APPENDIX 2

'Decrementalism: The practice of cuts and the theory of planning',
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Furthermore, it could be sustained that the long term security of employment in the Vale was, relatively speaking, of far greater significance though for long underplayed in the political debate. The politicians selected fluoride as a key issue of pollution, though official reports and advice from the consultants placed the emphasis on smell. Explanation of the selection of specific issues is not our concern here since it requires a deeper analysis of influence and motivation. What is revealed is that the exercise of power through political action determines the selection of issues. It is the essential and ineluctable characteristic of politics. For much of the time the administrative machine ticks over at its routine functions. Planners produce their plans, offer advice, make recommendations. For much of the time they are heeded. But their influence is circumscribed. They work within a policy framework agreed by politicians and they cannot predict when politicians will strike at an issue and stir it into life. Chance, timing and sudden opportunity rather than principles of rationality provide the explanation for the selection of environmental issues for the political agenda.

The case is susceptible to the usual criticisms of empirical work based on one closely observed issue. But I believe it does suggest features of wider relevance. It shows that an explanation of planning resides not in the identification of procedures but in an analysis of processes their causes and effects. The essential process for study is power and the relationship between powerful interests. What we need, therefore, is not so much a theory of planning but a theory of power. Without this the search for adequate theory will remain a case of much ado about nothing.

CHAPTER 11

DECREMENTALISM : THE PRACTICE OF CUTS AND THE THEORY OF PLANNING

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1. INTRODUCTION

Planning theory is now more firmly established as a respectable discipline or sub-discipline and yet more in a mess than ever before. To say this may appear contradictory, even illogical, but if that is the case contradiction and lack of logic must be happily accepted into the wonder-world of planning theory. As the circles of planning theory have spiralled ever upwards, they have at the same time become more vicious (Krieger, 1975). This necessarily contradictory state of affairs may at first be surprising yet on reflection it is surely the most inevitable outcome. It is only surprising if one sees planning theory as an autonomous, self-seeking body of knowledge (how could we/it ever get ourselves/itself into such a mess?); if one takes the counter view that it is social practice that creates ideas and ideology, including planning theory, then the contradictory state of planning theory can be seen as a reflection of the contradictory state of social practice, in this case the practice of planning.

In this paper I hope, dare I say plan, to look at the state of planning theory in relation to recent cuts in state expenditure in Britain. Hence I am concerned with 'decrementalism' rather than the well-charted waters of 'incrementalism'. 'Decrementalism' is a social phenomenon with profound implications not only at the level of planning practice but also at the level of planning theory. The major conceptual tool that I shall use to analyse these various changes is that of ideology, as cast within the framework of dialectical materialism. By dialectical materialism I do not mean a deterministic Marxism, nor political economy, nor economism. Rather I mean a view of ideology that is firmly based in material social practice, and yet is inherently structured by contradictions, even crises (for example Sumner, 1979; McDonnell, 1978; Chambliss, 1979).

As a final word of introduction, it is necessary to say something of the definition of 'planning' used in this paper. Planning is used here in a broad sense to refer to collective, purportedly rational, future-orientated activity, performed within state organisations and recognised as such by those concerned as planning. In other words, there is some degree of self-consciousness about the activity. This is generally carried out largely, though not necessarily exclusively, by those called 'planners', within an institut-

ionalised set of procedures, usually known as a 'planning process' or 'planning system'. Planning is thus seen as one major form of state activity. In the analysis that follows it is taken as read that the state is not neutral, but is both a major arena and a major instance of both class and gender relations. That the state is both capitalistic and patriarchal is a starting point, not a conclusion. However, the main concern of this paper is not with theories of the state itself as with the operation of one particular form of state activity. It should therefore be plainly stated that planning cannot be equated with town and country planning, urban planning or land use planning. Likewise, attempts to restrict planning theory to a concern solely with physical planning are likely to be misguided. State planning is not only applied to town and countryside, but also to social services, health services, the military and so on. If planning theory is to be anything but a gross misnomer, it should recognise and embrace this daunting fact of life. It also happens that in the present climate the argument in favour of more generic planning theory is reinforced even in the practice of physical planning. Financial stringencies may both cut back specific planning initiatives as well as forcing a greater interrelationship between physical planning, social services planning, health planning and so on.

The paper is constructed in five sections:

Planning in Theory: Debates and Doubts
Planning in Practice: Physical and Social
Conservatism, Cuts and Crisis
Decrementalism: the Practice of Cuts
Decrementalism: the Theory of Planning

The first three will be relatively short sections, as they cover issues dealt with by others at this conference; the last two more extended.

2. PLANNING IN THEORY: DEBATES AND DOUBTS

In this section I had planned to review some of the major debates within planning theory of the last twenty years. However, it will be apparent this plan was misconceived, for we have already received an excellent summary of these debates (Healey, McDougall and Thomas, 1982). So rather than attempt a pale imitation of others' efforts, I will limit myself to a number of lateral comments. First let me begin by doing what is often neglected, state the obvious:

(i) Planning theory now consists of a multitude of strands: it is diverse;

(ii) Planning theory has developed largely in reaction to procedural theory.

And yet already there is a problem, namely, what are we to include within the term 'procedural theory'? In particular, how are we to relate procedural theory to the related ideas of rational-comprehensive planning. Procedural theorists, such as Faludi, are clearly fully aware of the limitations of the rational-comprehensive model (as well as the advantages of the incremental) (Faludi, 1973). On the other hand, if one interprets proceduralism as systems planning it is perhaps more reasonable to include the incrementalists within proceduralism. Incrementalism can be seen as a rational response to the problems of planning in an open system or series of systems within a turbulent environment (Emery and Trist, 1965). It is thus in some ways more useful to interpret incrementalism as the precursor of systems planning rather

than a critique of it. This association of incrementalism and systems is illustrated in both their methods and their history. Note, for example, that the description and prescription for an 'organismic system' (Burns and Stalker, 1960) are remarkably similar to those of the incrementalists. The historical connection is to be seen in the collaboration of such innovative workers as Charles Lindblom, Herman Kahn and E.S. Quade in the late 50's and 60's in the RAND Corporation and elsewhere (see, for example, Quade, 1964). Perhaps it is more useful still to see incrementalism and systems planning as paralleling each other, both reactions to naive versions of comprehensive planning, acting in relation to each other (Van Gunsturen, 1976).

