hesitated only insofar as they feared workplace democracy might be misused by management or not really implemented. Kurt Wilson had been actively involved in increasing participatory democracy in all spheres for a decade, but he was wary of workplace democracy at CSS because he had seen participation and input initiated and manipulated by management in such a way that the result was more work and less power for the workers. Joe Demski was all for workplace democracy as national policy, but he feared that within the corporate hierarchy of NDC it would destroy fellowship by inducing workers to exploit each other. This reverence for fellowship and the democratic work ethics it implies was cited by most in both groups as one important reason they had refused promotions. Individual career mobility was not alluring enough to overcome their desires to remain among peers and avoid becoming part of the hierarchies they hated (see also Sennett and Cobb 1973; Aronowitz 1973). In this sense Republicans and Democrats alike lived a rarely articulated democratic ethic.

Their broader belief in a democracy of work was manifest in their public policy preferences. Most in both groups had doubts about the use of tax funds to bail out Chrysler because they understood Chrysler's bankruptcy to be a function of management's decision to stick with "gas guzzlers" on which there were higher profit margins. Most supported the decision "only to save the workers' jobs." All twelve, however, supported the idea of similar loans to a worker-community group trying to buy and run Youngstown Sheet and Tube, which its parent conglomerate was intent on closing for a tax write-off. That the federal government in this case rejected the loans only confirmed their modal suspicion that the state favored "big business" at the expense of workers and communities.

Although there were clear differences between private- and public-sector workers and conservatives and liberals on the nature of the *obligation* to work, only Buford had any reservations about government doing whatever was necessary to ensure that people had the *opportunity* to meet that obligation. They did not mean merely letting the market loose as in Reagan's "opportunity society." Most agreed that the state should be the "employer of last resort," and even Buford supported employment and training programs as "benefiting the whole." Similarly, all of them shared both a belief in meritocracy and a belief (Schmitt excepted) that under the banner of meritocracy some gaping inequalities having nothing to do with effort or skill had been perpetuated. Most of the NDC workers were more likely to argue that rewards should stem from effort and ingenuity than were most of the CSS workers. Yet, most in both groups cited examples of how the effort-reward link had been severed routinely in the marketplace (lawyers, speculators, and auto industry executives were favorite examples).

This broader belief in a democracy of work also showed up in their complaints about their jobs. All had managed to find meaning and satisfaction in

jobs that were often alienating and frustrating, and their criticisms made it clear that they wanted work that would challenge their creativity and provide something of value to society. It galled Buford and the other NDC workers when management's response to competition was to keep hiring down and work loads up. They all said this bothered them not only because it forced them to work harder and longer in jobs already legendary for that but because it hurt "the quality of our service." Most made mention of the pride they took in their product even as they were complaining about other aspects of the company. What they did not say directly was that corporate decisions that impinged on this felt unjust, undemocratic. Similarly, when the CSS workers felt most useful, most proud, was when they managed to get a troubled client "on his feet," in a job, off welfare—in a sense, into full citizenship. It bothered them that the new eligibility rules made this more rather than less difficult. They expected the Reagan reforms to cut against their ideal of service and to reduce the time they could spend helping people. But what disturbed them more was that the new rules also cut against the very laissez-faire ideals invoked to justify them by making it far more difficult for anyone to work his way off public assistance. None of the CSS workers actually used the term, but such policies seemed to strike them as un-American, undemocratic. There is, I submit, a work ethic running through such comments that encompasses many more dimensions than the individualist notion that livelihood is up to the person alone.

