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In the 1980s, food policy became the subject of some political sensitivity for the first time since the winding down of the wartime system of food controls in the early 1950s. It is argued here that over the last ten to fifteen years a new generation of activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) helped to create a new context for food policy decision-making, by taking food issues to the public. The full history of this period should, of course, feature many more people than can be mentioned here; the focus in this chapter is on the NGOs and people of the new food movement rather than on the industry, government and academic experts involved in food policy.

The new generation of activists and organisations injected new understandings into the discourse of food policy through its focus, themes, politics, language and methods of working, but it also represented, in areas such as food adulteration, poverty and school meals, the rebirth of older concerns. In the 1980s NGOs became a significant force in food policy, owing partly to the dominance of Thatcherism and disarray in the political opposition, partly to a reaction to great changes in the food system since the Second World War, and partly because of the fissure in state food policy between production, run from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), and health, run by the Department of Health and Social Security, later the Department of Health. The NGOs could analyse and exploit this, taking the rhetoric of the market at face value, and placing more emphasis on the public than on politicians.

This chapter argues that food policy can best be seen as contested space, a battleground of competing interests and ideologies, rather than as a consensus topic. Food always has the capacity to bring out
emotions. It is, after all, a daily need and intake. A Whig interpretation of history is inappropriate, as there are many competing versions of the study of the food system, the purposes of food policy, and the shape of food culture. Food NGOs became a key element in the moulding of mass consciousness, much as environmental NGOs did in the same period. In this respect alone, the new movement constitutes a rich vein for historical exploration of how culture and politics are shaped in the global age. Already, in the writings about modern food culture, there are some writers who recognise the role of NGOs, but others who do not.

THE NEW FOOD MOVEMENT

In the 1980s, food suddenly came out of the consumer and women's pages and hit the headlines. In two extraordinary periods, at either end of the decade, a series of scandals grabbed public and political attention. There were other occasions when consumption made headlines, such as the campaign over pesticide residues waged by Friends of the Earth (FOE), but these two periods appear to have been of a different order.

The first period in 1983–4 was sparked off by sections of the food industry, particularly the sugar industry, filibustering over a report by the National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education (NACNE) on diet and heart disease. NACNE was set up in 1979 by the government with representatives from the Department of Health, MAFF, the Health Education Council and its Scottish equivalent, and the food industry-funded British Nutrition Foundation (BNF). A succinct account of the events behind this cause célèbre has been given by Caroline Walker, the Secretary of NACNE, and Geoffrey Cannon, her collaborator and later husband. This row brought to a head unease within epidemiological and nutrition circles about evidence on the impact of diet on health. Following the pioneering work of Ancel Keys and co-workers in the Seven Countries study, and of Dennis Burkitt and others on fibre, evidence had grown that the modern diet was implicated in the so-called diseases of affluence, a wide range of illness including heart disease, tooth decay, irritable bowel and food-related cancers. Surgeon Captain Cleave called this constellation of illness The Saccharine Disease. A new era of public interest in food had been born.

With the growth of public and professional interest in the
NUTRITION IN BRITAIN

media coverage, and helped engender two television programmes on food poisoning, which set the scene for the Edwina Currie saga. A key argument at the time, developed by the LFC, was that consumers were being blamed for poor standards of hygiene further up the food chain.

The Commons Agriculture Committee held an enquiry into salmonella and the government's handling of the affair. This included some draconian action, such as the slaughtering of flocks and closure of plant, vehemently questioned by free-marketers to this day. A routine updating of food legislation was turned into a major new Act, the Food Safety Act 1990. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) was restructured, with a new food safety division. Two sets of regular meetings between Ministers and consumers groups were set up. British food scandals became international news.

CONTESTED SPACE

How had these two periods of scandal come about? In both cases, the role of NGOs and activists as mediators of opinion, argument and facts stands out. NGOs became commentators and actors simultaneously. It would be wrong to argue, however, that NGOs made events happen, as some beleaguered right-wing politicians tried to. Nor did these two periods of scandal emerge from the blue. Years of work and build-up preceded them. A critique of the post-war food system took time to develop. This critique came from many quarters: agricultural, nutritional, technological, feminist and consumer. If NACNE brought nutrition politics to the fore, the adulteration scandals carried an implicit criticism of excessive concentration upon nutrition. Nutrition, narrowly or technocratically defined, could not explain the nature of diet; it was too mechanistic. What was exposed was a clash of position on food policy, the role of the state, the balance of forces within the food system, and the rhetoric about consumer sovereignty. If consumers were under- or ill-informed, how could they be said to be sovereign? In neither period of scandal would there have been an outcry if the public was not already uneasy.