These divisions between rational planning, systems, proceduralism, incrementalism and so on may appear to be merely semantic debates. They are that, but they are much more. For it is the care with which such categories are drawn that determines the extent to which the crucial issues and differences can be shown up at all. However, such categorisation is a notoriously difficult operation if performed in a social and ideological vacuum. To appreciate the significance of these debates and doubts it is necessary to ask a more fundamental, and in some ways more obvious, question: why do we have planning theory at all? In one sense this is the sort of question to which there can never be a complete answer, more a gradual excavation of possible answers. Here I will only begin one possible answer, to be elaborated later and finally left necessarily unfinished.

War and its aftermath are major stimulants to the development of planning: war for reasons of offence and defence; the aftermath to aid reconstruction. In both cases it is crisis that prompts planning. By the end of the forties, the pre-war crisis of capitalism had been superseded and we had a number of specific conditions within planning practice:

(i) the diversification of the form and methods of planning;

(ii) the experience of a wide variety of failures of planning;

(iii) the acceptance of planning machinery for reconstruction within government; and

(iv) the revision of wartime planning machinery to peacetime 'normal government'.

In Britain the picture was particularly complicated by changing relations with the Empire and its general decline as an imperialist power. It is these various combinations of successful establishment and all too obvious failures that prompted in the 50's and 60's the development of planning theory - of thinking about planning one step removed from planning practice - the attempt to make sense of conflicting messages - to give legitimacy once and for all and also to improve planning practice as a technical operation (Child, 1969). The contradictions that beset the practice of planning are in effect reproduced in the contradictory status of, and reasons for, having planning theory at all. It is in these senses that planning practice creates planning theory, albeit one step further removed than planning itself is from its object to be planned.

A particularly influential branch of planning practice and hence planning theory at this time was undoubtedly military planning. The combination of practice and theory begun in the Second World War and the development of global strategic studies facilitated by the Cold War fed the establishment of planning theory. Thus just as the roots of planning are social and historical, so too must the present state of planning theory be appreciated socially

and historically.

Before moving on to consider the question of practice, a further general point may be made on the state of planning theory. In addition to locating planning theory historically, it may be useful to locate it philosophically. A recent survey of organisation theory by Burrell and Morgan (1979) notes the location of mainstream organisation theory within functionalist sociology, as opposed to those paradigms concerned more with either subjective interpretation or radical social change. Similarly, mainstream planning theory, with a few exceptions, can be placed firmly within functionalist sociology. Even those that attempt to reach out to move radical ideological positions, such as the political economy approach, fail to shake off the rationalist vestiges of mainstream theory. Even where planning is held to be unsuccessful or irrational, the search for the hidden or potential or thwarted rationale persists.

3. PLANNING IN PRACTICE: PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL

The establishment and growth of planning theory in the 60's is, interestingly enough, paralleled historically by the spread of planning into new areas of application. In other words, theoretical doubts were accompanied by practical innovations. The spread of rationalistic methods made its way from American public policy to American social policy and thence to British public policy and British social policy (Hearn and Roberts, 1976).

The first batch of social policy plans[1] - the Health and Welfare plans - were requested from the local authorities by the old Ministry of Health in 1962; were completed in April 1963; revised in 1964 and 1965; and then lapsed. Planning was resurrected with the ten-year Social Services plans in 1972, to interlock with the new centralised planning system in the DHSS and National Health Service. However, this version lasted hardly longer than the first and by 1976 local government reorganisation and public sector cuts had accounted for a second lapsing. Not deterred the Labour government opted the following year for a shorter-term set of three-year plans from the local authorities linked much more directly and simply to DHSS priorities (Booth, 1979). It goes without saying that even those short-term plans are in ruins, a rather pathetic unfunny documentary joke.

Despite the starting and stopping of social policy planning over the last two decades, there have been increasing attempts to formulate a prescriptive procedural theory for planning in social policy contexts that mirrors procedural theory within physical planning. The early work towards proceduralism was in a variety of practice-based locations: the work of the McKinsey Corporation and other management consultants in the National Health Service and local government; the research and consultancy of the Brunel Institute of Organization and Social Studies; and within central government the PPBS feasibility and other studies of the DHSS (Banks, 1979). In other words, the initial rather ad hoc planning initiatives of the 60's were beginning to be used as the basis for more generalised thinking on the 'one best way' to plan social policy, and so acted as a link from practice to theory. Prescriptive procedural theory proper for social policy was to surface from the mid-seventies - a good ten years after its equivalent in physical contexts. Algie's Social Values, Objectives and Action (1975) is the piece de resistance

[1] I prefer the more precise term 'social policy planning' to the vaguer term 'social planning', with its various meanings (Dyckman, 1966).

of social policy procedural planning theory. Nearly 400 pages of what you should do to get social services right stampedes to the conclusion: the prescription of I.M.P.A.C.T.S.: Integrated Managing, Planning and Action Systems. This is 'a method' drawing on the work of Dror, Lasswell, and Etzioni, amongst others, on 'comprehensive planning', 'systems planning' and 'macro-rational decision-making'. In a spectacularly positive and ebulliently optimistic statement, Algie notes according to this method: 'A commitment to agency planning is generated among all relevant groups. The total spectrum of agency objectives is reviewed. The optional feasible objectives are selected ... Various methods are used to handle built-in tensions and conflicts which manifest themselves when varied objectives are ... delineated ... Agreed objectives are translated into specific programmes of action ... Consequences are evaluated ... Revisions are made to agreed objectives accordingly, and the planning process is recycled'.

If 'the method' was not set down so explicitly and so recently, it would be laughable. When one looks a little closer to see that 'all relevant groups' includes 'fund-supplying sources, ... consumer groups, community representatives and affiliated interest groups', it is no longer laughable, but embarassing. One is obliged to ponder such questions as - who is committed to generate others' commitment to agency planning, and how indeed are these methods to resolve those built-in tensions and conflicts that may be irresolvable?

