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POLICY CONTINUITY AND CHANGE*

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The abrupt shifts in U.S. policy associated with President Reagan's administration raise fundamental questions. How are new policies instituted? Why do some policies survive and even expand? Why do others shrivel and die, and why are some reversed? We have seen many attempts to change U.S. domestic and foreign policy in the last 30 years, but not all of them have been successful. Likewise, many efforts to sustain and continue policies have failed.

Explanations of these developments should go beyond images of swinging pendulums, ladders of progress, or turning wheels. To shed light on the making and unmaking of social policy, I will compare cases of major changes and continuities in two different areas: U. S. relations with the U.S.S.R. and federal efforts to reduce poverty.

These areas are particularly useful for a comparative analysis of policy shifts. They include familiar and significant issues. Each of us is likely to be favorably predisposed to some of the policy changes and continuities in these areas but not to others. This challenges us to find common explanations, not easily shaped by our particular moral and ideological inclinations. Furthermore, the differences between these areas force us to seek explanations that cut across specific policy areas.

My analysis of these cases will stress three sets of factors that underlie such long-term, large-scale changes and continuities. After outlining my analytical framework, I will examine the course of U.S. governmental policy toward the Soviet Union and toward poverty in the U.S. over the past two decades. In the final section of the paper I will draw implications from this analysis for a general understanding of policy continuity and change.

FACTORS IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

First, the *content and consequences* of a policy affect its development. This means we must attend to who loses and who benefits from any given policy. Change in major social policy results more from disappointment with the old policy than enthusiasm for a new one. Continuity in policy depends upon the gains by beneficiaries relative to the losses by those who pay for the programs. Specifically, we must consider to what extent vested interests are created which provide incentives and means for expansion of an existing program.

The second set of factors is the *concrete historical context* within which opposing coalitions contend over the establishment or survival of a particular program. Three components of the historical context are especially important: social trends, societal institutions, and the international setting. Change in public opinion is one important social trend that I argue precedes rather than follows major governmental policy initiatives.

The third set of factors is the *social processes* which operate within a particular historical context. I stress the social processes that affect the relative strength of the coalitions of supporters and of opponents. The relative strength of these coalitions varies as the program is established and implemented. Thus, supporters may seek adherents by offering concessions to some in the opponents' camp, while those same concessions later may undermine the program. The skill of leaders in opposing camps to assess their relative strength for different policy formulations within

a specific historical setting is critical to their success in establishing and sustaining a program they want or in preventing or reversing a program they oppose. Policy continuity is the outcome of an unstable equilibrium between shifting coalitions of proponents and opponents. I argue that policy change results from shifts in that equilibrium.

CASE STUDIES

The Rise of Detente

The first case I examine is the rise of detente at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. A major achievement of the detente policy was the agreement on limiting strategic nuclear weapons embodied in the ABM and SALT I treaties of 1972. In addition, trade was expanded during this period, particularly the sale of U.S. grain to the Soviets. Trade, along with cultural and scientific exchanges, was to entangle the Soviets in a web of positive bonds and, in Kissinger's (1976:176) words, "generate incentives for restraint." All this would further promote a matter of mutual interest: avoiding confrontations and a suicidal nuclear war. Simultaneously, the moves toward normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China provided an opportunity to play one Communist power off against another. This would also be an avenue to gain Soviet and Chinese assistance in finding a face-saving way for the U.S. to leave Vietnam.

Detente emerged within a particular historical context. Many trends converged to produce a configuration which made that policy possible and almost inevitable. First, beginning in the mid 1950s, public opinion drifted toward greater liberalism and less anti-Communism. For example, the proportion of the public who would not allow a Communist to speak in their community declined from almost 70 percent in the mid 1950s to less than 40 percent in the early 1970s. Hostility toward the Soviet Union gradually declined during the same period (Kriesberg and Quader, 1984). Beginning in the mid 1960s the reaction against the growing U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam led to a lack of trust in the military and to increased pressure for withdrawal. By the end of the 1960s, the Cold War consensus was shattered. Second, elites as well as the public had significantly shifted to favor reducing military spending, finding a way out of Vietnam, and avoiding similar involvements in the future. Although these new views did not represent an overwhelming consensus, as was the case for the Cold War in the 1950s, they did represent a substantial shift in elite and public opinion. As Kissinger (1979) observed, the pressure for peace was palpable when Nixon assumed the presidency in 1969.

Third, trends in the U.S. economy also facilitated detente. Despite the drains of the Vietnam War, the economy grew at an annual rate of 3.2 percent from 1965 to 1970; yet this was a significant drop from the 4.7 percent annual rate of growth during the first half of the 1960s (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). In the context of other developments, the prospects of increased trade and investment in Communist-governed countries was attractive to many in the business elite.

