8 Policy and politics

SYNOPSIS

In the last chapter an exploration of the characteristics of various policy issues, deliberately designed to illustrate complexity and diversity, was followed by a brief discussion of Lowi's (1972) policy typology and Matland's (1995) emphasis upon the need to relate policy ambiguity and policy conflict. It was concluded that what is important about Lowi's contribution is his emphasis on the need to explore the relationship between policy issues and politics. This chapter takes up that theme, taking as its key theme the commonplace but important observations that politics is about 'who gets what' and that participation in the policy process is likely to be about the advancement or protection of interests.

This theme is explored through the elaboration of a simple model (set out in Figure 8.1) which sees the policy process as interactions between political and administrative decision makers and two potentially antagonistic groups of citizens: winners and losers from policy initiatives. That elaboration requires a recognition that there may be 'third parties' who are indirect winners or losers, and that the notions of direct and indirect impacts merge into each other in complicated ways. It then adds to that the fact that – as set out in various ways in Chapters 3–5 – the political and administrative decision makers will themselves have interests that may come into play.

This model is then applied briefly to the six policy areas examined in the previous chapter, highlighting some of the ways in which it can apply and also some situations in which it is hard to apply.

The chapter ends with an examination of the stages model of the policy process, showing why it has been given attention and outlining its strengths and weaknesses. While this is a necessary prelude to the rest of the book, set out in this chapter since that is the logical place to put it, it may seem to take the discussion in a rather different direction to the rest of the chapter. However, the presentation here of the main critique of the approach – that there is no simple linear process from political initiation to action – serves to emphasise something important for all that politics in the widest sense infuses the whole process.

Policy and power

In the first section of this book it was made very clear that the study of the policy process has to be directly related to the study of power. Therefore here, taking as our starting point the first part of Lasswell's (1936) definition of politics (quoted in Chapter 1) as about 'who gets what . . .', it is appropriate to ask to what extent the political games associated with the six policy areas discussed can be analysed in these terms. Of course there will be claims, made by key policy-making actors, in perhaps all of these cases that all will benefit from new policies. Of course it may exceptionally be true that losers are absent, or insignificant. Lowi (1972) uses the example of the land distribution policy in the nineteenth-century United States to explain his notion of distributive policy, as distinguishable from re-distributive policy. But that is an extraordinary view that surely Native Americans would dispute. Even in this case such distribution as occurred will have favoured some more than others. Ripley and Franklin (1982), who use the Lowi typology, rest their version of the distributive/re-distributive divide on the extent to which the losers can readily identify themselves. Significantly, Ripley and Franklin partly acknowledge the illogicality of this by indicating that they confine their re-distributive concept to shifts of resources from advantaged to disadvantaged groups, whilst acknowledging that the reverse does apply. They justify this in terms of ideological perceptions in the United States (perhaps better put as the 'dominant ideology').

In any case as far as the policy process is concerned policies that cause little or no controversy are not particularly significant topics for study. The issues that concern policy analysts are policies whose impact generates 'winners' and 'losers'. This basic point take us back to the central concern of the classic pluralist theorists, examining 'interests' and attempting, as in Dahl's (1961) New Haven study, to find ways to assess their impact on policy. The recognition of biases in interest systems does not detract from that essential point. It is similarly appropriate to have regard to the way in which public choice theory directs our attention to 'the political marketplace'. Note here the title of Buchanan and Tullock's book *The Calculus of Consent* (1962); even though there are many problems about identifying and aggregating interests (on which more will be said below) this is still a useful starting point for much policy process analysis.

Identifying winners and losers

Knoepfel and his colleagues (2007) explore the impact of the policy process in terms of implications for 'beneficiary groups' and 'target groups'. The simpler terms 'winners' and 'losers' are preferred here. They go on to use the notion of

Figure 8.1 Knoepfel et al.'s (2007) triangle of policy actors
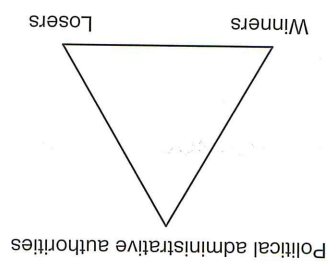
'a triangle of policy actors' (ibid., pp. 56–61), the basic components of which are winners and losers together with 'political administrative authorities that develop and implement policy' at the apex (see Figure 8.1).