The reason for this rather extended critique of Algie's work is not pure vindictiveness, but rather to provide some clues to the development of planning theory in both a general sense and in a specific area. A number of significant characteristic developments can be noted in the continuing interrelation of practice and theory. These include:

1. Innovation in planning practice.
2. Recognition of inadequacies in planning practice.
3. Repetition of planning practice.
4. Repeated inadequacies.
5. More concerted investment in generalised practice.
6. Further inadequacies.
7. Production of procedural planning theory from generalised practice.

This sort of progression seems to have occurred in the field of social policy planning in the period from the late 50's to the late 70's, some ten years or so in the wake of similar developments in physical planning. Not surprisingly, the linkages between 'practice', 'recognition of inadequacies' and the attempt to formulate 'theory' often becomes intense, with one feeding into and off the others.

As a caveat, albeit a rather fundamental one, to this section, it should be noted that the application of planning in social policy necessarily highlights certain general problems of planning. When building bridges or planning wars it is possible in some senses at least to consider planning in functional, instrumental terms; within social policy this is not so and at the very least a process model is demanded. In other words, it is not only the products of planning but the way it itself operates that is important. Problems of planning that may prove 'inconvenient' within physical planning stick out like great big sore thumbs with social policy planning. In particular internal organisational planning takes a relatively more important role than the programming of external interventions, as in the construction of public works. Thus the study of the application of planning here is of particular interest in relation to planning theory. Whatever tensions, conflicts, contradictions

or just plain doubts that may exist about generic planning practice are likely to be aggravated within social policy practice, with resounding implications for planning theory, so directly built as it is upon planning practice.

4. CONSERVATISM, CUTS AND CRISIS

So far I have attempted to describe some of the contradictions surrounding planning practice, and hence planning theory, since the Second World War; and I have also noted some of the attempted innovations and some of the failures within social policy planning. In many ways the general contradictions of post-war planning seem to be exacerbated within social policy planning. I now wish to bring the social and economic backcloth to planning into sharper focus, by considering a number of very significant developments over the last decade, namely, conservatism, cuts and crisis. Although we are in the thick of these three at the moment, it is important to see them as a characteristic feature of the planning context over the last decade. Indeed many of the difficulties and dilemmas facing the present government have been faced before, and certainly so in the last ten years.

I shall consider these developments in three sections:

(i) Heathism: Tory conservatism of 1970-74
(ii) Healeyism: Labour conservatism of 1974-79
(iii) Thatcherism: Tory conservatism of 1979 to present.

(i) Heathism. 1970 saw a new Conservative government, the dismantling of various interventionist and planning structures, such as the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, and a general move towards the free market economy. By 1972 this policy was in almost complete reverse with more intervention in industry, incomes policy and so on: the brief establishment of a corporatist conservatism. The short 1972-73 boom was to be halted by the 1973 Oil Crisis and cuts amounting to £1,200 million in the deflationary budget of December.

(ii) Healeyism. Intervention was reasserted with the Labour Government of February 1974, with the National Enterprise Board, the 'Social Contract' and food subsidies. This was to be soon superseded by a reassertion of a social democratic conservatism, this time with the connivance of the unions: the TUC agreement on £6 wage limit in August 1975, and a further round of 'temporary' public sector cuts: £1,100 million in April 1975; the introduction of cash limits in April 1976; cuts of £1,000 million in July 1976, for 1977-78,and in December 1976 of £2,500 million for 1977-79. The shift from the Keynsian legacy to an incipient monetarism had begun.

Overall the cash limit policy seems to have brought a definite tightening up in government spending, even though it failed to produce the expected correspondence between planned and actual expenditures. Glennester (1979) summarises this phase as follows:

> "In 1976-77, the first year of cash limits, total government spending fell three and a half per cent in real terms between the second half of 1976 and the second half of 1977, whereas spending was planned to remain stable in real terms".

This amounted to a net saving of £1,000 million in the year up to April 1977. Importantly, in both 1976-77 and 1977-78 there was substantial underspending below cash limits. In 1976-77, £2.5 billion or just over four per cent of

total planned expenditure was thus left unspent. Such underspendings do not necessarily represent government policy, but are more likely the result of the system of administration and budgeting, (Wright, 1979). The final public expenditure plans of the last Labour Government were predictably much more hopeful (on paper at least). But if the last few years have taught us anything it is to be wary of government financial estimates, especially those tinged with any element of optimism.

(iii) Thatcherism. With the new Conservative Government the ground has shifted further to the Right, with the emergent dominance of the New Right, and the hardening of the monetarist ideology.

We are now plunged into the next round of Conservative cuts, with all that goes with it in terms of unemployment and material decline. The cuts are portrayed as a reaction to crisis, whilst manufacturing the crisis further. In absolute terms they are considerable. There have been three main bouts: initially in November 1979, amounting to over £1,000 million; with the April 1980 budget to a total of £4,000 million (though 1,500 million of this is accounted for by shortfalls on previous estimates); in November 1980 a further £3,000 million through expenditure cuts, together with increased taxes; with relatively moderate cuts in March 1981.

However, in addition to their straightforward material impact there is now a strengthened ideological dimension, asserting more than ever the traditional values of Tory conservatism. What are we to make of this story of conservatism, cuts and crisis? First, not all cuts are the same or of the same order. Some of the early cuts merely contributed to a slowing down of growth, with differential effects on different sectors. For example, in 1976-77 a gross increase of 1.5 per cent on the 1975-6 was forecast for health and personal social services expenditure, though this clearly concealed absolute cuts in specific areas. More recently, no-growth has been replaced by proposed and actual cuts, above all in public sector housing.

Secondly, there are differences within sectors between different types of expenditure, and particularly between capital and current expenditure. In 1974-75, for example, whilst a 25 per cent fall was recorded on capital spending in personal social services, the current figure rose by 13.8 per cent.

Thirdly, there are the incessant and insistent uncertainties for planners and politicians alike that come from public sector cuts coupled with an inflationary economy. This is partly a financial issue, but it is also one with deep social and psychological implications, particularly for decision-making within groups.