Certain U.S. institutional structures also were conducive to detente. The historical experience of America's two major political parties often leads Democratic administrations to be militantly anti-Communist and supportive of increased military spending in order to avoid accusations of being "soft on Communism" (Wolfe, 1979). The Republicans have more often reduced or limited military spending. Nixon's reputation as a strong anti-Communist protected him from attack if he pursued a policy of detente. Also, the bureaucratic momentum of previous developments was relevant. The earlier moves — inside and outside of the government — to limit the arms race established a solid base of support for continuing efforts to negotiate arms control agreements. Of course, the momentum of the Department of Defense, producers of military hardware, and many other groups was much greater. This ensured that no substantial cutbacks in military expenditures would occur. Bureaucratic incrementalism is an important source of continuity in policy toward the Soviet Union.

Finally, the international setting was crucial for the emergence of detente. Soviet-Chinese relations had deteriorated for several years and in 1969 this led to bloody skirmishes along their common border. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Social Democratic Party, under the leadership of Willy Brandt, had come into power and launched his Östpolitik. This move toward reconciliation with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union offered an opportunity, finally, to give legitimacy to the existing borders of Europe — a long-sought objective of the Soviet government. In the Soviet Union, Brezhnev had consolidated his power and internal developments made the idea of increased trade attractive as a means of raising Soviet living standards.

Within this historical context, the coalition in the U.S. supporting the Cold War policy was weakened. This had been a broad coalition including liberal internationalists and conservative militarists. But the hopes raised by the increased military means of fighting Communist insurgency were dashed by the Vietnam experience. The coalition broke apart — not to be put together again (Holsti and Rosenau, 1984). On the other hand, the coalition supporting detente expanded. Groups who feared nuclear war, groups who saw opportunities for trade and investment, groups who saw detente as an avenue out of Vietnam, and groups who saw it as a way of limiting military expenditures were easily rallied to support the new policy.

Nixon seized the opportunity presented by this configuration of conditions, since detente was in his own political interest. Attempts to move toward accommodation with the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China gave him time to continue the war in Vietnam so that he did not have to withdraw in "dishonor". He and Kissinger skillfully put together a set of programs constituting the detente policy which fit the historical context and the relative balance of forces both in the national and international arena. Nixon and Kissinger articulated these programs so that they appeared to be a coherent strategy. In contrast, earlier efforts of President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara to initiate arms control negotiations did not succeed (Johnson, 1971). The timing was off and the time was too short, among many other considerations.

The Decline of Detente and Renewed Cold War

The second case of a shift in U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union is the decline of detente and the rise of a new Cold War. Many of the detente goals were achieved during the early-to-mid 1970s. Trade increased several fold, largely due to increases in U.S. grain sales to the Soviet Union. Soviet tolerance for dissidents increased and emigration of Jews from the U.S.S.R. was permitted to rise quickly (from 379 in 1968 to 35,000 in 1973; Scherer, 1982: 378). Agreements were made to stop the deployment of anti-ballistic weapons systems and to limit strategic nuclear weapons. U. S. military expenditures, declined (in constant dollars) from the heights of the Vietnam war, and returned to the levels of the mid 1950s by the mid 1970s. Soviet military expenditures increased at a slower rate in the 1970s than they had in the late 1960s (SIPRI, 1981).

But, from the mid 1970s on, detente did not produce the consequences that both Soviet and U.S. officials had desired. Some of these disappointments are relative to raised expectations. For example, Soviet conduct regarding domestic dissidents and the emigration of Jews, Germans, and Armenians had improved by U. S. standards. However, greater attention to this issue seemed to increase public awareness of the Soviet failure to be more like the U.S. Following the Jackson-Vanik amendment linking emigration to most favored nation status for trade purposes to the Soviet Union, the emigration of Jews declined.[1] Trade between the two nations was less than had been hoped. Soviet and U. S. officials also blamed each other for failure to adhere to detente agreements at the time of the October, 1973 Egyptian-Syrian offensive against Israel. The subsequent exclusion

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1. However, in a vain effort to encourage ratification of SALT II, the Soviets allowed Jewish emigration to reach the very high level of 51,000 in 1979.

of the Soviets from Mideast negotiations signified to them that they had not gained real parity with the U.S. in the international arena.

The new confrontational U.S. policy emerged in the late 1970s, particularly at the end of 1979 following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Reagan was elected president, after promising that his administration would be "tough" with the Soviets and would greatly increase the military strength of the U.S. Indeed, military spending has increased vastly, the Reagan administration has threatened repeatedly to use armed force as a policy tool, and its tough bargaining positions on arms control have contributed to the collapse of the arms control negotations. The goals behind these "tough" stances are obscure; they do appear to be aimed at regaining world primacy. Contrary to this goal, detente had acknowledged parity in many spheres between the two countries.