That simple model then needs to be made more complicated. As far as winners and losers are concerned there are also 'positively' and 'negatively' affected third parties (ibid.). However, the distinction between directly affected actors and these so-called third parties can be a difficult one. There are legal contexts, for example in relation to planning issues, where there is a need to draw a clear line between those who have a direct right to provide evidence on the impact of a development. But from a political point of view assigning others to the weaker status of third parties may be contestable. Consider for example the indirect effects of a new road upon people whose property remains intact but who experience more noise and other nuisances (there may of course also be winners who experience less). So while it is useful to bear in mind here the notion of 'third parties' it is probably more useful to talk about indirect winners and losers, who may spread across a spectrum from the situations in which these are very clear to ones where those gains and losses are indirect, very diluted and obscure. Wilson (1973), for example, has distinguished between 'concentrated' and 'dispersed' costs and benefits, with the blocking of policy least likely where there is a broad distribution of both. The issues about dispersed costs – even hidden costs – seem particularly important here. Much public policy involves costs which fall on a collective exchequer – often that of the nation state. Incremental addition to benefits for specific groups, that may be readily identifiable, may involve additional costs that are very widely spread so that they are small or even unidentifiable to those that pay them. This of course also featured earlier (in Chapter 4) as an aspect of public choice analysis of the real costs of public policy, where reference was made to the fact that politicians may endeavour to make clear who are winners and hide the evidence on who are the losers.

Hogwood (1987) on the same theme suggests about the extent to which policy benefits can be distinguished will be relevant. Relevant here too are 'policy instruments'. This term is used:

to encompass the myriad techniques at the disposal of governments to implement their public policy objectives. Sometimes referred to as 'governing instruments', these techniques range in complexity and age . . .
(Howlett, 1991, p. 2)

Issues about the choice of instruments have been seen to be influenced by concerns about costs and benefits. Hence, Howlett suggests, 'instrument choice, from this perspective, is public policymaking' (ibid.). However, instrument choice – while influenced by the policy issue at stake – is much more about the selection of means to achieve policy objectives. As such it is discussed further in the context of policy formulation in Chapter 10.

Another complication for any analysis in respect of winners and losers is that policies may involve choices between alternative winners and losers. Take the example of a new airport, where a choice is made between alternative venues. Depending upon interest configurations there may be both winners and losers in the chosen area. But there may also be both disappointment and relief in places not chosen. The winners/losers model may be extended to cover decisions like this, but it is stretching it a little. It is another reminder of the complexity of the policy/politics relationship.

It is important, too, to make clear here something that is implicit in talking of 'winners' and 'losers' using plural forms, which is that there may be various groups or coalitions involved. In this respect various scholars have made use of the 'advocacy coalition framework' (see Chapter 3, pp. 62–4) to identify groupings of this kind, with 'dominant' groups probably influencing the policy process over a significant period of time until 'shocks' of some kind disturb the consensus.

A related point of importance about the identification of winners and losers is that it is necessary to give attention to the apex of the triangle in Figure 8.1: the political administrative authorities. We explored theoretical perspectives that indicate that the bodies that make policy have interests too (in Chapters 3–5). It was suggested (in Chapter 3) that we may find them in the networks and policy communities to which the organisations that represent the public also belong. It also indicated that there may be competing networks, with different parts of the government machine potentially in conflict with each other. We reinforced that perspective by indicating that there is a need to recognise institutional configurations with their own commitments, expectations and standard operating procedures (Chapter 4). Then we added the public choice perspective with its strong emphasis on the likelihood that public officials will pursue their own interests (Chapter 5). So it is important to add this group of 'actors' as not necessarily impartial initiators, formulators and implementers of public policy but also as people who may see themselves and their departments as winners or losers, and who may be drawn into collaboration with winners and losers amongst the general public.

Winners and losers in relation to the policy areas

With these considerations in mind the six policy areas will be discussed, not in the order they were introduced but in an order starting from the one where the process of identifying winners and losers may be easiest. The aim

is to contrast the policies about which a clear open political competition is possible with those where this is likely to be much more obscure.