Fourthly, there is the question of the restructuring of the state. This can be considered at a very broad level in terms of the respective role of the agencies of warfare and the agencies of welfare, or restructuring within say the educational sector, even down to restructuring within individual institutions (CSE, 1979). Material restructuring occurs not only in services provided but in ideology, in the very ideas of those performing planning, or managing those services.

5. DECREMENTALISM: THE PRACTICE OF CUTS

These various upheavals clearly have immense implications for the practice of planning. For certain the idea of the smooth succession of successful and co-ordinated plans is gone. Affluence may have fostered planning, but crisis

has brought the plans themselves home to roost. Planning can no longer be seen as a way of making better use of resources, or a way of seeing more clearly where we are going, of pursuing a given policy direction. Instead planning is dealing in the practice of cuts - either directly, by producing and planning for cuts, or indirectly, by producing plans that fail to take full account of cuts, but which may affect cuts made. This process I call decrementalism - the process of directly or indirectly planning for small reductions or decrements as opposed to incrementalism which effects small increments.

Just as incrementalism has several facets: as a descriptive account, a method, even a technique, and an underlying theory, even an ideology, so too has decrementalism. The ideological strength of decrementalism is such that it is easy to neglect the possibility that during announced crises there may in fact be an even stronger case for certain increases rather than decreases. Decrementalism is taken-for-granted, without being articulated, conceptualised or understood as anything more than a series of inevitable and irresistible cuts.

The ideology of decrementalism arises out of the contradictions which beset the state at the present time (Holloway and Picciotto, 1978). The state remains at root underlain by a bourgeois ideology yet overlain by a sense of neutral, incremental optimism. While cuts may be seen as stemming from some sort of crisis, the recent tradition of those involved in cutting is heavily rationalistic and technocratic so their justifications are so influenced. Justifications for cuts can thus be seen as the product of contradictions within and around the politics of the state. More specifically decrementalism results from the interplay of technocratic responses to the bourgeois pressure to limit and restructure the state. Where technocratic ideology is dominant, 'rational talk' prevails; where it is bourgeois ideology 'crisis talk' operates.

Decrementalism is thus characteristically a hybrid animal: it exists between the ideal of rational planning and the reality of crisis. It hovers uncertainly between 'crisis talk' and 'rational talk'. In 'crisis talk' justifications of actions, often cuts, are made in relation to events or sets of circumstances widely viewed as a crisis (Wildavsky, 1964). 'Crisis talk' is characterised by an unstable relation of ends and means, or even a lack of stipulated ends or means. Thus a decision to cut a particular building programme of residential homes may be taken simply because 'we are in a crisis' and so 'have no option'.

On the other hand, 'rational talk' involves justifications of cuts or whatever, made with respect to events or sets of circumstances widely viewed as a plan. For example, the same decision to cut may be justified on the grounds that it is consistent with a plan to move from 'institutional care' to 'community care'. 'Rational talk' is characterised by a stable or even static relationship of ends and means, purpose and method. Within 'rational talk' there is some resistance to cuts where they may impinge on the interests of state managers. However, at the end of the day measures will still be taken to effect cuts, rather than let them be left to the whims of 'crisis talk'.

The ways in which 'crisis talk' and 'rational talk' can become interwoven with each other are many and complex. Here I merely wish to describe five of the major forms of decrementalism that seemed to have become established in recent years. (Fig. 1).

In the first two forms 'crisis talk' is dominant, with the assumptions of an existing crisis or impending crisis; and 'rational talk' is correspondingly played down. In the last two 'rational talk' is at least superficially

	Assumptions about Crisis	Assumption about Rationality	General Form of Planning	Example
"Crisis Talk'	Existing crisis	Abandoned	Planning Abandoned	Planning by Crisis
	Impending crisis	Expedient and Reduced	Expedient Planning	Rationalised Planning
	Probable crisis	Selective and crisis-focused	Crisis Planning	Contingency Planning
"Rational Talk'	Potential crisis	Strategic and Refined	Strategic Planning	Priority Planning
	No crisis	Maintained	Persistent Planning	Planning Charades

Fig. 1 Typology of forms of Decrementalism

dominant, with the assumption of either a potential crisis or lack of crisis, so that 'crisis talk' plays a lesser role. With the intermediate form, 'rational talk' and 'crisis talk' are more fully integrated to produce Crisis Planning. In the first form, Planning Abandoned bourgeois ideology carries all before it; in Expedient Planning some resistance or modification is attempted towards the interests of planners themselves. Strategic Planning rests on a technocratic approach to the effecting of cuts; and with Persistent Planning an attempt is made to proceed with planning ignoring the pressure of bourgeois ideology, such that planning can degenerate to a charade. (Hearn, 1980).

These are forms of planning in practice; they are also the practical forms by which cuts are made: they are the practice of cuts by the practice of planning - hence decrementalism.

Planning Abandoned

The abandonment of planning is of course strictly speaking not a form of planning. However, it is included partly for conceptual reasons, in the construction of the typology, but more importantly for social ones, as it represents one possibility alongside much planning practice. In this situation a crisis is recognised and this in itself acts as a justification for both the curtailment of planning and the production of cuts. Rational planning is seen as redundant; it is not even acknowledged as a serious possibility. It is the acknowledgment of crisis that legitimates whatever cuts follow. With the abandonment of planning, the emphasis is strictly on the outcomes to be achieved - less staff, delays in the building programme or whatever.

Planning Abandoned opens up the possibility of different forms of decision-making to those that have previously dominated (Hearn and Hitch, 1977). Decisions have to be made; they have to be made fast; they may be unpleasant; but someone has to make them! The sense of crisis can thus provide an easy excuse for decisions to be taken by a few, an elite of formal office

holders, disregarding if they wish previously agreed plans. According to one's perspective, one might see this process as operating '... pretty much as it was supposed to operate' (Lowi, 1969) or a quick return to baronial anarchy (Jay, 1970). The abandonment of planning can certainly lead to quick fire decisions - either acclaimed as 'taking the bull by the horns' or denigrated as 'panic measures'. The rationality and irrationality of collective planning is replaced by the rationality and irrationality of the individual or small group (Torrance, 1954).