This great shift in U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union must be explained within the context of changing historical conditions. Interestingly, U.S. public opinion began to shift toward support for increased military spending *before* the mid 1970s — prior to the deterioration of detente (Kriesberg *et al.*, 1982). The same is true of negative attitudes toward Russia (Kriesberg and Quader, 1984). Following Vietnam, support for the military began to return to earlier levels. A drift toward conservatism in general also contributed to increased support for arms spending and anti-Soviet sentiment. In the mid 1970s elite groups previously pushed aside with the rise of detente began to rally support for a more militant policy against the Soviets — as seen, for example, in the formation of the Committee on the Present Danger (Sanders, 1983).

Institutional arrangements also contributed to the shift in U.S. policy away from detente. Nixon fell from power after revelations of his involvement in Watergate. Ford tempered his support of detente, avoiding the use of the term. President Carter, however, entered the presidency seeking major arms control agreements and a minimization of U.S.-Soviet antagonism. But as a Democrat he was more vulnerable than Nixon had been to accusations of being soft on Communism. He stressed human rights issues which provoked the Soviets, but did not make him look tough to the American public. Generally, American presidents rise in public approval more after a conciliatory international event than a confrontational one (Borker *et al.*, 1982). However, this was not the case with President Carter whose public approval increased more after confrontational than conciliatory international involvements.

The international setting had changed by the mid 1970s. The U. S. involvement in Vietnam was over; this reduced the U. S. need for Soviet and Chinese assistance in a face-saving exit. Yet the Soviets presumed that detente meant that they were an equal global power — a claim the U.S. government did not basically acknowledge. The Israeli-Egyptian negotiations following the October, 1973 war — mediated by Kissinger and then by Carter — excluded the Soviets. This gave them less reason for restraint elsewhere. The Helsinki Accords pledged political security for the borders of European states as they emerged after the Second World War, but they also were used to decry the restrictions on human rights in the Soviet Union. While some gains had been achieved from detente, the costs of this policy also continued to mount.

Finally, the relative strength of coalitions supporting and opposing detente shifted in the late 1970s. The coalition of supporters was greatly weakened by the historical trends and changed international setting noted above. The expectations of detente supporters had not been fulfilled. Despite many arms control agreements, the capability of both the U.S. and the Soviet governments to wage devastating nuclear war continued to increase. As each agreement was negotiated, support from groups in the opposing coalition was sought by promises to modernize weapons systems and to develop new advanced ones (Rathjens *et al.*, 1974). In the long run, these promises to the adversaries of detente undermined the purposes of the agreements. This process seemed to occur in the Soviet Union as well as in the U.S., and the Soviets approached effective parity with U.S. in more and more areas of military capability.

On the other hand, the coalition opposing detente and supporting a new, more adversarial policy toward the Soviets was strengthened by historical and institutional developments. Encouraged by trends away from detente, opponents mobilized around the prospect of eventual victory. With the Republicans no longer in the White House, a major reason for restraint by opponents was gone.

Representatives of the coalition favoring detente were unable to analyze the emerging configurations and exploit them for their side. In several ways President Carter's approach was out of phase with the drift of events. He failed to offer a coherent and convincing rationale for the specific programs of his administration. He also failed to move quickly enough to achieve agreement on SALT II and other initiatives. In contrast, Reagan has fashioned a more coherent approach — which some see as a posture (standing tall) rather than as a policy. His timing has been fortunate, but he has also been skillful in exploiting the available opportunities.

The Rise of the War on Poverty

The third case of policy change is the enactment of several programs in the mid 1960s to reduce poverty in America. Many programs to prevent poverty and to provide assistance to the poor were developed during the New Deal. After the Second World War, the Truman administration suggested the enactment of several social welfare programs, notably provisions for housing and medical care. For example, several bills during his and subsequent administrations provided for federal assistance for the construction of housing for low-income persons. But the actual provision of low-income housing and other benefits to the poor increased relatively little. The most notable change in U.S. anti-poverty policy was the War on Poverty, manifested particularly in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Friedman, 1977). The Act established many programs that sought to break the cycle of poverty by equalizing opportunities. Two points about the way the programs were formulated deserve special notice. First, equality of opportunity was stressed while the costs of transfer payments were minimized. Second, the provision of training programs and improved educational opportunities did not threaten established professions — they retained their autonomy.

The sudden burgeoning of the anti-poverty programs of the mid and late 1960s must be explained in the context of the times. As noted earlier, since the mid 1950s, public opinion had moved in the direction of more liberalism and tolerance. Support for increased welfare spending grew in the 1930s and after the Second World War, reaching 44 percent in 1950 (Janowitz, 1978:159). Public support remained high into the early 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement gained momentum as public support widened. The issues raised by the Civil Rights Movement brought attention to the economic difficulties of Black Americans. The economy was growing at a strong rate, raising the prospects of significant increases in the flow of taxes into the federal treasury and allowing the Kennedy administration to consider using these funds for new programs. The Ford Foundation had launched several demonstration projects in community action, providing models for government programs.