Broadly, we may distinguish between three competing positions. First, there was an interventionist perspective, developed during the Second World War, which argued for regulation of the food system through a system of committees of experts drawn from
MAFF, industry and academia. If there were to be regulations and policy objectives, let them be agreed. The second position was anti-interventionist, and blossomed under Thatcherism. The less government the better; the state should withdraw from both subsidising and ‘nannying’. This position was developed through the patient work of a group of right-wing think-tanks critical of corporatism, and espousing a then unfashionable ‘leave it to the market’ approach; it also turned distinctly anti-European, pillorying the Common Agricultural Policy in particular. The third was developed by the NGOs from the 1970s. This argued that food policy could not be left to the free market, and that post-war affluence had apparently resolved some food problems only to create new ones. New priorities were needed. Production should be extensified, rather than intensified, to stop the public and environmental health costs of current production; consumers were not receiving proper support to enable them to make informed choices; and the state should prevent food industry excesses.

THE BSSRS AND RADICAL FOOD SCIENCE

A significant source of ideas and people was the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science (BSSRS), founded in 1968, which had a considerable effect in nurturing the radical scientists and perspectives which came to prominence in the 1980s. During the 1970s BSSRS was based at 9 Poland Street, a Rowntree-funded hive of radical NGOs near London’s Oxford Street. Although BSSRS itself has ceased to exist, some of its products still do, such as Hazards Bulletin, which is now published from Sheffield. The BSSRS approach was influenced by arguments about the labour process of science and the view that science could not be judged purely from a ‘use–abuse’ framework. It asked who and what sets the questions that science addresses. Charlie Clutterbuck was also a key person in organising and motivating the emerging food movement’s arguments. He founded the BSSRS Agricapital Group after calling a public meeting on food, as part of a BSSRS series on science and technology in 1975–6. Clutterbuck was a soil scientist whose Ph.D. had been on pesticides, the value of which he increasingly questioned. He moved ultimately into trade union education but retained an interest in food.

The Agricapital Group saw early on that the debate about food needed to be wider than it had been in the 1950s or 1960s.
Technical fixes like pesticides and the Green Revolution were inadequate, indeed socially unjust. The food revolution was being driven by corporations and a willing state, which provided infrastructure and research. This modern food system needed to be studied better, and more critically. Although critical of the role of experts, BSSRS tacitly argued that ‘alternative’ experts were needed to take issues to workers, the poor, or people with health problems.

I remember meeting Clutterbuck, BSSRS’s first full-time worker, at a conference on technology in 1976, hosted by David Elliott of the Open University, another long-time BSSRS activist. We found our mutual interest was food and he asked me to join the fledgling Agricapital Group. Our first work was to produce a special issue of Science for People, BSSRS’s magazine, in 1976. Agricapital groups were developed in the south and north of Britain. The southern group was ultimately more productive, publishing Our Daily Bread, a report on bread quality and production, produced with help from bakery workers. This almost led to BSSRS being sued by one of the three big companies then dominating bread production. The northern group failed to finish a report on potatoes, but was larger, and did better in experimenting with local food campaigning, with a week-long campaign on food in Sheffield in 1978. This was of doubtful impact, but great fun. Both groups met regularly. A social life was emerging in this middle-class, educated circle.