A classic example of this form is described by Richard Crossman (1975) in his account of events surrounding the 'economic crisis' of October, 1964; he remarks:

> '... the preparations for dealing with economic crisis ... had been entirely by Harold Wilson with the help of James Callaghan, George Brown and - I imagine - Douglas Jay at the Board of Trade. The crisis programme was just imposed on the rest of us (the Cabinet) ... Cabinet as a whole had no advance notice so we simply had to accept the fait accompli or resign. To judge from this first meeting the Prime Minister can consult whoever he likes in a crisis and once he has consulted, Cabinet must really go along'.

This goes to show that Thatcher's dismissive treatment of the Wets is nothing new. More importantly, for every cabinet meeting run in this way, there will be dozens of similar meetings in local authorities and elsewhere doing the business of cutting.

Much of what happens in these situations resembles what has come to be called 'management by crisis' (Argyris, 1952) or perhaps better 'planning by crisis'. In this mode, crisis itself becomes a central aspect of management and planning: the attempt is made to live with crisis by planning by it: planning thus proceeds through crisis.

One of the arts of management by crisis, at least from the point of view of the managers, is not to sound the alarm bells too often or too soon. This is not only to maintain some sort of credibility that the crisis is not 'getting out of hand', but also to avoid the 'wrong' items becoming candidates for cutting. Once the crisis has been recognised, management by crisis may appear a 'sensible' way of justifying cuts. Management have effectively internalised bourgeois ideology in a way that may even not be in their own long term interest. Ironically, such firm action may often be justified as necessary to stave off threats to 'Democracy' itself.

Expedient Planning

In this type, crisis in an important part of the planning, but does not dominate completely as with the previous type. Crisis does not provide a direct justification for cuts, rather it does so indirectly, by justifying other necessary measures which in turn justify cuts. Whereas the abandonment of planning is in some way the clarion call of the present government, Expedient Planning is its routine mode of operation.

The emphasis here is on expediency: a notion that can so easily become self-justifying. Crisis is assumed to be impending rather than present, so that it is more important to get something decided urgently rather than wait and perhaps risk losing even that. A specific, but not unusual, example is when a particular department or section is more than one person short in its establishment. A cut in the establishment may follow with the proviso some of the shortfall in personnel is made up. A cut is justified as an expedient measure. Planning is continued albeit through a reduced rationality. Planning is rationalised in both senses of the word: in the obvious sense of being reduced, but also more subtly in terms of it being defended by a process of rationalisation. Rationalised planning may itself contribute to a more general social service rationalisation.

Thus instead of seeing planning as a means of pursuing the 'best' course of action for public authorities, it is a means of gearing one's efforts towards those activities where financial and other support is likely. This necessitates a thorough knowledge of and willingness to exploit so-called loopholes in the planning system. This may include attempts to transfer funds either officially or unofficially from a well funded to a less fortunate sector (Wildavsky, 1964). Cuts are thus placed within a complex web of, often post hoc, rationalisations. Reference to planning may be a major element in such rationalisations.

This juggling of funds, which is difficult at the best of times, is not easier during times of cuts. It is also complicated by pressures for participatory decision making and more still by the structure of accounting systems themselves. Most important at present is the new system of local government finance, whereby central government can proceduralise expediency.

At root Expedient Planning remains profoundly haphazard. Planning continues, but the outcome is more the happy or unhappy coincidence of events, of sources of funds, of completion dates, and so on. It is for these reasons that Expedient Planning may produce almost bizarre outcomes: for example, of new investment in sporting or social facilities proceeding in an area blighted by the drying up of funds for housing improvement and renewal. Planning here is expediency institutionalised.

Crisis Planning

Whereas both Planning Abandoned and Expedient Planning are essentially reactive, Crisis Planning shows the first signs of a shift to a more proactive and rationalistic stance. Crisis Planning mirrors crisis management (Jackson, 1976; Williams, 1976), describing the management of crisis, as within international relations and related fields. It is therefore to be distinguished from 'management by crisis' as already discussed. An important distinction is between crisis arising from a failure in decision-making and crisis being anticipated (Burton, 1967).

Perhaps the clearest example of Crisis Planning, though admittedly a somewhat unusual one, is that of contingency planning. Although in one sense it represents an attempt to plan rationally the main focus remains around events of crisis status. Specifically, contingency planning involves drawing up plans to cater for 'unexpected' turns of events. It is an attempt to convert crisis to normality, to make it routine, to incorporate it, to move it towards 'rational talk'. The development of contingency planning may mean that cuts can proceed relatively unimpeded and thus justified in many sectors, whilst maintenance, even innovation, is needed in the areas of most acute problems or threat. Universal services may suffer, while emergency units, special funds and crisis routines are bolstered. A popular current example is where local authorities put aside a certain amount of money for services for the unemployed, whilst cutting other related services. In such cases crisis has effectively been institutionalised in the structure of the organisation. Furthermore, with an efficient 'crisis organisation' there may be space for

future cutting of services previously seen as indispensable.

The logical conclusion of Crisis Planning and contingency planning is disaster planning (for example, Healey, 1969), where crisis becomes the meat and drink of the agency.

Strategic Planning

With our fourth type, Strategic Planning, we are back in the safer waters of proceduralism, or so at least it seems. 'Crisis talk' has now given way to 'rational talk'. Crisis is possible, perhaps even likely, but there is either sufficient time, resources or 'good sense' to act rationally in the meantime to avoid it completely or the worst of its possible impacts. Crisis may be a problem but it is not a special problem beyond the grasp of technical innovation within planning. The potential crisis merely demands a certain amount of informed rethinking of and/or qualitative adjustment to planning method and the subjection of the planning institution to rational scrutiny.

A example is where particular plans and planning documents are reinterpreted 'flexibly', so that cuts do not make them obsolete, or are used to provide guidelines or principles on what to cut. The general thrust of the argument is that organisations, and planning itself, operate within a turbulent environment, and that the necessary strategy for coping with this is that of strategic choice or strategic planning. Faced with the prospect of dynamic change, one can plan for that which is least uncertain (i.e. planning for the obvious): adopt plans that can withstand sudden changes (i.e. are robust); and generally plan one's effort strategically.