Income maintenance policy is explicitly about benefits, and debate about policy change is likely to take the form of claims about winners and losers. However, even here the debate may be complicated. It is generally true that where benefits are funded from taxation and directly applied to the relief of poverty, through means tests for example, winners and losers will be identifiable. However, even here the complexity of taxation can obscure exactly where the costs will fall. Social insurance is even more complicated, implicit within it is collectivisation of risks, but there is a compromise made between actual re-distribution (from those more likely to be sick or unemployed to those less likely to be so) and a process in which we contribute at some stages in our lives and receive benefits at others. This is particularly true of pensions, where in fact the greater longevity of the better off may make them long-term winners at the expense of poorer contributors. Calculating actual re-distributive effects is a scholarly activity which will not be discussed here. However, the ultimate obscurity of outcomes does not prevent much political debate around social insurance being conducted on the assumption that a re-distribution process from rich to poor is occurring.

In the discussion of pollution policy, much was made of both externalities and the global nature of some of key problems. In that sense the winners from pollution control are us all. However, what is central to much pollution control is the curbing of economic activities with costs to be met by polluters. In that sense the losers' side of the equation is very explicit, and often losers are immediately evident and winners obscure. However, even in the context of a general gain from pollution control there are likely to be differences in gains, as a consequence of relative proximity to the nuisance to be curbed. Not surprisingly the politics of pollution control is often fiercely fought out. Potential losers are likely to be powerful, able to remind politicians of their economic importance. Potential winners are either economically weak (workers living close to factories) or not particularly aware of their possible gains.

Many education and health policy changes are likely to be presented by policy makers as involving general benefits. In this respect – take for example the extension of higher education – the critical political debate is about the cost side of the equation. However, in relation to both of these policy areas there is a salient debate about the reduction of inequalities. This obviously implies an identifiable group of potential winners. Except at a time of rapid social advance, upward mobility is likely to have to be balanced by downward mobility; it may be observed that political actors find it difficult to come to terms with the fact that redressing inequalities implies that there will be losers too.

In relation to services like education the point made above, about choices between places (using the airport example), can be important. The allocation of new resources generates winners and losers inasmuch as only some secure scarce benefits. Issues about the extension of, or correction of, inequalities may be evident in this area of policy. We see here decisions in Lowi's (1972)

'constituent policy' category which may have important re-distributional consequences.

In respect of both health and education policy making there are actors within the system – teachers, doctors, etc. – who may be winners or losers from policy change. The key point here is that much policy change in health and education is explicitly about how professional staff are to be organised, deployed and rewarded.

The discussion of health policy in the last chapter was explicitly organised around the topic of system change. The aim was to emphasise how there may be crucial policy changes occurring in ways in which a discourse about winners and losers is either absent or obscured. In fact we often see affected staff as salient protagonists in debates about these changes with patients observing this rather passively on the sidelines. The complexity of the issues contributes to this. But in addition a peculiarity of health politics is that while we almost all need health care sometime in our lives those who are most intimately affected at any point in time are probably also – as a consequence of their infirmities – unlikely to engage with the policy process.

So far four policy areas have been explored, in all of which there is likely – in a democratic state – to be fairly active public participation (directly or through interest groups) affected by considerations about gains and losses likely to be consequent on policy change. It was noted in the course of presenting the last two policy areas – making war and controlling the economy – that the policy process seems in those cases to be rather different. In both, the issues about winners and losers are perhaps rather peculiar.

I will not detain us here with a discussion of whether there are ever real winners from a war. What is clear is that the case for war is made by politicians in terms of general benefit, at least to their own nation state and perhaps for the world as a whole. There are then obvious losers and modern politicians are very sensitive to the impact on public opinion of repatriated bodies. There are also good reasons why those who 'profit' from conflict are likely to want to evade identification.

The discussion of the issues about waging war also highlight the way in which participation in decision making before action may be limited. It is also pertinent to note the high speed with which actual decisions are made. There are then strong efforts to try to maximise support once conflicts start, manipulating notions of loyalty and patriotism.

The management of the economy is seen as something done for the general good. There is little dissent from the view that it should be about securing growth without excessive inflation or unemployment. But then exactly how that should be done takes us right to the heart of political controversy. That would seem to take us into forms of democratic debate any bit as explicit as the debates over social security. Yet somehow it does not always do so.