The Agricapital Group was an important grounding for socially aware young scientists and others who were questioning the shape of the modern food economy. The membership included Sandra Hunt and Joyce Treuhertz, who were both nutritionists, Erik Millstone, a physicist and philosopher, Geoff Tansey, editor of Food Policy, Carole Smith, who is now a naturopath, and Lizzie Vann, who now owns an organic-baby food company. Others included Colin Hines, an environmentalist who now works for Greenpeace, people working on development such as Dave Bull, now head of Amnesty UK, and John Clarke, who is now at the World Bank, as well as Clutterbuck, and myself, a social psychologist. Bull and Clarke worked in Oxford, close to Uhuru, a bookshop, café and education centre, and then at Oxfam. They produced a cartoon version of the Agricapital bread report, which taught the importance of producing accessible information, not just worthy tomes or work for lawyers! Some of these people are still in touch and collaborating in the world of food policy, but others, inevitably, moved away.
The Agricapital Group tended to focus on production, but another BSSRS group, the Politics of Health Group (POHG) Food Group, worked more on diet and nutrition. Both were active in the late 1970s and early 1980s, making BSSRS a focus for critics of food policy. In 1979, POHG produced *Food and Profit: It Makes You Sick*, a critique of health policy. POHG Food Group included Tim Lobstein, a psychophysicologist, now of the Food Commission (UK) (FCUK); Aubrey Sheiham, now at University College London; Helena Sheiham, now at the London School of Economics; Michael Joffe, a public health physician; Liz Dowler, a nutritionist, now at the Centre for Human Nutrition in London, and Sandy Hunt. In fora such as POHG or Agricapital, a wide range of disciplines were drawn on to argue 'out a perspective which was neither corporatist, nor ‘top down’ planning-oriented, nor free market, but pro the public health, workers, the ‘people’. Another BSSRS-related group, the Radical Statistics Group, survived BSSRS, and continues to produce statistical and epidemiological critiques. People such as Mel Bartley, George Davey Smith and others played a vital role in food policy debates in the 1980s from this perspective.

A common perspective to much BSSRS work was the argument that the nature of technology both reflects a set of social relations and reinforces them. This perspective could be found in the work of Millstone and Miller on additives, Sheppard on cook-chill technology, and Brunner on bovine somatotropin, which highlighted the imminence of the biotechnology revolution. A campaign on food irradiation was run for the LFC by Tony Webb. Webb had formerly been involved in the Labour Party-oriented Socialist Environment and Resources Association, which, like BSSRS, had been based at 9 Poland Street, and the London Hazards Centre, another GLC-funded and BSSRS-inspired advice centre.

BSSRS developed radical left-of-centre perspectives which were often critical of both traditional left/right positions. There was a genuine desire to understand what was happening in the developing countries, while focusing on the developed world where we lived. This perspective was then unfashionable. The dominant position was that ‘capitalism has resolved the problems of agriculture and food for rich countries like ours, but not for developing countries’. This logic was disputed by both POHG and Agricapital. Many radical and traditional food scientists, industry and policy specialists alike, were bemused. Food adulteration and contamination, they argued, are the stuff of history. Any claims to
the contrary are either unscientifically based or politics masquer­
adng as science. Science has resolved the old bugbears of
contamination, and engendered undreamed-of choice, said the
traditionalists.

A decade on, the new food movement’s perspective appeared to
be more in touch with public sentiment while supporters of the
status quo became increasingly defensive, resorting to ad hominem
attacks. In a much-quoted phrase John Gummer, MP, Minister of
Agriculture in the late 1980s and early 1990s, referred to the need
to counteract ‘food fascism’. His junior Parliamentary Secretary at
MAFF in 1992 referred to ‘food terrorists’, a phrase first thrown at
one of my colleagues at the LFC in 1986. The director of the right-
wing Social Affairs Unit talked of ‘food Leninism’. These kinds of
gibes were constantly thrown at the food movement, but became
less frequent as the implications of the food scandals sank in.

In the 1980s, on foundations laid by BSSRS, a remarkable
coalition of people, groups and interests came together. The
coalition bridged academic and voluntary sectors. The collapse of
the formal left opposition, and the triumph of the New Right,
opened the way for newer analyses. By the 1990s, this coalition had,
in my opinion, become a classic alliance, in the tradition of
alliances like the anti-adulteration movement of the mid-nineteenth
century. Modern food policy had been transformed. The WHO’s
1990 report on preventable diseases, for instance, included con­
cern about new adulterations and contamination from additives
and pesticides, and recognition that the production process had to
be understood, even if diseases such as CHD and cancer were the
primary focus. Equally, NGOs like FOE could now argue that
coronary heart disease was part of an environmental food strategy
which otherwise focused on the land, or issues like packaging. Food
became a rallying point.