This form of decrementalism is witnessed most obviously in the current considerable emphasis on the analysis of priorities. Politicians, academics, and practitioners have all championed the specification of priorities, as if this were a non-ideological activity. In fact, strategic choice methods with their emphasis on flexibility, uncertainty and networking are firmly grounded within pluralist politics, and as such are open to structural critiques.

Priority planning can fundamentally be a means of maintaining legitimacy when threatened. It may involve dividing up the problem and redefining what is to be planned and what is to be cut. Less kindly one might say that this can involve a system of dual standards: some parts of the business are planable and to be protected; other parts are best left for the crisis to take its toll. One obvious way of doing this is by distinguishing between statutory and discretionary services. This is of course not such a straightforward exercise as might be imagined, as the required level of services is frequently left undefined in the relevant statutes. It may also lead to an excessively legalistic and static view of planning: strategy in fact following law.

Strategic Planning appears more rational than it really is. It fails to resolve the inevitable uncertainties about what are the exact implications of different levels and thresholds of provision: a point that is particularly relevant to the understanding of the ideology of decrementalism. Despite its apparent rationality and apparent familiarity from more affluent times, Strategic Planning can be an easy way of effecting cuts, not so much by gradual reductions as cutting by chunks. Lopping off through relatively large, strategically-reviewed cuts may strangely enough be more generally acceptable than a long series of minor incisions. In that lies one of the contradictions of Strategic Planning within decrementalism.

Persistent Planning

On top of these various forms of compromise, there remains within British government and social policy a powerful tendency to persist with present plans regardless. In this form crisis is not seriously acknowledged; rather the attempt is to abandon it. The roots of Persistent Planning are various: the psychological processes of self-deception; the political power of public officials; the rationalistic culture we accept as 'normal'. Above all, Persistent Planning rests on the central importance of professionals, administrators, planners, bureaucrats and other social policy personnel in the operation of decrementalism. Persistent Planning gives pride of place to value judgements from the inside rather than value judgements of those being planned for or about. It may mean that the bureaucrats and the planners themselves are the least likely parts of the apparatus to be cut (Steiner, 1966; Niskanen, 1971). The implication of this is a perpetuation of those constant and consistent policies characteristic of planning to the detriment of the planners' least favoured sectors and services.

A crie de coeur for Persistent Planning has come from Bill Utting (1975), a Director of Social Services:

> 'Plan rigorously and stick to it. It may be tempting to look for economies in sections of social services departments whose basic function is to assist the department, rather than the client directly. In fact, the function of these sections is like the mortar without which the brickwork falls down, and the plan to which the house is built. Trimming administrative support (unlikely to be flabby in these days of management-serviced organisations) may impair the ultimate efficiency of the service. Staff training is a vital investment. Research should have an enhanced role, particularly of costly services, the preparation of alternative packages of care, and the standardisation of buildings and equipment. Rigorous planning is an even greater necessity in the bad times than it was in the good; expediency is a policy for waste?'

The problem is that despite such rhetoric, cuts still occur; indeed in some senses because of such rhetoric they occur. Cuts may be justified by reference back to some previously agreed 'rigorous' plan. This of course does not necessarily mean the most appropriate or most rational response to economic stringency is forthcoming.

A more specific form of argument (or non-argument) for cuts that is along these lines is to simply plough ahead with 'doing' planning as in more settled times, but to ignore its implications and prescriptions, to say one thing and do another. The possibility of planning rationally and maintaining services is upheld, but for some 'unaccountable reason' this presupposition is often not borne out by experience. What we have here is a kind of planning charade in which plans are publicly produced, yet meanwhile cuts just take place supposedly within that rational framework. A classic case of this followed the production of the ten-year local authority social services plans for the DHSS in 1973. Leigh (1974) wrote:

> 'Inside and outside the DHSS there is an awareness that this is a charade, since the analysis won't be worth the paper it's written on. It relates to a period before the cutbacks imposed by the Conservative Government and not

> yet reversed; and before local government reorganisation ... . Since then certain authorities which contributed plans have ceased to exist'.

More recently we have reports of something rather similar within the NHS:

> 'Locally the NHS is still acting as if this was all an unfortunate intermission. Planning teams go on pouring out plans for large capital schemes and increases in staff. It is still assumed that increases in services for the elderly, the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped can be financed out of a growth element that has all but disappeared ... . On the "business as usual" approach, the NHS would come to provide an increasingly inappropriate service in ageing buildings. Planning would serve a release through fantasy'.
>
> (Bosanquet, 1980)

Planning charades may make good politics for politicians, just as charades themselves may be good fun for party-goers, but they have the unusual effect of displaying for all to see structural contradictions in the very word of office holders in those powerful structures. In this climate, despite the optimistic tone of policy, literally anything goes.

These various practices of cuts and of planning raise a range of issues and questions. I shall just mention two briefly: first, each form has its own contradictions, each is dynamic and potentially unstable; second, the two polar types, Planning Abandoned and Persistent Planning have, strangely enough, certain similarities: they both raise the spectre of almost arbitrary decision-making by the few, be they planners or otherwise. In this lies their ideological power.

6. DECREMENTALISM: THE THEORY OF PLANNING

Having reviewed some of the major forms of decrementalism in practice, we can now continue to examine their relevance for planning theory.

The first general point to be made is the all too obvious one, that the vast bulk of planning theory is just ill equipped to deal with planning under present conditions. For while 'crisis' and 'cuts' have for quite a number of years figured strongly in public affairs, politics, the media, not to mention everyday life, it has taken a little longer for such matters to be assimilated by the academic community. Although the idea of crisis is important within certain, especially neo-Marxist, academic traditions, there is remarkably little written on its institutional and organisational implications. Indeed the major part of the literature available in the fields of resource allocation, budgeting, organisation theory and planning theory is premised upon assumptions of gradual growth or 'incrementalism'.