A second and related form of convergence between the two groups may be called *populist delegitimation*. Just as most in each group had a range of criticisms of management, there were striking similarities in complaints about the master institutions of both state and market spheres, and these tales of discontent appeared all across the ideological and voting spectrums. Four of the private-sector subjects opposed not the principle of a welfare state or state regulation of the market but rather the bureaucratic, inept, or undemocratic practices with which this was financed and carried out. There was surprisingly little disagreement on this from the public-sector workers. Although they might argue that the intent of alienating bureaucratic procedures was uniformity and thus fairness, they would admit more or less readily that individual differences got short shrift. Indeed, they spent much of their time trying to bend the bureaucratically rigid boxes on their forms to fit the unique details of damaged lives. There would be full agreement on the regressive character of taxation and the need to do a better job of building individual self-sufficiency for the poor. What united the complaints of both groups was not the idea that the state *tries* to make up for what the market fails to do but that it too often fails to do this—fails, that is, to enhance people's capacities for achieving the ends of the laissez-faire

moral economy. This was precisely the criticism leveled at CSS by Driscoll, one of its leading social workers, and the theme expressed more vaguely by most NDC workers.

The state, then, doesn't work very well. Most CSS workers attributed this to the constraints placed upon it by business interests; their private-sector counterparts—both less familiar with the politics of the welfare state and less self-interested—tended to believe that government is often generically inept. Where they converged was on the notion that "big business" gets pretty much what it wants from both politicians and thus government in general. This shared populist critique tended to mean that the state was not seen as an arena from which hoped-for change was likely to emerge.

Market institutions, then, generally fared no better. Clear distinctions were made in both groups between small business and corporate America. Social relations with local merchants were personal and participatory and were experienced as democratic. Bank of America and Dow Chemical, the utilities and the oil companies, were another matter entirely. The inviolability of private property applied more to family homes and firms in which owners work than to faceless conglomerates that know no national boundaries or that come from other states to invest in condominium developments along *their* public beaches. Even Buford the evangelical believer in capitalism bemoaned "international bankers" who send America's capital, jobs, and, therefore, parts of its "sovereignty" abroad. Rudi the would-be capitalist felt the same way about "the big boys" of the corporate world. All had complaints that may be seen as indictments for violations of an unwritten code of capitalist conduct. What market mechanisms and the commodity form had done to health care (according to Sally), to fuel prices (Rudi), and to housing (Joe) was nothing short of disgraceful. Most of these people did not conceptualize such beliefs so abstractly, but all of them made arguments that there are moral limits on market forces, a greater good to which market institutions should be held accountable. Indeed, this idea has always lain at the heart of capitalist ideology. Not even the most nakedly greedy maintain that the market is moral in and of itself simply because it allows them riches. The market's legitimacy depends fundamentally upon its capacity to serve society and its citizens with those riches. Of my twelve subjects, only Buford took it as an article of faith that capital accumulation by itself serves as its own legitimation apart from its social consequences. For the others, this was more or less an empirical question. Most had their doubts about the notion that the market's raison d'être—that it does a better job at meeting human needs than any other imaginable arrangement—still has moral validity.

I do not wish my inferences to gloss over the many individual and group differences I spent several chapters describing. Yet, running through these

differences was a gut-level populism, shared sentiments that consistently took the side of "the little guy" against both the bureaucracy of the state and the plutocracy of the market. Central to such sentiments was an undifferentiated or generalized delegitimation. G. William Domhoff (1978), one of the preeminent scholars of the structure of power in America, has described four concrete processes by which corporate elites shape politics: special interest group pressures (for example, industry PACs, high-powered law firms hired as lobbyists); policy formation organizations (Council on Foreign Relations, Trilateral Commission, Business Roundtable); candidate selection (choosing, grooming, promoting, and financing); and the "ideology process" (mass media promotion of probusiness frames and definitions of problems and the national interest that skirt questions about the distribution of wealth and power). None of my subjects had ever read Domhoff's books, but all twelve intuitively understood at least the first three of these processes. The specifics were often only vaguely grasped, the consequences sometimes oversimplified, and the processes themselves differentially interpreted. But all three were part of their commonsense notion of how the world works, part of political folklore. This does not mean that some of them did not still feel that the United States was "a great country" or even, for Buford and Rudi, "the greatest." It is likely that most Americans see our political system as pluralistic, but this does not prevent them from understanding that some interests have far greater power than others (see Form and Rytina 1969). In short, most of my respondents found it quite possible to see America in the late twentieth century as simultaneously good relative to most other nations and bad relative to its ideals—to what it should or could be.