THE LONDON FOOD COMMISSION

No review of 1980s campaigning could be complete without
acknowledging the role of the LFC. It picked up many of BSSRS’s
themes, and coupled them with the medical–epidemiological thinking about food policy represented by the CPG, and later by the
National Forum for Coronary Heart Disease Prevention. The LFC
was unusual in a number of respects. It was not just supported by,
but was set up by, a local authority, the Greater London Council
GOING PUBLIC: FOOD CAMPAIGNS

(GLC) and the support came in the form of a five-year, one-off grant of just over £1 million in March 1985. A trust was set up to administer the funds and to ensure that they were spent by 31 March 1990. The LFC was less a service provider than a hybrid of think-tank, strategic campaigner and public education point. It also had a very large board of directors, the council, of fifty people chaired by Mike Joffe, representing four ‘chambers’ of interest: local authority, workers/trade unions, professionals and consumers.

Formally, the LFC ran for six years, 1984–90, and then became the Food Commission (UK). It was the brainchild of Robin Jenkins, a former community development project worker and researcher into development aid. Jenkins and Sandra Hunt began to work for the GLC in 1982/3 under the Economic Development Unit, where they drew up a number of reports on food, nutrition and the case for radical change. Jenkins held talks around London, and suggested that an independent public group should be set up to pursue the issues. The LFC was steered through the GLC decision-making process with help from Tim Lobstein in the summer of 1984. Appointments were made in autumn 1984. Four people started work in November 1984, and by 1986 fifteen were employed. With volunteers and students on placement, the office at times held twenty people.

The LFC’s workers included two nutritionists, two psychologists, a biochemist, a food technologist–economist, an environmental scientist, a biologist, a philosophy graduate turned journalist, a science campaigner, and ultimately five administrative staff supervised by Sue Dibb, now co-director with Lobstein of the FCUK. Dibb brought vital experience from her work with Des Wilson at CLEAR, the campaign to remove lead from petrol, and the Campaign for Freedom of Information. The LFC had a steady stream of visitors and placement students, and had good relations with a few academic departments. Diane McCrea, now head of food at the Consumers’ Association, came on a year’s sabbatical from Middlesex Polytechnic to write a report on water in food.

Internally, the LFC was a relatively ‘flat’ pyramid; the director was generally responsible, but project officers researched subjects, wrote reports, and prepared and presented the public education and information to follow. Its brief, laid down in the trust documents, was to provide information and education to alleviate food-related ill health. It was clear that part of the goal was to confront the role of the BNF in representing the public interest; the BNF’s
role and near-total dependence on food industry funds had been exposed in the NACNE debacle. The LFC was run on a project basis, broadly covering the following areas: nutrition, social aspects, technological impact, general food policy, consultancies, and education and training. Some projects were picked up by the media; other work was not, such as the reports on labelling, and Brunner’s early report on catering education. But a corporate oeuvre and style were emerging, and media contacts and credibility were built. By any standards the LFC was productive – forty or so reports, five books, and numerous courses, speeches, campaigns and meetings, which generated box files of press coverage, helped usher in a Food Safety Act, educated the public, and built a cross-party consensus in the media.

The LFC also set up and serviced a number of co-ordinating committees such as the global Food Irradiation Network and a more informal one on BST. Such international work was necessitated by UK domestic politics. The government’s belief in the market meant devolving responsibility for food policy to the commercial sector: supporting business took priority. NGOs increasingly turned to Europe to win state support. The LFC was no exception, and cultivated good relations with civil servants and politicians in Brussels.

Following the LFC’s packed launch at the Festival Hall in spring 1985, questions were asked about why the GLC was wasting its money on this body. When it handed over to the smaller FCUK in 1990, questions had turned round: the food scandals of 1988–90 meant that the public was asking the government what it was doing. The legacy continues through the Food Magazine, set up to disseminate information in a more accessible way than the weighty reports. Food Magazine has became the mainstay of the FCUK’s finances.

SWIMMING WITH OR AGAINST THE TIDE?

It is hard to measure the effectiveness of NGOs. By conventional ‘business’ measures such as output, the CPG and the LFC were highly productive. Much of their campaigning left a mark on public culture. Irradiation, for example, was legalised by the UK government in the 1990s, but was made almost unusable, such was consumer hostility. The campaigns made the market work by providing information to the public which otherwise would have
been given only half the story. The LFC, for example, was central in shifting thinking on BST, food poverty, children’s food and adulteration. It could claim considerable credit for leading the campaign on food safety, which culminated in the Food Safety Act 1990.