In looking at the twenty-first-century world it may be the case that now the parameters for any debate are set globally – by the economic relationships between nations and the international capitalist institutions. As this piece is being written, week after week the news is full of the complex problem of solving a crisis for the Euro posed particularly by the contrast between nations

with high levels of public debt (particularly Greece and Italy) and those in securer circumstances (particularly Germany). There are evident problems here about relationships between nations, highlighted by German unhappiness about getting into a role as a rescuer of weaker economies. But solutions lie as much within the politics of the individual countries as in the development of better ways to manage the economic relationships between nations. Within Greece, for example, what has been said above about winners and losers is only too evident in respect of solutions to the problem that focus on the need for massive public expenditure cuts. It is all very well for external commentators to point to overpaid or unnecessary civil servants or to the need for the elimination of tax evasion. But those who gained from the previous status quo can hardly be expected to cheerfully give up those gains in the national interest, particularly when it is people from other countries who lecture them on the need to do so. A similar point may be made about expectations of political leaders; delivering unpopular cuts is not a good strategy for re-election. Not surprisingly the politics of response to an economic crisis is complicated and fraught; meanwhile the journalists criticise and the financiers speculate!

Significantly both the making of war and the management of the economy (the latter in a rather weak sense) predate the democratic era as state activities. Some writers have described them as 'high politics', to refer to the way in which they are the particular concerns of political elites with little wider participation in decision making. Bulpitt (1983) argued that during the twentieth century 'British statecraft separated decisions between central and local government, in particular distinguishing between the "high politics" of managing external relations and economic management and the "low politics" of delivering public services' (John, 2001, p. 30). However, drawing a distinction between high and low seems to carry an ideologically and politically loaded tone in which those who have been in a position to devolve power have a distinct view about what they regard as important. It may also be argued to be out of date inasmuch as that there has been a tendency for British national politicians at least to want to try to extend their grasp to issues that their predecessors would have regarded as beneath their concern (those issues that Bulpitt saw as belonging to local government such as much social policy).

Hence the labels 'high' and 'low' add nothing to our understanding of the nature of the policy issues, and the use of them by Bulpitt is no more than a prescription about how to separate the role of different layers of government. In what other ways may these two policy areas be distinguished? Are these issues where the need for a rapid response means that the policy-making process is rather different, in particular precluding the competition between interests? This seems sometimes to be the case but there are several problems about developing generalisations based upon that.

While there does seem to have been a tendency in the past for efforts to keep foreign policy issues out of the democratic process (and there is some evidence on the lack of public interest in such matters – though surely not in respect of issues about war), this cannot now be seen to justify the scholarly separation of the foreign policy from other forms of policy analysis.

One other approach to foreign policy decision making that may be noted is Putnam's (1988) notion of a 'two-level game': a domestic level operating with recognisable rules and an anarchic international level. But that surely over stresses regularity at the first level and disregards the increasing structuring of the second level, a topic to which the discussion of governance beyond the nation state returns (see Chapter 14).

Allison's (1971) comparison of models of the process in his study of the Cuban missile crisis illustrates nicely that while events may be explained in terms of a low visibility chess game played by the two political leaders they may equally be explained by a bureaucratic politics that has much in common with other policy processes. In general, when we look at the making of war, attention can be given to elaborate preparatory events that only differ from other policy-making activities inasmuch as efforts are made to keep them obscure and minimise public participation in debates about them.

Then when we look at aspects of economic policy making we see side by side rapid responses, where again there may be preparatory moves obscured by efforts to avoid giving advance notice which will influence speculative activity. Furthermore – as is only too evident at the time of writing – the rapid response to the events of 2008 has spawned a mass of issues which political decision makers struggle with now and which are very much matters of public participation. In the UK one fall out from 2008 that is throwing a very long shadow is banking reform with, at the time of writing, policy proposals that seem unlikely to see their full enactment for several years.

The final point here is that there are issues in other policy areas where there is a need for a rapid response, probably combined with efforts to restrict the range of participants in decision making occurs. Environmental disasters and disease outbreaks come into this category.

There is a point to be made here – highlighted by use of the notion of high politics to focus upon issues that are central to the lives of key politicians – about the way in which the real world of policy making is one in which elaborate efforts at policy problem solving are going on side by side with rapid responses to events. This is well explored in Rhodes' (2011) study of 'everyday life' at the top of a government department, a contribution discussed further (see Chapter 10).