Does such populist delegitimation have significant political ramifications? For Habermas (1975), advanced capitalist societies are sustained by "legitimating beliefs" about the justness and validity of institutions and practices that are repressive and exploitative. Thus it is the false attribution of legitimacy to master institutions—the mistaken belief in their validity and fairness, and the false consciousness within which people believe their well-being depends upon them—that support capitalist social formations. As it pertains to the beliefs of the people in this book, however, there is a certain awkwardness to this theory. Most of them granted only tepid and contingent legitimacy to either state or market, so their "mode of conformity" (Riesman 1952) did not appear to rest upon wholly mistaken beliefs. Further, my subjects were usually well aware of the exploitative aspects of master institutions, yet nevertheless perceived that their well-being did, as an empirical matter, depend upon them. Thus, false consciousness defined in such terms cannot easily be applied to them in that they seemed to acknowledge both the injustice of such institutions and that what was good in their lives had occurred within them. If this was a form of false consciousness, it

was so only relative to a standard extrinsic to their lived experience. That few of them assessed their situation by more ideal or ideological standards seemed to have less to do with being fooled by legitimations than with the fact that ideologies were either unavailable or failed to help them make sense of their experience. And an ideology that does not work well cognitively seems unlikely to have strong normative appeal.[19]

Habermas argues that the inequalities and injustices of capitalism will be challenged when contradictions in the economic sphere are displaced onto the political-administrative sphere. There, they can no longer be portrayed as the results of some invisible hand but rather will be perceived as caused by the concrete policy decisions of officials. Thus, such decisions will be opened up to democratic scrutiny, critique, and demands. For most of my respondents the invisible hand was increasingly visible and decreasingly part of "nature"; "the system" was seen as mostly the work of a dimly perceived corporate-plutocratic "them." However, most remained unaware of or disconnected from the cultural resources with which they might have effectively scrutinized, criticized, or made demands. For the NDC workers there was little in the way of language, organization, or precedent; for the CSS workers there was some of each, but these generally got spent just keeping matters from getting worse at their small station within the state. For both groups, there was little faith that either the state or politics generally was a forum more hospitable to them than the market, a forum in which their criticisms and potential demands might be heard or have consequence.[20]

One view of politics through these twelve windows, then, is irony: It is in part the very generalized character of delegitimation that militates against a legitimation crisis, and their populist critique is so wide-ranging that it leaves no arena untainted enough to seem appealing or effective for populist political ends.

19. See Lane (1978) on how the market influences personality. My reading of Habermas has benefited from McCarthy's (1978) lucid synthesis of his oeuvre and from the useful overview of *Legitimation Crisis* by Flacks and Turkel (1978).

20. Habermas himself complicates the thesis of *Legitimation Crisis* in his *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In a recent interview he outlined his conception of a "crisis of the welfare state" from that work in a way that speaks directly to the ambivalence about the state I encountered: "The project of the welfare state has also become problematic in public consciousness, insofar as the bureaucratic means with which the interventionist state aimed to bring about the 'social restraint of capitalism' have lost their innocence. . . . The bureaucratization of the life-world . . . is experienced by broad strata of the population as a danger. . . . These new attitudes are exploited by neoconservatism, in order to sell the well-known policy of shifting the burden of problems back from the state onto the market—a policy which, Lord knows, has nothing to do with democratization, which rather effects a further uncoupling of state activity from the pressure for legitimation emanating from the public sphere, and understands by 'freedom' not the autonomy of the life-world, but a free hand for private investors" (1985, 99).