High-profile activities were only a portion of LFC work. For example, Sara Hill and Issy Cole-Hamilton, LFC dietitians, organised a conference on ‘Food for Black and Ethnic Minorities’ which drew over 200 people, and led to a huge report. Another example was the project on food poverty which Cole-Hamilton ran; this is still part of the FCUK’s work and was greatly enhanced by Suzi Leather, the National Consumer Council’s nominee to the MAFF consumer panel in the 1990s.

The food poverty work was one of my deepest commitments. I had come to London in 1984. At Manchester Polytechnic, we had set up a small food policy unit in 1982 and had begun three projects, including a large pilot survey on poverty. This was set up with encouragement and help from Sandra Hunt and Caroline Walker. Walker had worked with the Child Poverty Action Group on benefit levels for her M.Sc. thesis. One of the attractions of the LFC job was the chance to start up a comprehensive programme of work, with pride of place for poverty. The LFC produced a paper against the 1985 Social Security Bill proposals, and conducted some terse correspondence with the junior Minister, John Major. Major assured us that there was no set cost of a diet included in welfare payments ‘as each claimant is free to decide how to budget their income according to their individual requirements’. The correspondence continued with the Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health, who wrote in response to our report, ‘A healthy diet is not necessarily a more expensive one’. The LFC calculation that it was 35 per cent higher upset the implicit health education message that diet was a matter of choice. The retailers desperately tried to show that shopping in their giant superstores meant parity, but the evidence was strong on our side, too. The LFC had added weight to the argument that modern poverty takes new forms.

The work on school meals was another aspect of the anti-poverty work, which became sorely needed in the 1980s as structural unemployment built up. The Education Act 1980 removed obligations on local education authorities (LEAs) to provide school meals to standards set by government. School meal take-up fell from
around two-thirds of the population in 1979 to just over 40 per cent in 1990, yet poverty rose. In 1980 there had been the first of three attempts to counteract this removal of a nutritional safety net. It was regional, rather than national, for example in Edinburgh, Lincolnshire, Lancashire. The second was national, with a private member’s Bill in 1986 introduced by Tony Lloyd MP with LFC and CPG backing, and a set of guidelines produced by CPG. The third, much larger and with a broader range of backers, was the 1992 School Meals Campaign, launched with support from fifty-four national NGOs, including the British Medical Association, the National Association of Head Teachers and the National Federation of Women’s Institutes. By 1992 the government had been embarrassed enough to set up a working party on school meal guidelines as part of the Nutrition Taskforce. This was not the reintroduction of modern nutrition standards that campaigners wanted, but moving in the right direction compared with the 1980 Act, and the result of increasingly well co-ordinated lobbying and evidence.

The LFC’s style was collaboratory. Almost always it set up a working party. In this respect it developed the BSSRS critique of experts and tried to build a radical consensus about the problems and challenge of food policy. In the process, alternative experts were made, but information which otherwise would have been withheld was given to the public.

Although well funded, and by the end of the 1980s quite high-profile, the LFC was not alone in this style of work. Partly owing to financial pressure and partly on account of their effectiveness, coalitions were more common by the 1990s than they had been earlier. Baby Milk Action, for instance, had been constituted in 1979 as part of an international network to promote breast-feeding and to campaign against companies selling breast-milk substitutes. Another campaign, the Hyperactive Children’s Support Group, was also founded in the 1970s. A coalition active in the 1980s was Action and Information on Sugars (AIS), set up by dentists such as Aubrey Sheiham with doctors and health promotion specialists. This was more professionally based but also represented an understanding that campaigning was necessary. AIS ran an effective campaign to ‘Chuck Sweets off the Checkout’, targeting supermarkets profiting from children’s ‘pester power’ when queuing at the till. In the 1980s, many groups for whom food was not a primary focus were drawn into the new movement, and became part of the National Food Alliance.
an umbrella group for NGOs working for mothers, conducted one of the first pieces of research and campaigned on modern food poverty, with Lyn Durward’s report on the cost of a maternity diet.56

Because it was well staffed with committed, articulate professional people, the LFC was well placed to build bridges with NGOs, and across sectors. Different projects brought in different organisations and ‘constituencies’. Close links were set up with organisations working in fields as diverse as animal welfare, poverty, the environment, medicine and trade unions. Steve Pryle and Donna Covey for the General Municipal and Boilermakers’ Union, and Nigel Bryson for the Bakers’, members of the LFC Council, were particularly active and helpful.