The state of societal institutions also favored this initiative. The increased power of the presidency allowed a president to assume a strong, activist role. This was enhanced by the trauma of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Such "accidents" can speed change but they can also interrupt it. In this case, change was accelerated. Possible anti-poverty programs had been discussed within the government and in academic circles. A few experimental programs had begun, such as the Mobilization for Youth program funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (Marris and Rein, 1973). Such efforts provided the base for further moves and a forward momentum.

Finally, the international setting should be considered. In the mid 1960s, the struggle against Communism in a bi-polar world was still the prevailing image. However, the Korean War had ended in 1953 and the escalation of the Vietnam War was just beginning. The limited involvement

in Vietnam seemed manageable, without threatening immense costs or breaking up the liberal coalition. Improving domestic conditions, particularly the rights of blacks, would contribute to the United States' leadership of the Free World.

The War on Poverty was launched without a broad base of popular demand which is unusual for a policy of such magnitude and innovation. The presidential initiatives of Kennedy and Johnson were critical in this regard. Of course there was a constituency of supporters within the government, foundations, and universities who had been involved in earlier related efforts. Political leaders at the local, state, and national levels saw some utility in such a policy. It could be launched without the mobilization of a large coalition and without being a response to mass demands. Nevertheless, the Civil Rights movement, urban riots, and other related collective action were important incentives.

The initial success in launching the War on Poverty was due in part to the weakness of the opposition coalition. After two terms of Eisenhower's domestic policies, it was difficult to argue that an expanding economy would bring about a more equitable distribution of income or improve the lot of the lower strata. The economy had not steadily expanded and even in periods of recovery, unemployment rates remained above where they had been in the previous recovery (Marris and Rein, 1973:11). The relative position of blacks was not improving and unemployment among black youth was rising relative to that of whites.

The configuration of conditions in the mid 1960s made the War on Poverty possible. President Johnson seized the opportunity. But the difficulties that soon emerged were partly a result of the hasty formulation of the package, the absence of a committed coalition, and the raised expectations which the policy generated.

The Decline of the Anti-Poverty Policy and the Rise of Supply-Side Policy

The fourth and final policy change is the decline of the anti-poverty policy and the rise of "supply side" approaches to poverty. This new policy stressed economic growth from which benefits would trickle down to the poor rather than the direct approach contained in the War on Poverty legislation. The War on Poverty programs ran into trouble very quickly. The emphasis upon maximum feasible participation of the poor and community action aroused opposition from local government officials in many cities. At the same time, blacks, women, and low-income people generally were making claims for better living conditions. Transfer payments in cash increased, followed by large increases in benefits in-kind.

In constant 1967 dollars, public aid expenditures rose gradually from 1.7 billion in 1955 to 3.1 billion in 1963; but then the rate of increase quickened. Expenditures eventually rose to 13.7 billion in 1972 (U.S. Bureau to the Census, 1981). This "welfare explosion" was marked particularly by increases in the coverage and beneficiaries of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (i.e., expansion of rolls rather than benefits). In addition to public aid increases, expenditures for low-income housing — which had increased steadily but very slowly since the 1950s — increased rapidly in the late 1960s. The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 introduced programs combining aspects of interest rate subsidies and depreciation benefits (Bourne, 1981).

Expenditures for public aid and for public housing leveled off in 1973 and 1974 (in 1973, the Nixon administration suspended or terminated all housing programs involving federal subsidies). But in the latter half of the 1970s assistance for low-income housing and public aid expenditures increased rapidly. The public housing expenditures were not in the form of construction of housing for low-income tenants but, rather, were subsidies for private developments. The increase in public aid was in the form of Supplementary Security Income (SSI). In addition, the Food Stamp and the Medicare-Medicaid programs expanded greatly.

The most important shift was the increase in expenditures for in-kind benefits rather than cash. *In 1964 the Food Stamp program was begun and in 1965 Medicaid committed open-ended federal*

matching funds to state-run medical programs for segments of the poor. Jobs-training, education aid, college tuition assistance, and energy aid also provided benefits in-kind for low-income persons. In 1968, 53 percent of all need-tested benefits were in cash; by 1981 this had fallen to 28 percent. Food benefits had risen from five percent to 14 percent, medical care from 30 percent to 33 percent and housing from five percent to nine percent (Burke, 1983).

When Reagan was elected president, his administration sought to cut back many social programs. AFDC and Food Stamp income eligibility limits were lowered and other federal contributions to programs directed at low-income persons were reduced (Piven and Cloward, 1982; Struyk *et al.*, 1983). Despite the efforts of the Reagan administration, however, not all social welfare expenditures have decreased dramatically. For example, the Food and Nutrition Service programs include Food Stamps, Child Nutrition, Women, Infants and Children, and other programs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that cash expenditures and value of the commodities provided in the Food and Nutrition programs (e.g., Food Stamps) increased from $11 billion in 1979 to $19.4 billon by 1983 (Food and Nutrition Service, 1984). These increases (even in constant dollars) occurred despite the 1981–1982 changes reducing benefit levels and raising eligibility requirements. The increase in the number of poor people in the early 1980s meant that, despite the changes in eligibility criteria, more people became eligible. Furthermore, per capita benefits for people in need declined between 1979 and 1982. In constant 1983 dollars, spending for food stamps alone declined from $11.0 billion in 1980 to $10.7 billion in fiscal year 1984. But AFDC spending fell more: from 8.8 billion to 7.2 billion in constant 1983 dollars (*New York Times*, 1984a).