Those events may require decisions of fundamental importance or they may be the day-to-day trivia of the hothouse politics of operating in a 24/7 media environment (Raynsford, 2007). There are some issues here about the relationship between policy and politics which are confusing inasmuch as plenty that is written about the latter, particularly by the media, features the exceptional and the short term. Here then we need to turn Lowi's emphasis on the impact of policy on politics around the other way. McConnell, in a book about 'policy success', argues that it is important to have regard to the extent to which what is being sought in the policy process is 'political success':

> . . . if public policy is broadly what governments choose to do (or not do), then government does not just 'do' processes or programmes, it also does politics. (McConnell, 2010, p. 25)

While McConnell's work is explicitly concerned with examining 'success' claims, in doing so he explores a wide range of ways in which political concerns influence policy choices. The discussion of evaluation in Chapter 15 returns to aspects of his approach. Chapter 9 picks up some relevant points on this theme with the examination of Kingdon's (1995) exploration of how problems, policies and politics interact in determining the policy agenda.

McConnell stresses the work of writers who have seen 'political symbolism' as important for political life, and therefore for understanding the policy process from the politician's point of view (Edelman, 1984; Stone, 2002). He makes an interesting comment on what have been called 'wicked issues' (Head and Alford, 2008): 'complex problems without clear solutions' (McConnell, 2010, p. 79) where politicians experience strong pressure to do something accordingly', ... a placebo or symbolic dimension to many of the programmes designed to tackle' them (ibid.).

We have here a relationship between policy and politics that may be compared with a piece of music in which the use of a clear theme is complicated by a mass of cross-cutting distracting alternatives, which may or may not harmonise with the theme. At the heart of the literature on the policy process are questions about how feasible a rational policy process is in the context of all the political 'noise'.

Policy stages

The next topic in this chapter, policy stages, may seem to involve a distinct change of emphasis. But it has important connections with the preceding discussion of the relationship between policy and politics in two respects. First, the theory of representative democracy sees expressions of the popular will as an 'input' into the political system leading through various processing stages to a policy outcome as an 'output'. In that sense there is an assumption that policy should start with politics. Second, implicit in that theory is the notion of a linear process of realising political goals. In that, 'losers' in the initial political battles might be expected to drop out – as in a knockout tournament in sport. Both of these assumptions have been challenged.

The propagation of the stages model, not just to describe the policy process but also as an ideal for rational administration, has its roots in an influential nineteenth-century essay which stressed a need for a clear distinction between politics and administration (Wilson, 1887). The case for this is also made in arguments about the rule of law as well as in arguments for representative democracy. Implicit in the latter concept is the notion that citizens should be able to predict the impact of the actions of the state upon themselves and secure redress when affected by illegitimate actions, hence what this implies is a coherent law-making process that then binds the subsequent actions of state officials (whether or not that process is democratic).

The development of the stages or policy cycle model may be seen, in part, as an elaboration of these concerns. The systems approach outlined by David Easton (1953, 1965a, 1965b) is seen as a key source for the stages model. Easton argues that political activity can be analysed in terms of a system containing a number of processes which must remain in balance if the activity is to survive. The main merit of systems theory is that it provides a way of conceptualising what are often complex political phenomena. In emphasising processes as opposed to institutions or structures, the approach is also useful in disaggregating the policy process into a number of different stages, each of which becomes amenable to more detailed analysis. For all of these reasons, stripped of the biological emphasis in Easton's work, the systems model is of value, and this no doubt helps to account for its prominence in the literature. Other writers who do not necessarily share Easton's systems framework have also used the idea of stages in the policy process for the purposes of analysis (see Box 8.1).

The advantage of a stages model is that it offers a way of chopping up, if only for the purposes of analysis, a complex and elaborate process. It is useful as an heuristic device but potentially misleading about what actually happens

Box 8.1	Variations on Easton's systems model of stages

Jenkins (1978, p. 17) elaborates the Easton model considerably, recognising complex feedback flows and identifying the following stages:

- Initiation
- Information
- Consideration
- Decision
- Implementation
- Evaluation
- Termination

Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p. 4) offer a more complex model in which they identify the following:

- Deciding to decide
- Deciding how to decide
- Issue definition
- Forecasting
- Setting objectives and priorities
- Options analysis
- Policy implementation, monitoring and control
- Evaluation and review
- Policy maintenance, succession and termination

(Parsons, 1995, pp. 79–81). As noted above, it is important to recognise the extent to which both the systems model and the stages 'discourse' rest upon a model of the representative democratic policy process in which politicians make decisions, senior civil servants help to translate them into specific legislation, and junior civil servants implement them. This is a widely held view of what 'should' happen. From the standpoint of this book the most important problem with this perspective is that the use of the stages model imposes upon the analysis of what actually happens a potentially distorting framework wherever what really happens is radically different from this.