CORONARY PREVENTION GROUP

If the NGO world was run like business it would be dominated by competition for funds, attention and prestige. Sometimes there was competition and jealousy, but the new food movement was and is remarkably co-operative. The organisation most obviously close to LFC interests was the CPG. CPG’s first director was Christopher Robbins, an academic in the 1970s, a writer and campaigner in the 1980s, and a herbalist in the 1990s; then Ann Dillon, who later became head of corporate relations at the National Farmers’ Union; then Michael O’Connor, a former civil servant responsible for tobacco at the Department of Health. It was under O’Connor that the closest links between the CPG and the LFC/FCUK developed, but CPG’s profile, staff and output declined within eighteen months of his departure in 1993.

The CPG and LFC worked by a de facto division of labour. CPG was more medically driven and ‘inside track’ in that it tried to influence Department of Health circles, whereas the LFC was more radical and ‘outside track’. Both groups worked closely over school meals, but there were differences of emphasis. The CPG was more ‘realistic’, calling for the introduction of guidelines, whereas the LFC was for the reintroduction of standards. Both strategies had ground to nothing by the early 1990s, but the two traditions came together most effectively when O’Connor offered office space to Parents for Safe Food (PSF) in 1991, and then to the FCUK in 1992, leading to the formation of the School Meals Campaign. The activities of the campaign resulted in the Health of the Nation promise to develop ‘healthy schools’.59
PARENTS FOR SAFE FOOD

When the LFC formally closed and the FCUK was established, I went to work as director of a pesticide-based campaign that the LFC had helped to set up over a year earlier. PSF continued to operate until 1994. Its original members were a group of celebrities from the world of the media and entertainment, and it was founded and energised by Pamela Stephenson, who with her husband, Billy Connolly, and concerned friends such as Olivia and George Harrison, Jenny Seagrove, Patricia Hodge and Gay Exton, turned PSF into a very unusual NGO. The NGO world is famous for low pay, hard work, long hours, worthiness and unconventional career structures. In the 1980s, the environment movement had built bridges with entirely different kinds of people from business, the media and entertainment. FOE, under Jonathon Porritt, for example, had set up The Arts for the Earth (TAFE) which became both a major fund-raiser and a source of street credibility. Pamela Stephenson’s vision was to build a parents’ organisation which would front with stars and act as a campaign vehicle to improve food quality.

The stimulus to PSF’s creation was the US-induced scare about a plant growth regulator, marketed under the brand name Alar. Pamela Stephenson quickly built up contacts in the NGO world, drawing considerably on the *Guardian* consumer correspondent James Erlichman and myself. She pulled together about seventy celebrities, including the surviving Beatles and their wives, Dame Judi Dench and Jeremy Irons, to back the organisation’s launch calling for the withdrawal of Alar pending an enquiry. The idea was based on a US initiative, Mothers and Others for Safe Food, set up at arm’s length by the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), whose report sparked off the Alar cause in early 1989. In the scientific literature, Alar had long been a ‘grey area’ pesticide, with some studies suggesting there were health problems, others disagreeing. Within months of PSF’s launch the maker withdrew the product, still professing its clean bill of health. All the NGO pesticide specialists consulted by the embryonic PSF recommended caution, on the grounds that the evidence was equivocal. Pamela Stephenson and colleagues agreed to argue that the public, not the producer, deserved the benefit of the doubt. At the year’s end a special ‘Alar-lujah’ concert was held at the Albert Hall to celebrate the withdrawal. The approach of appealing direct to the public had
worked and had left government and the Pesticide Advisory Committee floundering.

This experience of working with celebrities was a big change for food NGOs; a number of useful collaborative projects were set up, such as joint residue testing with FOE's countryside campaigner, Andrew Lees, who died in December 1994 on a project in Madagascar. After Alar, one of the most inconclusive but fruitful things PSF did was to host a number of alliance-building meetings at the Stephenson–Connolly house at Windsor Great Park in 1990 and 1991. For two years or so, 1989–91, the food movement had a rare showbiz edge to it, but the victory over Alar paradoxically took the wind out of PSF's sails; the Stephenson–Connolly household, always the driving force, moved to Hollywood. PSF subsequently moved into more strategic areas such as work on the international harmonisation of food standards, running the School Meals Campaign, and conducting a project on cooking skills for the NFA, funded by the Department of Health and backed by the BBC Good Food Magazine.