Medicaid expenditures continued to rise despite restrictions intended to reduce costs, although the changes in coverage have slowed the rate of growth (O'Sullivan, 1984). In the case of Medicaid as in other programs, the decreases in federal spending have been partly compensated for by the expansion of state programs. The increases in state support have partly been in response to the effective lobbying of the providers of the services at the state level (*New York Times*, 1984b).

To explain the shifts in the anti-poverty programs from the mid 1960s to the early 1980s requires an examination of the historical context. First, consider domestic trends. As noted earlier for the decline of detente, a general trend toward conservatism was discernible in the 1970s. National survey data on public views of welfare spending reveal that support for increased welfare spending had fallen from 40 percent in 1961 to 21 percent in 1973 (Janowitz, 1978:160). Support continued to fall through the 1970s, reaching 11 percent in 1978 (NORC, 1983). The shifts in public opinion preceded rather than followed government policy. In the early 1980s support for increased welfare spending was rising again (from 14 percent in 1980 to 22 percent in 1983).

The rate of economic growth slowed in the U.S. in the 1970s. The GNP in constant dollars actually declined in 1970, 1974, and 1980. Increasing welfare expenditures and slowed economic growth has meant that a growing proportion of the GNP has gone to welfare expenditures. The proportion of the GNP going to government social welfare programs was small and increased slowly during the 1950s. It constituted 5.0 percent of GNP in 1960, 5.7 percent in 1965, 8.1 percent in 1970, and increased to 11.5 percent in 1975, and then did not increase much in the later 1970s. Although most of the welfare expenditures do not serve poor people directly, they still constitute an increased tax burden for wage and salary earners. Together with stagflation, increased welfare costs contributed to a decline in perceptions of personal financial improvement. For example, the percentage of respondents in NORC surveys who think that their financial situation is getting *better* in the last few years declined from 43 per cent in the early 1970s to only 34 percent in 1980.

The institutions and culture of the U.S. also helped to channel the development of programs directed against poverty. The shift from direct transfer paymer.ts to benefits in-kind in the late 1960s and in the 1970s benefited many groups in the private sector. Medicaid furnished essential benefits, without socializing their provision. Food stamps, too, supplied benefits through the existing

channels of production and distribution. In addition, the program provided an outlet for the large U.S. agricultural production. Of course, one might argue that the greatest individual freedom would be attained by giving low-income people cash to spend as they wish for food and to purchase medical insurance. But that requires more trust in low-income people than is generally present and businesses in the private sector would probably not receive as much for their goods and services.

Consistent failures to take certain routes also reflects continuities in the American social structure. In the early 1970s after considerable discussion of the "welfare mess," plans for a guaranteed minimal income or a negative income tax were developed by some academics and government officials. President Nixon and President Carter each proposed a form of guaranteed minimal income plan, but both failed to gain sufficient congressional support for passage. There were numerous stumbling blocks confronting these proposals and the reasons for the failure in both administrations are not the same (Moynihan, 1970). Nevertheless, certain enduring features of the U.S. prevented adoption of this policy in any form thus far. A fundamental problem is the variation in wage rates in the U.S. coupled with the presumed requirement of setting assistance levels below local wage rates to induce people to seek employment, even in the most undesirable jobs (Piven and Cloward, 1971). Nixon's solution was to set the levels very low. This weakened support from liberals and others concerned about the ensuing reduction in levels of public assistance in many parts of the country. On the other hand, white southerners were concerned about raising levels for southern blacks while Republicans questioned the costs of in-kind programs.

Carter's solution was to have different levels for families with and without an employable member. The fate of the program was also affected by the results of negative income tax experiments (Coleman, 1982). For example, findings indicated that men would not leave the work force under such provisions, but a small proportion of women would. More significantly, there were indications of increased divorce when unhappily married women were assured of a minimum income. This might be viewed as a positive feature of the plan; but it was treated as a disadvantage, given conventional male thinking about the value of women staying married and maintaining traditional sex roles.

The international setting is also part of the historical context relevant to the breakdown of support for the anti-poverty policies of the 1960s and the greater support for a supply-side approach. In the later 1960s the war in Vietnam escalated and costs rose along with opposition to the war. But it was not the costs of the Vietnam war that interrupted the War on Poverty. After all, social welfare expenditures continued to increase through the 1960s and 1970s. But the war disrupted the coalition which had supported the Kennedy and Johnson policies, and distracted Johnson's attention from social issues.