In this concluding section, I wish to examine three general areas of implication following from the discussion so far, that may contribute to the reconstruction on the basis of social practice. These three areas are

(i) ideology in practice;
(ii) the ideology of decrementalism; and
(iii) the ideology of planning theory.

(i) Ideology in practice

The descriptions and analyses of the practice of planning and the practice of cuts in section 5 are not meant as a statement of planning theory. They are intended as generalised statements about the work of planning. The important point is that even when cuts are occurring, these do not occur by default: the production of cuts is as much the work of planners and others as is the production of plans or material improvements at other times.

In this sort of situation a form of pragmatism appears almost irresistible: hence its ideological power and domination. To quote from the Conference Position Paper:

> 'Many planners are now desperately concerned to demonstrate their "relevance" to local councils, to central government and to a highly critical public. The emphasis is on "getting things done" ... This is no doubt a commendable objective, but the creation of products in isolation from questions of purposes and values is ultimately a socially dangerous activity'.
>
> (Healey, McDougall and Thomas, 1982)

There are several points to make here. First, "getting things done" can include effecting cuts directly or indirectly. Secondly, 'the creation of products in isolation from questions of purposes and values' has the obvious implication of the possibility of giving reverence to those 'products' for no reason. In other words, planning can become primarily concerned with surface appearances, phenomenal forms, to the exclusion of real relations underlying phenomena. This is essentially akin to the Marxist notion of fetishism as a source of ideology. Within this scheme '... social relations ... inevitably take the form of things and indeed cannot be seen except through things'. (MacDonnell, 1978). Planning can in several senses be a form of fetishism: partly, in terms of its location within the state, and its assumed neutral stance (CSE, 1979); partly, in terms of its concern primarily with the objects being planned and their outcomes rather than their underlying structural location. It could be argued that fetishism figures strongly within planning 'at the best of times'; within decrementalism, fetishism becomes rife.

Of particular interest is the way rationality is held as a basis of most forms of planning, even during crisis. There is an insistent holding on to Weberian notions of rationality to explain cuts (Glennerster, 1980), even the suggestion that financial restraints may lead to more rational outcomes (Wright, 1980). This tendency necessitates that references to rationality should more properly be in inverted commas: rationality is not unrestrained rationality, but rather legitimated types of action within certain, definite limits. To be more precise, the content of planning decisions may be rational, but their form may not be (Offe, 1975). Rather than dismissing planning practice as possibly irrational, it is more useful to understand the contradictory way in which rationality (within limits) contributes to planning, and hence ideology in practice. In this way, planning is perhaps thought of not as '... a series of feeble attempts to match up to standards of rationality ... but ... as a series of dazzling performances to which these standards are essentially irrelevant'. (Giddens, 1976, on the ethnomethodological interpretation of social life).

(ii) The ideology of decrementalism

Decrementalism has a plurality of forms in practice, but it also maintains and is maintained by an ideology. Those involved in decrementalism have a practical problem of 'making ends meet' and a cognitive problem of understanding 'what is going on'. Planners, politicians, and administrators are both obliged to adopt 'planned methods' to achieve 'planned solutions' and 'outcomes', and be unsure of the nature of that 'planned method' or that 'planned solution'. It is as if those involved are being asked to devise new concise rules for a game, whose rules are not clear in the first place.

At first sight much of this may look very similar to incrementalism, it also being a descriptive account, a precriptive method and an ideology. But in fact there are a number of clear discrepancies. Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963) in their classic analysis of disjointed incrementalism suggest three major characteristics of the approach (as well as eight minor ones). The major characteristics are: first, it is serial (endless); second, it is exploratory, and moving from means to ends; and third, it is remedial. Decrementalism may certainly be serial, but it is doubtful if it is exploratory, and it is anything and everything but remedial. The reason why decrementalism may not be exploratory hinges on the doubtfulness of the role of experience in means and thence ends, as contrasted with its role within incrementalism. Past experience may be of use in this respect within decrementalism, but often it is likely that there is necessarily no relevance for experience. Cutting and dismantling a given plan, service or institution may often have no parallel with previous events. Thus there is literally no way of knowing the impact of a particular cut; unrecognised and indeed unrecognisable interrelationships may lead to far more profound impacts than could be imagined. Incidentally, this point casts further doubt on the notion of rationality within decrementalism.

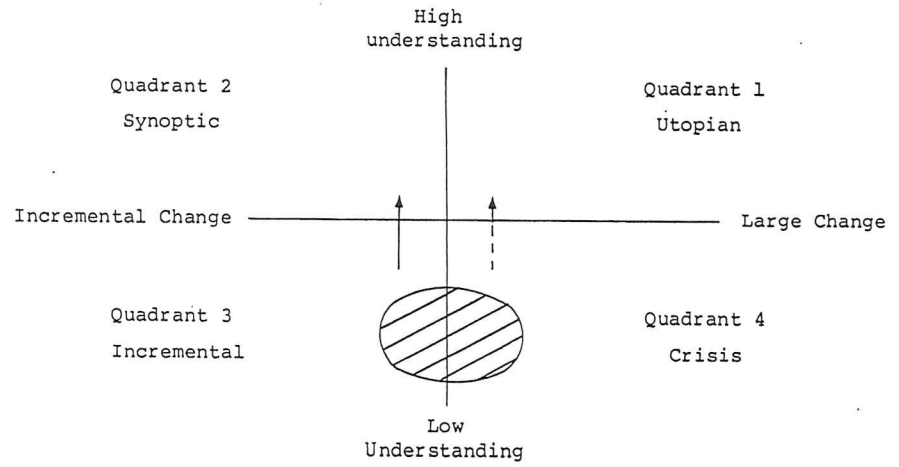
The third point of comparison, the remedial nature of incrementalism, can hardly be at issue. Decrementalism is not remedial: it is damaging. Braybrooke and Lindblom define remedial as 'moving away from known social ills'. Decrementalism if anything involves moving towards known social ills, as well as towards some unknown ones no doubt!

Decrementalism is inherently more unpredictable than incrementalism. Whereas crisis appears an abnormality within incrementalism, within decrementalism it is inherent and commonplace. This can be seen if we examine Braybrooke and Lindblom's four-fold typology of decision-making (Fig. 2).