From an empirical perspective, policy processes are in many respects continuous processes of evolution in which a realistic starting point may be far back in history. It was noted in considering the definitions of the term 'policy' that it is inappropriate to get into a model of the way policy processes occur which might only apply to a newly annexed desert island where nothing had been done before. Inasmuch, therefore, as it is possible to identify policy 'initiation', it may start anywhere in the system. Whilst there are grounds for seeing the stages as involving the progressive concretisation of policy (or involving a nesting of decisions in which some are logically prior to others), this offers no basis for prediction about how much will occur at any stage (in other words, whilst some policies may be formulated in very explicit terms early in the process, others may gradually manifest themselves as they are implemented). Stages are not insulated from each other and there may be a succession of feedback loops between them – often the same actors are involved at different stages and the policy games they play will be carried on through different parts of the process (this remark is particularly applicable to the policy making/implementation distinction). Friedrich summed up this alternative perspective long ago when he argued that 'public policy is being formed as it is being executed and it is likewise executed as it is being formed' (1940, p. 6).

The stages model has been discussed here because it is still widely used. This discussion has suggested, however, that its use can mislead. The problem – as John, one of the model's severest critics, has recognised – is that there is a pragmatic case for the model as it 'imposes some order on the research process' (1998, p. 36). What had to be recognised in shaping this book was that if every process is continuously seen as interacting with every other process, there is no way to divide up discussion into separate chapters or sections. Hence, limited use is made of the stages model by recognising rather that there are somewhat different things to say about agenda setting, policy formulation and implementation, respectively. At the same time, interactions are regularly stressed.

Relating the stages approach to actual policy issues

As far as the stages approach to policy analysis is concerned, there are some significant contrasts to be made. The two extremes are perhaps economic

policy and income maintenance policy. In the case of economic policy, in the use of the key instruments of influence in the modern world – the exchange rate and the rate of interest – there really is no staged process at all. Specific actions or specific decisions are often made and implemented simultaneously. There will of course be some sort of agenda-setting process. Inasmuch as this may be expected to involve a public debate, political leaders may be reluctant to have one, since a debate about impending economic measures generates anticipatory actions by those likely to be affected.

As far as the device of leaving interest rate setting to a partly autonomous committee is concerned, it may be argued that such a body is merely an implementing agency working within strict parameters defined by 'policy'. But that is really playing with words, thereby illustrating the problematical nature of the policy formulation/implementation distinction. The decisions in question may have been quite closely pre-programmed, but their impact can be such that it seems inappropriate to describe them as merely implementation. In any case in the UK, the 2008 crisis seems to have brought to an end a process in which the Bank of England simply reacted to the inflation rate without consulting the government.

On the other hand, in the case of income maintenance policy, there is likely to be not merely a prolonged, but almost certainly a public, agenda-setting process. During its later stages that agenda setting will generally take the form of the presentation of proposals to a legislature, which will then be debated and perhaps amended. Once that stage is completed (or nearing completion, as these parts of the process will overlap) work will be done to translate legislation into a rule structure that will enable individual entitlements to be identified. Once that is done the legislation will be brought into action in a form in which very explicit instructions will be given to implementers. Inasmuch as the legislation gives individuals rights, the concerns in the implementation process will be about managerial control and about ways in which people may ensure they secure those rights. Of course, discretion may be enshrined within the rules, but these will tend to be tightly structured by the legislation. Feedbacks will occur, but primarily in the interaction between legislation and more detailed formulation. Here simultaneous work on both will tend to save governments the embarrassment of having to introduce amending legislation soon after the initial legislation. Furthermore, as is the case in the UK, with what is known as the use of 'delegated legislation', flexibility for amendments based upon later experience will be built into the primary legislation. Feedbacks can often be seen as a clearly structured part of a structured process.