Domestic and foreign policy were also linked in the policy changes introduced by the Reagan administration. The rise of anti-Soviet sentiment and the confrontational policy toward the Soviet Union was a justification for the great expansion of military spending. This was coupled with the policy of tax cuts as the way to revitalize the economy. The coupling of the two policies generated unparalleled budget deficits, justifying additional curtailment of social welfare programs.

The relative strength of the coalitions supporting and opposing the anti-poverty programs of the 1960s and 1970s was affected by the internal dynamics of each coalition. On the one hand, the successes of the War on Poverty helped to strengthen the position of its supporters. Low-income people and categories of people associated with poverty — women, blacks and other minorities, and residents in low-income neighborhoods — gained additional resources which they used effectively to demand further expansion of programs. Demonstrations, even riots, were additional inducements to expand social services. Expectations of low-income people rose along with their improved ability to make some gains through legal means and through organizational pressure.

But, this success also weakened the strength of the coalition. The proportion of people officially in poverty fell from 22 percent in 1960 to 11 percent in 1973. Although low-income people had

more resources in their struggles for economic advances, they also had less incentive to use these resources in such struggles. Many people's lives had improved substantially. The alliance between whites and blacks was weakened by the gains of each from improved social security benefits and public assistance programs. But many whites viewed the gains of the blacks as paid for by whites, while many blacks sought more autonomy in their struggle for equality.

Despite the improvements, many people — including advocates of the anti-poverty programs — were disappointed. The programs had not worked out as well as they had hoped. Some viewed many community action programs as failures because their leaders were co-opted by government officials. Participation by low-income people was not as significant as they had hoped. Training programs were seen as aging vats while trainers and trainees each made money from the venture (Bogdan, 1971). The proportion of people in relative poverty (having less than 40 percent of the median income) was unchanged (Kriesberg, 1979).

The breakup of the coalition supporting the anti-poverty programs due to the divisiveness over the Vietnam War has already been mentioned. The shift in emphasis from equal opportunity policies to direct transfer payments, and then to payments in-kind, also meant shifts in coalition partners. To gain support from possible adversaries of program, commitments are often made that channel the program in ways that in the long run adversely affect it. Thus, to gain the support or, at least, reduce opposition of real estate organizations to low-income housing programs or of the medical organizations to health insurance, the interests of those groups were protected. For example, the legislation for Medicare states that nothing in the act is to be "construed to authorize any federal supervision or control over the practice of medicine." (cited in Friedman, 1977:37). The compromises to gain allies contributed to the high costs of the subsequent programs.

Conversely, some of these developments strengthened the opposition to anti-poverty programs (Gans, 1981). The disorders of the late 1960s and the first years of the 1970s contributed to the shift toward increased emphasis upon law and order. Some people were concerned by what they regarded as the excesses and permissiveness of that time and began to struggle against these currents. The prevailing ideological patterns of thought meant that these moves were regarded as moves to the right, to toughness, and to curtailment of anti-poverty programs.

The rising costs of social welfare programs and the slowed growth of the economy meant an increased burden for each employed person. Rather than increasing annually, the disposable income of many working people stagnated or even declined. For example, consider the disposable average weekly earnings of production or non-supervisory workers (with three dependents) on private nonmanagerial payrolls (Blumberg, 1980:68). In constant 1967 dollars in 1950 it was $72; it fluctuated during the 1950s, gradually rising to $82 in 1960. Weekly income continued to rise until it reached $92 in 1965; it never rose to that level again in the 1960s. It was higher in 1972 and 1973 but then began to decline. In 1979 disposable average income was $89 — what it was in 1964.

Of course, many different interpretations and explanations for these developments can be given, including the oil price shocks, the increasing overseas investment of U.S. based corporations, declines in research and development devoted to non-military production, and short-term management planning. Neo-conservative intellectuals developed new ways of presenting old ideas about incentives to investors and entrepreneurs as the way to stimulate economic growth. Cost effectiveness would be increased by forcing people to work harder at lower wages.

How the configuration of conditions can be used to promote one policy rather than another is partly affected by the skills of coalition leaders. They propose packages of programs, combine groups of supporters, and present a rationale to justify their proposals. The right program, with the right sponsorship, at the right time can result in the initiation of a new program. Many conditions must converge. When they do not, the effort fails. For example, recall the unsuccessful efforts to establish a negative income tax. Note, too, Nixon's failure to achieve his goal of "changing the

whole size and shape of the federal government" (Nixon, 1968:660). Reagan was very skillful in packaging several policies together in a way that appeared coherent, and the policies meshed with several converging trends.

IMPLICATIONS

Several inferences can be drawn from these cases that help to explain continuity and change in similar large-scale U.S. foreign and domestic policies. The analyses of policy content, historical conditions, and coalitions suggest important implications in each area.