Another is offered by Mann (1975), who argues that the very notion of legitimation crisis is a viable part of linguistic currency only for intellectuals. What matters most for the continuation of capitalist societies, he argues, is the fit between ordinary people's daily lives and capitalist institutions (jobs, housing, stores). As I've tried to show, such a fit did exist for my subjects, alongside their discontents. What *might* have occurred if the language, culture, and organizations of an authentically democratic politics were to fit their everyday lives seems as intriguing a question as any answer I might offer would be speculative (see Flacks 1976, forthcoming). It seems fair to say, however, that Joe Demski and José Bustamante, and maybe even Sally Jones would have looked politically much more like Kurt Wilson than they did. I can also say, if these twelve workers are any guide, that the persistance of residual conformity in capitalist societies does not necessarily require false consciousness. Although most felt little in the way of a legitimation crisis, most felt little legitimacy. Their conformity, as Schaar has argued in general terms, seemed to rest on pragmatics rather than passion:

> The philosophical and experiential foundations of legitimacy in modern states are gravely weakened, leaving obedience a matter of lingering habit, or expediency, or necessity, but not a matter of reason and principle, and of deepest sentiment and conviction. (1969, 280–81)

It does not seem accurate to say that such populist delegitimation along with the shared support for the ideal of a democracy of work constitute a democratic *movement*. I would argue, however, that together they can be understood as a democratic *current*, an inchoate phenomenon embedded in mundane practices and sentiments, intermediate between nothing and a movement. Such a formulation, I hope, names the evidence without reading too much into it. As Studs Terkel has said of his respondents' lost and found American dreams, "something's happening, as yet unrecorded on the social seismograph. . . . There are signs, unmistakable, of an astonishing increase in the airing of grievances: of private wrongs and public rights. . . . In unexpected quarters, those, hitherto quiescent, are finding voice . . . [and] the last communiqués are not yet in" (1980, xxv).

My respondents' last communiqués are most certainly not yet in, but I am not certain what sort of voice they are apt to find or even, for many of them, if one will be sought at all. One danger in asking such large questions of such a small number of subjects is that the time frame is too constricted to take in many of the possible answers. It is worth remembering that in the 1980s virtually everyone is a small-d democrat, whereas less than two centuries ago democracy was feared to be as subversive of civilization as communism is said to be by many today.

Democracy's success, however, has depended in no small way on its dilution from, say, the Greek or Jeffersonian conceptions to modern elite conceptions that hold that participatory democracy can avoid anarchy only via a functional oligarchy of professionals. In the former, the lack of informed and active participation and clear articulation was disaster; in the latter, a sizable amount of apathy is "good for the system."[21]

If in fact such a democratic current exists, the question becomes whether it will be damned up or overflow its banks—or neither. In O'Connor's seminal formulations (1978, 1984), the American capitalist state came to a critical juncture in the 1970s: the loss of U.S. economic dominion in the world market had produced pressures on the state to reduce regulation and welfare spending in favor of capital accumulation. Democratic demands for increased participation (implicit in regulation) and for improved mass living standards (implicit in welfare and education spending) have become too expensive for the market's tastes. Against these, demands by business for untrammeled growth and profitability that began before Reagan have found their voice in him. O'Connor thinks this clash will set in motion a popular movement to democratize the state, transform it from an agent of the market to one whose purpose is to meet human needs. Such a movement would be about a defense of the rights and living standards accumulated since the New Deal and embodied, however precariously and contradictorily, in the state. Here O'Connor's case coincides with that of Piven and Cloward (1982), who maintain that state intervention in the market on behalf of both business and the polity has rendered the economy transparently political. Because such precedents now are part of historical experience, they say, a new moral economy is afoot in which the state is expected to ensure the right to a livelihood. Accordingly, attempts by Reagan and the Right to dismantle democratic sides of the state and reimpose the primacy of the laissez-faire moral economy will, *in the long run*, be doomed by the demands of the many whose everyday lives have been insulated by the state from the ravages of the market.