The only exceptions to these propositions about income maintenance policy will be some forms of means-tested benefits (with characteristics not dissimilar to the 'poor laws' of earlier ages), where high levels of policy choice have been delegated downwards (Eardley *et al.*, 1996). On the other hand, in the cases of education policy and pollution control policy, the delegation of policy choice is likely to be much more evident. Furthermore, in these two areas notions that are crucial for the characteristics of the policy are likely to be left to be settled at later stages. The UK National Curriculum for schools offers a good illustration. Beyond the specification of subjects to be studied, most of the detail of

what should go into a specific curriculum has been left to officials within the education system, and even then the resulting documents leave many areas of choice for teachers. Reference was made to Bowe *et al.*'s (1992) notion of 'texts', in this case negotiated and debated up and down. Occasionally, politicians or the media have raised certain issues for national debate – such as the extent to which the history that is taught should be national history – but on the whole the detail is settled 'lower down' the system.

The equivalent to this in pollution control policy is the range of issues discussed above about different options for use of the planning system, about co-production and doctrines like 'best practical means'. These too need to be seen as matters not just for any particular level in a staged system but as the subject of interactions between the systems. A good approach to the exploration of these interactions involves seeing one level as engaged in 'mandating' others (May, 1993). An interesting characteristic of pollution control is the extent to which there is expectation of a tightening of control over time, using targets to be reached incrementally. Such targets even appear in international agreements. Hence there is an interesting contrast between the macro-politics of target setting (often involving supra-national bodies) and the very specific (and more local) micro-politics of determining implementation arrangements. If a stages model is used in this field of policy then it is at best going to be one in which feedback is particularly important.

The case of health services reorganisation fits less well into this discussion. A great deal depends upon the nature of the reorganisation. Also very relevant is the structural context in which it occurs, the distinction here being between the UK system, in which incremental changes are frequent, and systems in which legal constraints make change a matter for fundamental legislation, even constitutional change. In the UK, health service privatisation developed gradually after a very limited piece of legislation allowed some services to be contracted out. However, what is important is the fact that government reorganisation processes are complex, may get little clear attention at an agenda-setting stage and are rolled out over time. During that time evidence about winners and losers will emerge from analyses that focus upon detailed formulation or implementation issues.

Turning now to the making of war, here there is clearly a prolonged process which can be traced over time. But does it make any sense at all to describe, for example, the Vietnam War as involving agenda setting, formulation and then implementation, let alone to follow any even more elaborate version of the stages model? What was described above in relation to all the examples given was indeed agenda-setting processes, in which public participation was unwelcome and political elites sought (not necessarily successfully) to keep strong control over events. An interesting (dare I say sinister?) feature of the relationship between agenda setting and policy formulation is the fact that nations do not declare war until they have prepared for it. I recall seeing American military supply ships massing off the shores of the United Kingdom long before war was declared on Iraq. To what extent does preparing for war make war inevitable? The evidence on the Cuban missile crisis suggests there can be a negative answer to that question, but that was a very closely run thing.

Going to war is therefore, perhaps, a very strong example of *implementation as policy making*. A great deal of the detail is settled incrementally in action. What makes this implementation very different from most of the examples of implementation discussed in the texts on this subject is the very high involvement of the 'top' of the political and administrative systems in the process. Once a war is in progress, policy change processes, affected by local intelligence and by local action, are likely to continue. It is an interesting paradox about military action that, whilst there is a high stress upon top-down authority and discipline, much of this is actually designed to pre-programme highly discretionary actions in situations in which those at the front have to react to unpredictable situations. This aspect of limits to control over the policy process is explored in parts of Chapters 11 and 12.

There are clearly other policy issues where a 'crisis' (in reality or as defined by the government) that requires rapid executive action creates a policy process in which separating the stages is problematical. Taylor's (2003a) study of the response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease amongst animals in the UK in 2001 provides a good example of this. What was involved was action that the Prime Minister and other politicians initiated quickly to supplement or replace an existing policy framework. In this case an animal disease emerged, foot and mouth, for which there was already an apparently coherent policy on the statute book, but the problem was that the disease had not manifested itself for nearly 40 years and in that time the organisation of both agriculture and the regulatory system had changed dramatically. Policy therefore had to be made 'on the hoof', as Taylor puns in his article, in a context in which very activist politicians needed quick results when a general election was pending (see Box 8.2).