The content of the policies themselves significantly affect whether or not they are adopted and whether or not they persist. One important implication of the cases examined here is that the consequences of a policy affect its continuity and also help shape a new policy when it emerges. This occurs through three processes: people are disappointed with the effects of policies; some groups carry more of the burdens for the cost of the policy than others; and policies create varying vested interests in their maintenance.

Policies rarely fail completely. They generally produce some of the consequences desired by their supporters. But they are also almost inevitably disappointing. The results desired by their proponents are not fully realized. But the sense of disappointment must be more pervasive to lead to a change. In the cases I have discussed, change usually followed considerable disappointment in the previous policy. Disappointment in the old policy is more important than enthusiasm for a new one in generating a major policy change. Of the cases considered here, the War on Poverty is a partial exception to this general rule. Some groups, particularly blacks, were disappointed by the failure of previous policies to grant them the civil rights that were due them as citizens. Although focused in the South, a national coalition was forged to win civil rights and then to advance social and economic rights. The War on Poverty was a way of addressing some of those claims.

Disappointment is readily interpreted as failure and the alleged reasons for the failure help determine the shape of the new policy. If Hitler threatened the conquest of Europe and the world as a result of appeasement, that mistake was to be avoided by being tough with the next tyrant. The struggle over the interpretation and explanation of past failures is therefore important. This is true for arguments over the outcome of the War on Poverty and the benefits of detente.

Even good programs impose unwanted costs and those costs tend to be unequally distributed. The groups who feel that they are paying a disproportionate amount for a policy are likely to try to shift that burden to other groups or to terminate the policy. Again, the perception among major population groups that they were threatened by detente or relatively disadvantaged by programs directed at reducing poverty does not arise from careful analyses or immediate experience; nevertheless these perceptions contribute to the loss of support for those policies. This may be illustrated by reference to other policies. The costs of the militant containment policy against monolithic communist expansionism seemed to be more inequitably distributed as the war in Vietnam escalated. The costs of the current policy to curtail domestic poverty programs clearly fall upon the poorest groups in the U.S.

Programs provide benefits for some people. Beneficiaries include not only recipients of goods and services, but also the providers of these goods and services — social workers, physicians, farmers, and manufacturers of weapons. These groups have a vested interest in the perpetuation of existing programs. The benefits may be minor and diffuse or large and concentrated. When the benefits are substantial and widely shared, the program is obviously more likely to continue and even expand. This has been true of social security programs. After all, one of the best predictors of the magnitude of social welfare programs is the number of years they have been in existence (Wilensky, 1975). When the benefits are substantial and concentrated, the program may *still* survive if the costs are widely diffused. This has been true of military expenditure programs

(Lieberson, 1971). This helps account for the ratchet effect in welfare spending and military spending: large-scale increments at one time may decline when the precipating cause has passed, but spending does not fall below its initial level.

In addition, once government agencies are established in a particular area, staff people have a vested interest in further development and expansion of their programs and the capacity to advance that interest. For example, the Housing and Home Finance Agency was established in 1947 and its staff was used to develop material to support the legislative struggle for the Wagner–Ellender–Taft housing bill (Keith, 1973:78). Similarly, as arms control negotiations were conducted and some agreements reached, specialists in and out of the government developed new proposals and modifications of proposals for a wide variety of possible arms control measures. A new industry of arms control experts, officials, consultants, and negotiators emerged. The very existence of a program can legitimize its continued growth. Programs which seem to have potential negative effects often turn out not to have the expected adverse consequences that some had feared. This facilitates the mobilization of allies to sustain and even extend the program. The establishment of a program, even at a minimal level can, when times are more propitious, be rapidly expanded. This was the case for the Food Stamp Program, enacted in the early 1960s (DeVault and Pitts, 1984).

Historical conditions impose constraints and present opportunities for policy change and continuity. One important condition turns out to be social trends. Public opinion has preceded rather than followed major governmental policy initiatives. This finding may seem contrary to conventional understanding. But for large-scale issues the evidence is strong (Hughes, 1978; Page and Shapiro, 1982). Major changes in public opinion are related to important changes in people's environments. These shifts have a dynamic of their own and are not merely responsive to elite opinions. Mobilization efforts by elites or by challengers are unlikely to be effective when their views are not congruent with public sentiment. This is the reason that timing is so important in introducing major policy changes. Admittedly, the beginning of the War on Poverty by presidential initiatives was not in response to great clamor. But it was consistent with the movement of public opinion and with initiatives already undertaken by private organizations. Moreover, as popular pressure swelled, the magnitude and form of anti-poverty programs changed. We should also recognize the significant role of elites and challengers in shaping the evolving programs. Shifts in public views which are not exploited by elites and challengers for support of policy changes may have little impact.