"In the long run," Keynes once said, "we're all dead." What evidence is there that the democratic current is turning into a democratic movement in defense of the state, the social charter, and the new moral economy? As of this writing, Democrats in Congress apparently have discerned enough popular support for the vast bulk of what the state does to hold the line against an extremely popular president bent on cutting back the state. Although fiscal crisis

21. In a report to the Trilateral Commission, Huntington makes this view rather explicit: "Some of the problems of governance in the U.S. today stem from an *excess of democracy*. . . . The effective operation of a democratic political system usually *requires* some measure of apathy and noninvolvement" (Crozier et al. 1975, 113–14; emphasis added). Well-argued alternative views may be found in Alford and Friedland (1974, 1985), Macpherson (1977), and Finley (1985).

and budget cuts persist and the discourse of the New Deal and the Great Society is nowhere heard, there is little evidence the Right has succeeded in dismantling most of the regulatory and welfare functions of the state.[22] Yet if the consensus behind the new moral economy was socially constructed, it can be socially deconstructed—particularly when fundamental economic restructuring has shaped a political context of fragmentation and dealignment and when the political language and organization with which this might be resisted is as distrusted as it is impoverished.

If I have understood my subjects correctly, there are openings for and obstacles to a democratic movement. Their different leanings and modes of ambivalence notwithstanding, the debate that might ensue should these two sets of workers be convened would not center on *whether* there is a legitimate role for the state in meeting human needs. It would be about where to draw the lines: who should be eligible for how much after what level of effort and for how long? How many reins should government put on business and how tightly should they be held? Taken together, their transcripts may be read as a *discourse that presupposes the legitimacy of the state in all its basic welfare and regulatory aspects.* Eleven of my twelve favored, for example, health care as a right, guaranteed employment, stronger public education, assistance for the needy, and regulatory restraints on the freedom of capital that take explicit account of social costs. In this sense, my data provide some measurable support for Piven and Cloward: these eleven share a bottom-line belief that here, in the late twentieth century, nostalgic notions of an individualism that leaves each citizen's fate to the market alone and the public interest to unfettered competition will not suffice as the basis of a decent society.

These shared sentiments might serve as support for a democratic movement in defense of the new moral economy. If they are often latent and mixed up with other, conflicting sentiments at this historical juncture, they might become manifest and unmixed by events. The abstract-sounding structural shifts mentioned previously have had concrete consequences in working lives at both NDC

22. Although Americans have long bristled at "big government," particularly when mobilized to do so in the era of slow growth, tax revolts and the Reagan presidency, there is surprising support—as Piven and Cloward contend—for the vast bulk of state programs. For example, soon after Reagan's second landslide and at the peak of his popularity, twice as many in Gallup's national sample said "too little" was being spent on social programs as said "too much" (G. Gallup, Jr., "Big Defense Budget Opposed," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1985). See also M. Oreskes, "Poll Finds Majority in U.S. Are Fearful of Budget Cutbacks" (*New York Times*, March 7, 1985), D. Rosenbaum, "20 Years Later, the Great Society Flourishes" (*New York Times*, April 17, 1985), R. D. Hershey, Jr., "Spending Rose Sharply in 'Reagan Revolution'" (*New York Times*, February 2, 1986), Palmer and Sawhill (1982), and Reeves (1985) who says the liberal consensus that guided the development of the welfare state still holds.

and CSS. The fit between everyday lives and market institutions may loosen. In follow-up interviews, for example, Greg and José complained of the unwritten company policy of "getting rid of the older guys" who "cost 'em more," a policy implemented as one strategy for dealing with deregulation and heightened competition in the transport industry. If this policy were to be applied to these twenty-year veterans, threatening their family lives, their affinity for the laissez-faire moral economy might weaken along with their estrangement from the new moral economy.

It is not at all certain, however, that such openings as might occur would overcome the obstacles already visible. The "crisis ideology" (O'Connor 1981) justifying wage concessions at both NDC and CSS and lower living standards for most Americans has had some impact on expectations. Sally Jones told me in 1983 that she was satisfied with a new NDC-union contract that for the first time in history offered no pay raise because "It's no time to strike, too many people are out of work." The CSS workers did strike, but to no avail. Their caseloads were up, their clients were in worse shape, and, as Karen Mullavey said, "Morale is really down. I can't see either [political] party pulling somebody out of the fire to build a working economy—one that feeds people, employs people, educates them. That dream has been squashed. . . . it's heretical to even bring it up." In the scenarios of O'Connor and Piven and Cloward, public workers like those at CSS would bond with their clients and lead the movement to democratize the state. But low morale, squashed dreams, and mere liberalism as heresy are not the elements of an effective defense of the post–New Deal social charter. Such obstacles suggest that political economic conditions and the Right's response to them have dampened democratic expectations and capacities.