Decrementalism is centred between quadrants 3 and 4, between Incremental and Crisis Decision-making; however, it is also influenced to a considerable extent by quadrant 2, Synoptic Decision-making and to a lesser extent by quadrant 1, Utopian Decision-making. If decrementalism is inherently beset by crisis, what of planning in general? To answer this we must turn to the ideology of planning theory.

(iii) The ideology of planning theory

Although decrementalism is involved with cuts, it would of course be untrue to conclude that this is new to planning. Indeed almost all planning will be a combination of cuts and increments. The fact that this is ignored in most planning theory is itself an aspect of its own ideology. Similarly, at the broader social level, planning, its origin and development, tends to be intimately bound up with crisis. A.J. Kahn (1966) recognised this point in general terms when he wrote that planning tends to arise because: 'there is complaint,



Developed from Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963)

Focus of decrementalism

Fig. 2 Types of decision-making

tension, disagreement,dissatisfaction, conflict, need for choice, some combination of these - or a dream.' Thus if we reconceptualise the development of planning as intimately bound up with crisis, as indeed discussed in the earlier parts of this paper, what does this say to us about planning theory? The main implication is that planning theory cannot be immune from the social and economic conditions that affect and produce planning practice. If planning practice arises out of the contradiction of rational prediction and crisis, then so too will planning theory. The contradictions that beset planning practice will also beset planning theory. Indeed the notion of contradiction can now be seen as a central issue within the elucidation of planning theory and indeed its ideology.

Perhaps the most important area of contradiction at the moment lies in the realm of conflicting political ideologies. Neo-Keynsian social democratic thinking is threatened on both sides of the political spectrum. Within Tory conservatism there is the ongoing contradiction between bourgeois anti-planning and technocratic interventionism (Harris, 1972). The current New Right stand against centralisation and planning represents an acceleration and an intensification of a long established Conservative tradition. This still leaves the irony that to reduce the size of the state and produce a less planned society, a stronger than ever hold must be taken by government to 'control itself'. The continuing battle of central government and local government is but one element in the orderly planned move to a planned non-planning. Such contradictions bear on planning practice; and thus planning theory.

The climate of cuts and the dominance of conservatism are but two elements in

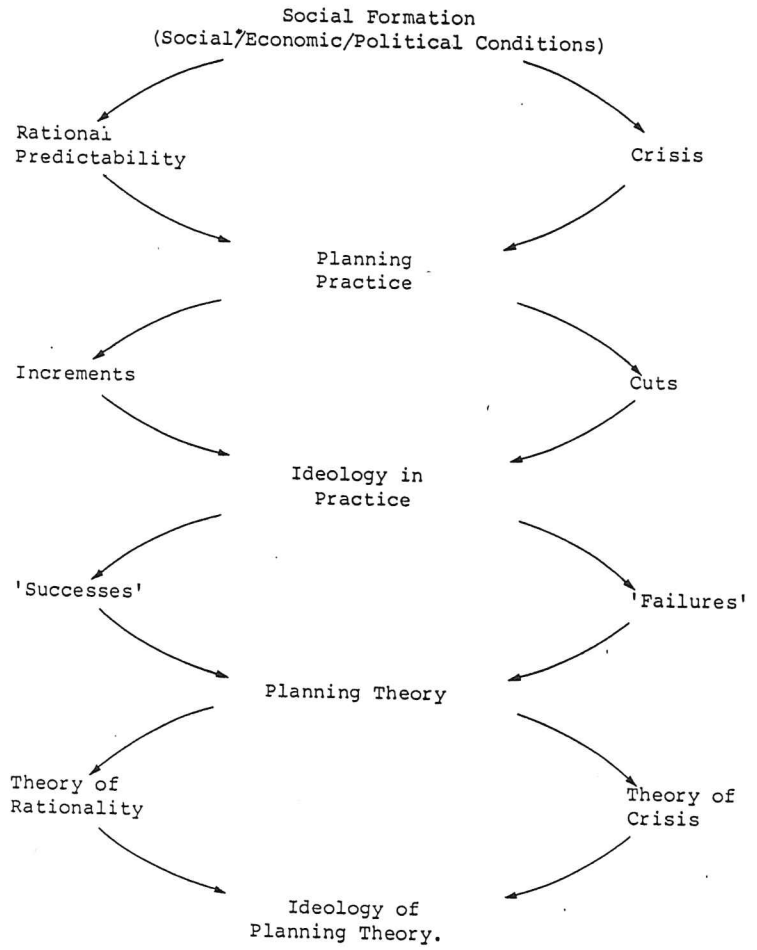


Fig. 3 Model of ideology of planning theory

the broader crisis. The crisis exists at both the general level of economy and society, and more specifically in relation to planning. More subtly still, one might suggest that there are a further series of contradictions between planning theory and planning practice, i.e. practice both determines theory, and yet theory is in contradiction with practice. These relationships give us the outline of a model for the analysis of the ideology of planning theory (Fig. 3).

contradictions, rather than the 'crisis' element. This is not to suggest that the rationality of planning, at its various levels, should be relegated in importance. Rather it is to suggest, firstly that the social relations underlying the notion of 'rationality' as applied to planning should be investigated more closely. This is not just a question of class relations, but also gender relations. Secondly, it suggests more attention to the 'crisis' aspects of planning, at their various levels. Thirdly, and most significantly it suggests attention to the contradictions between the two. Planning is both the smooth technocratic hand of rational resolution, and the arm of the distortion of crisis; it is also the contradiction between hand and arm.

Finally, this survey raises the yet more dangerous possibility that planning theory itself needs a critical review and perhaps rejection. Perhaps rather than being called 'The Practice of Cuts and the Theory of Planning', this paper would be better retitled 'The Practice of Cuts and the Cutting of Theory'. Cuts may yet cut theory, or at least its feet from under it.

In 1976, M. Tidball, an Assistant Director of Social Services, wrote:

> 'No doubt in the future social services planning will become more accurate and meaningful ...'

Would anyone dare say so now?

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