Trends in the economy also provide opportunities and set constraints on policy. But the impact of domestic growth or stagnation does not determine the *direction* of policy initiatives. In the early 1960s, economic growth offered an opportunity to move in several directions; the War on Poverty was the one taken because of several additional conditions. Similarly, in the late 1970s, economic difficulties did not require a curtailment of social programs—different national security and industrialization policies than those pursued by the Reagan administration are imaginable. Economic trends are important in shaping policy as part of a configuration of other trends—not as the sole determinant.

Societal institutions set constraints on policy change which largely account for the continuities we have noted. None of the changes we have discussed are fundamental shifts in the social structure. We saw, for example, the continued failure to establish a national minimal income through a negative income tax. There has also been considerable continuity in U.S. foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. The goal of maintaining U.S. world preeminence has remained, as has the essential reliance on military means for deterrence and defense.

The international setting interacts with societal institutions to affect both domestic and foreign policy. No major policy arena is a closed system. This has profound implications. It means that struggles about one policy issue interlock with many other policy debates (Kriesberg, 1982). What

makes sense for one policy struggle may not for another. Therefore, from the vantage point of any particular partisan in one fight, the opponent may seem irrational or wrong-headed; but that opponent is simply giving more importance to another fight in which she or he is engaged. This is further complicated by the tendency of people to generalize their positions. For example, the shift in the 1970s toward more conservatism, partly in reaction to the domestic developments of the 1960s, also affected views of the Soviet Union, to some extent independently of changes in Soviet conduct (Kriesberg and Quader, 1984).

On the other hand, international struggles — largely shaped by local factors — are often interpreted by the U.S. and the Soviet governments as part of the struggle between them. For example, U.S.–Soviet antagonism increased as a result of conflicts in the Middle East, Central America, and Central Asia. External relations then affected U.S. domestic issues and policies. This was the case, for example, with the curtailment of social programs in the early 1980s, justified in part by the need to increase military expenditures to counter the Soviet threat.

Finally, my analysis suggests implications for the role of coalitions in policy changes and continuity. Clearly, many parties make up coalitions of proponents and opponents of a given policy and, in addition, many groups act as potential coalition partners, audience members, and intervenors. Attention to only one party or one coalition, no matter how large, cannot explain the course of a policy's development. Consideration of the many different actors who support and oppose policies is essential to our understanding of the initiation and persistence of social policies. Policies are formulated in part through struggle within a coalition; representatives of member groups disagree about the content of policies and may never fully adhere to the same position. The actual implementation of the policy is the result of the contest not only between opposing coalitions, but of compromises and disagreements within opposing coalitions.

Two pairs of contradictory processes pertaining to coalitions are particularly worthy of note. First, as coalition leaders and members seek to mobilize support for a given policy, they raise their own and others' expectations about the benefits to be derived from victory. Such raised expectations make the policy vulnerable to supporters' disappointment. Second, as leaders seek to extend their coalition in order to win, they may offer concessions to buy off elements of the opposing coalition. Those concessions can, and often do, undermine the attainment of the policy goals or raise the costs for doing so to unacceptable levels. This is an important source of unanticipated negative consequences of social policies. In addition, coalitions often link various programs in efforts to mobilize support. Coalitions formed in one struggle may be revived for new issues, helping to account for links between diverse positions (Mazur, 1981). Partisans also try to link issues together by simplifying images of left-right positions. Undoubtedly, actors use such concepts to give coherence to their actions and to the actions of their opponents. As analysts, however, we must be wary, since the content of the configuration shifts. During the period of Cold War consensus, anti-Communist militancy was an expression of liberal internationalism. An expanding economy, social welfare programs, trade-union anti-Communism, and military expenditures did not seem contradictory. Now, old left enthusiasm for science, technology, and central planning to bring prosperity and equality are rejected by many of the new left who stress natural, small-scale modes of production with local control and extensive participation. Social welfare programs, military defense expenditures, and expenditures to stimulate economic growth now appear to compete with each other in a zero-sum society.

In summary, policy persistence and change are the resultant of a complex configuration of conditions. Promoters and resisters of change must rely on luck to find the necessary combination of good timing, historical conditions, and appropriate policy formulation to construct a winning coalition. That luck is enhanced by careful analyses of the historical conditions and the relative strength of coalitions, and by skillful crafting of policies and programs. Each of the changes discussed here have emerged from different configurations.

This analysis leads to a challenging conclusion. The fact that policies are formed and implemented as a result of the interactions among many groups means that no one group is in total control. It also means that we each count. Clearly, some persons have much more power than others. Presidents and major office holders wield great power in affecting the policies examined here. But the analysis also demonstrates that even presidents and major office holders cannot completely determine policy – even domestic policy. Policies are instituted, persist and change depending upon the configuration of many factors and conditions. As citizens and social scientists we are part of those configurations. What we do or do not do contributes something even if it cannot be precisely assessed. We make our own history, even if it cannot be just as we please.

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