It is not possible, of course, to predict the political direction of a nation—with any amount of data, much less a dozen case studies. The value I place on reflexive candor requires my admission that I would *like* to be able to argue that the reassertion of market supremacy by Reagan and the Right will engender the first overt defense of the state as a democratic haven and that this defense will democratize rather than further bureaucratize it. Such support for this tendency as I found in my private-sector subjects' was too tepid and contingent to support this argument, so the value I place on fidelity to their accounts requires that I not make it. Moreover, the value I place on not appearing foolish in light of the margin of victory enjoyed by Reagan in 1984 virtually demands that I conclude on a different note. It does seem safe to say that if there is any semblance of a mandate for radically restricting the social charter, then there is always the risk that this will mobilize the constituencies behind past mandates for broadening it (the civil rights, environmental, and women's movements, for example, do not seem to have disappeared in the face of a changed political climate).

It seems even safer to say that there are very likely multiple mandates, just as there are multiple value systems, that can and do coexist. Despite what I had hoped, as a citizen, I might find in my subjects' beliefs, I cannot deny that among many of the NDC workers reaction and radicalism seemed to float rather handily around the same ideological space.[23] I do not know a more humane or charitable chap than Greg Larson, yet he was at times capable of justifying conservative policy preferences with what he himself saw as inhumane and uncharitable opinions. Even some of the more consistently liberal CSS workers seemed able to entertain anomalous ideological strains. Marc Driscoll more than once espoused his respect for Barry Goldwater, who appealed to him not for the substance of his beliefs but for the principled honesty with which they were held, particularly as compared to "wishy-washy liberals." If the polity at large is as capable of entertaining multiple value systems and harboring support for multiple mandates as my subjects seemed to be, then there exists an *ideological indeterminacy* capable of surprises for everyone. Republicans and the Right may be surprised by the enduring character of basic support for a broad social charter even among those who voted for them. Democrats and the Left may be surprised by the degree to which people can be *already radical*—not because of some affinity for imported European ideological traditions but because of a continuity with traditional American values—albeit in ways that militate paradoxically against a movement in support of them. Yet if basic economic changes have dissipated the political consensus that once made liberalism seem transcendent, then the end-of-ideology theorists also may have spoken too soon.

If I have been accurate and fair in my attempt to cull themes from the ongoing discussions I had with my dozen very different subjects, then the populist delegitimation and the ideal of a democracy of work expressed by all of them do suggest the existence of a democratic current. For most of the Americans whose ideas compose this book, socialism remains stigmatized, New Right nostalgia seems senile, and postwar liberalism appears increasingly moribund. But *democracy*, despite and perhaps because of its apparent distance from daily reality, seems to have meaning that cuts across differences in experience, education, and income that are thought to push people into different ideological camps.

The existence and character of this democratic current is, as we social scientists like to say about phenomena we think we are clever enough to measure, "an empirical question." I hope subsequent investigators look for it. Although I cannot offer empirical predictions, my theoretical speculations lead me to

23. I am indebted to Troy Duster and Bennett Berger for not allowing my optimism to overshadow my analysis on this point; personal communications, 1984.

suggest that we should look in all the least likely lacunae of the body politic. For if there is a democratic current out there, it is embedded in the infrastructural practices of daily life, taking on this or that ideological valence according to the historical and situational exigencies of lived experience. It will not be easy to detect and describe because its channels have been chosen in part as paths of resistance to the very political technology by which "public opinion" is constructed and political discourse debased.

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