Box 8.2	Taylor's (2003) account of the handling of the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak in the UK

The last serious outbreak of foot and mouth disease occurred in 1967–8. A sequence of recommendations was adopted after that to involve the rapid diagnosis, slaughter and disposal of all animals that might have been exposed to the disease. The problem in 2001 was that agricultural and marketing arrangements had changed significantly, with very much more movement of animals around the country, hence the potential rate of spread of the disease was much increased. After such a long, almost disease free, period, few experts had any familiarity with the disease. Furthermore, there had been substantial changes to the veterinary service at the disposal of the government, so that it was very difficult to get services into action quickly. Evidence that the disease was likely to be located in several different parts of the country and that very large numbers of animals might have been exposed to it (in all, once the picture became clear, about 2000 cases were confirmed and 4 million animals needed to be slaughtered) made it difficult to implement the standard policy.

The government were seen by some as acting too slowly, by others of making unnecessarily draconian decisions about slaughter and about the movement of both people and animals. 'From a policy-making and implementation perspective, the notion of "policy on the hoof" is appropriate because that was the way in which policy proceeded during the crisis' (Taylor, 2003, p. 544).

This is illustrated by:

> the proposal to vaccinate and the decision to base culling on contiguous contact culling rather than contiguous premises, the decision to reprieve Phoenix [a pet calf featured in newspaper stories] . . ., bury instead of burn carcasses, make use of retired veterinary surgeons after initially rejecting the proposal, use the army later rather than immediately and transfer major decision making to . . . [the Prime Minister's office]. (ibid.)

The use of a stages approach: just a pragmatic matter or something more?

The chapters in the rest of this book have labels and contents that broadly follow the specifications of the stages model. The matter could be left there, using the pragmatic case for this approach. There are however two threads in the case for the stages model that are regarded as important. One, to which only brief attention is appropriate (the main case has been made above) is that, while this book is an exercise in descriptive analysis rather than prescription, the prescriptive importance of the stages model (embodied in the model of representative democracy and of the rule of law) suggests that it is important to be aware of the extent to which processes are staged in the real world.

The other justification is a matter of logic. This was explored in terms of a journey earlier (Chapter 1) where it was suggested that there will be three or four separable elements: deciding where we want to go to (agenda setting), deciding how to get there (formulation) and going (implementation). There may even be a fourth stage: evaluating what we did and how we did it. But it was pointed out that people may change their mind about where they want to go or how they want to get to somewhere during a journey. The point about this mundane example is then that if we want to analyse a purposive act it is surely logical to assume, but not take for granted, some kind of sequencing.

The journey example here involves a single actor but its logic can be extended to multiple actor situations more typical of the policy process. Here of course the conventional prescriptive position implies some sort of hierarchy, and particularly a distinction between who decides where to go and

who goes on the journey. The position to be adopted here is that who does what should be regarded as an empirical question.

But, as institutional theory stresses (see Chapter 4), earlier decisions tend to structure subsequent ones. In this respect, Kiser and Ostrom's (1982) notion of three related but distinct levels of analysis is useful. They thus separate decisions taken at the constitutional level, which structure the design of the context within which choices are made, from the collective choice level, at which key decisions about the management of policy are made, and the operational level, which explains the world of action. There is a 'nesting' process in which some kinds of decisions have a particularly strong impact upon the context for later ones, hence the idea of constitutional level and collective choice level decisions. The present author and Peter Hupe (Hill and Hupe, 2006) have adapted this idea for the examination of the implementation process arguing that there is a need to separate the fact that there are different decision levels from the exploration of the actual layers of organisation of governance.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has argued that, while Lowi is right that policy characteristics influence the politics of the policy process, there is no easy way to generalise about that through a typology. Rather it is important to take that observation as a cue to recognise the importance of conflicts of interest. If that is done then it leads on to attention to the fact that there are winners and losers from policies, and that it is the configuration of these that may determine what is done. The six policy areas in the previous chapter have been examined in these terms.

The chapter ends with an exploration of the use of, and limitations of, the stages model of the policy process. It shows that the limitations of it rest upon the fact that in one sense or another politics continues as policy is translated into action. Losers at one stage in the process fight on, and in doing so may contribute to feedback processes or even complete re-starts.

Finally, there are some observations indicating that, while the structure of the discussion in the rest of the book loosely follows the stages model, and is justified in pragmatic terms, some of the notions embedded within the stages model of the policy process can be used in the analysis of the process so long as they are only seen as relating to the logical sequencing of activities, and the impact of early decisions on later ones.