CORE THEMES IN THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN FOOD ALLIANCES

It could be argued that what is described in this chapter as a food movement is no more than a collection of campaigns on single issues, such as breast-feeding, animal welfare, new food technologies, pesticides, or food advertising targeted at children. This would be wrong, for three reasons. First, from the early days of the 1970s, a cross-over of members and participants bonded these single-issue campaigns through friendship, debate and social intercourse. Second, in the 1980s, considerable energy went into increasing co-ordination by setting up umbrella groups. These include the NFA, run by Jeanette Longfield, the National Forum for CHD Prevention, run by Imogen Sharpe, the Public Health Alliance, run by Maggie Winters, which was formed under the aegis of David Player in the dying days of the HEC, and, in the 1990s, the Sustainable Agriculture Food and Environment (SAFE) Alliance, run by Hugh Raven, a former Labour agriculture researcher. SAFE was supported by the Goldsmith brothers, Teddy, founder of The Ecologist, and Sir James, a former food entrepreneur, who is now deeply critical of the food industry. Other alliances with food interests included the Maternity Alliance and the Green Alliance.

Third, the NGOs and campaigns possessed a shared vision of
what was wrong with the modern food system, and of what it ought to be. This vision had a number of common themes. One was that the nature of food and food production had changed, a theme clearly articulated by the Agricapital Group in the 1970s. The emergence of contemporary environmental and consumer concerns, such as food additives or pesticide residues, reflected profound changes in the nature of food production, on the farm and in the factory.\textsuperscript{65} The second core theme was that, even as the modern food system appeared to have resolved old problems such as scarcity or malnutrition, it had created new problems. Notably these were environmental problems such as pollution, and health problems, ranging from heart disease to food poisoning and allergies.\textsuperscript{66} This latter theme was the \textit{raison d’être} of groups such as the POHG Food Group, and the CPG. The third theme was that decision-making about food left much to be desired, with too much power and influence being accorded to unaccountable corporate and industrial interests, a theme common to both BSSRS and the consumer-oriented NGOs. In the eggs and salmonella affair of 1988–9, the free-market-oriented Health and Welfare Unit of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) argued that there was no point in interfering in the working of the market. In their report for the IEA, Richard North, an environmental health officer who earlier had worked with the LFC on cook–chill, and Teresa Gorman, a right-wing Conservative MP, spoke of ‘health and safety fascism’ at work.\textsuperscript{67} Their enemy was the state. The new food movement, in contrast, appealed to the public to force the state to help protect them. Contesting the relationship between state, industry and the public was central to the new food policy debate.

Historically, food policy has inevitably been focused upon the state as agent, either in and out of war-led food planning, or to meet social policy goals. Less attention, however, has been paid to modern movements which try to articulate public, rather than sectional, pressure on food policy. One classic study by Self and Storing of British farmers after the Second World War highlighted their transition from a disparate group to an effective lobby of legendary proportions.\textsuperscript{68} The 1980s brought some interest in NGOs, but often as subjects, or manipulators, of the media. Following the food scandals of 1988–90, there was a flurry of studies by business and academics.\textsuperscript{69} Business was concerned because of profits, but soon saw opportunities for new markets in areas such as biotechnology and functional foods – deemed technical fixes by
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the NGOs. Consumers and NGOs could be 'managed' through risk assessment techniques and better use of public relations.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that the role of NGOs is best understood as that of a social movement arguing a case in a contested space. The modern food movement focused the attention of the public upon changes it was already aware of in the products which it consumed daily. The movement offered new interpretations of what these changes entailed. In this role, the NGOs could be said to have taken on some aspects that E. P. Thompson attributed to the crowd. Thompson explored how people fought food price rises and sought to articulate their resistance to the transition to market forces from a more feudal and paternal culture.70 This study, like another classic, Captain Swing by Hobsbawm and Rudé,71 described widespread dissent. Such protest has almost become the archetype of social movements concerned with food.72

Romantic though such a model could be, it would not fit the modern food world. More appropriate is that given in Paulus's depiction of the British anti-adulteration movement of the mid-nineteenth century.73 Paulus suggests that the success of the nineteenth-century movement was in part due to the alliance that made it: middle classes, gentleman scientists, enlightened aristocrats, politicians, popular agitators, and so on. Such alliances are entirely familiar to observers of the modern environmental movement,74 and may be appropriate to the food movement, too.

It should be stressed that the eruption of interest in food policy in the 1980s built upon the long-term thinking and work of many pioneers. A full account should include some earlier voices. Derek Cooper, a former journalist with World in Action, and later presenter of the BBC Radio 4 Food Programme, wrote The Bad Food Guide in 1965.75 As editor of the Good Food Guide, founded by the socialist Raymond Postgate after some articles in the magazine Lilliput, Christopher Driver also wielded considerable influence. In the 1960s, too, Elspeth Huxley wrote articles for Punch, systematically analysing the impact of changed food production techniques.76 The Guardian played an important role in articulating the growing awareness and gave strong coverage to the 1980s movement through James Erlichman, an American historian turned consumer correspondent.77 Colin Spencer, an artist turned novelist
and playwright and then food writer and vegetarian cook, was another influential writer. The revulsion expressed by restaurant critics and food writers like Jane Grigson throughout the food scandals of 1988–90 was important in reinforcing the NGOs’ message.

Articulate though these voices were, it was only with the development of the NGOs in the late 1970s that they became organised. Another feature of the new food movement was that it moved the policy debate beyond the purely medical health framework. The problem was not just saturated fats, but saturated markets. The post-war food revolution meant that industry was highly concentrated, internationalising, and keen on increasing market share. An estimated 10,000 new products and processes came on to the European market each year. Consumers were inevitably guinea pigs in this process, and NGOs argued that they knew it.

The lessons of this food revolution and the changes it brought to the relationship between public, state and commerce are still unfolding. The food movement of the 1980s and 1990s argued that, if government will not regulate, a new system of market forces will emerge, with a more volatile, opinionated and sceptical consumer. NGOs helped set a cultural tone for the 1990s, arguing for eternal vigilance by the public and providing a stream of insights, arguments and spokespeople. The arrival of a strong, independent voluntary sector, working to high standards, and watching what those with the financial muscle to mould our diet were doing, introduced a new actor in mass food culture. Ironically, the NGOs thereby became part of the food system’s dynamic. They had become change agents, observers, critics and participants.

NOTES

The chapter draws heavily upon my experience of working with voluntary sector organisations, in particular the LFC, NFA and PSF in the period 1984–94. My thanks to colleagues and friends with whom these issues have been discussed, and in particular to Keith Ball, Jeanette Longfield, Erik Millstone, Aubrey Sheiham, Sue Dibb, Eric Brunner, Martin Caraher and Charlie Clutterbuck for comments on drafts. I also thank Mike Rayner for his comments, as discussant, at the conference at which a spoken form of this chapter was first presented.

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12 *Sunday Times*, 3 July 1983.


16 The NFA co-ordinated briefings and pooled intelligence for NGOs and representatives on the working parties throughout the period 1993–5.


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28 No history of BSSRS exists, but see D. Albury and J. Schwartz, Partial Progress. The Politics of Science and Technology, London, 1982, for an account of the kind of politics it espoused.


32 Millstone became a policy researcher specialising in food additives and regulation. He co-founded the Food Additives Campaign Team (FACT) with Melanie Miller, a former student of the BSSRS stalwart Fred Stewart of Aston University, Julie Sheppard, a philosopher turned journalist, Felicity Lawrence, of the Daily Telegraph magazine, Walker, Cannon and myself.


35 Such people included Tony Gordon, now at Aberystwyth, Jonathan Jones, now joint head of the Sainsbury Laboratory at Norwich, Mike Knee, a researcher at East Malling Research Station, and David Smith, editor of this volume.


38 A persistent source of such pronouncements was David Conning, Director General of the BNF; see, for example, comments in the Sunday Times, 20 October 1985.


40 Interview with Nicholas Soames, MP, in T. Forrest, ‘Food Minister: an appetising job’, SuperMarketing, 4 December 1992; T. Sanders, interview
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41 Many such comments appeared in Farming News. See, for example, A. Rosen, 'We can’t ignore this conspiracy', Farming News, 16 August 1989.


50 J. Major to T. Lang, 17 January 1986.

51 D. Acheson to T. Lang, 24 June 1987.


57 Compassion in World Farming joined the NFA. The BST work created contacts with animal welfare activists such as Mark Gold, Joyce d'Silva and Peter Stevenson. They pushed the arguments about the nature of production, as argued in M. Gold, Assault and Battery. What Factory Farming Means for Humans and Animals, London, 1983.


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64 J. Goldsmith, 'Intensive Farming, the CAP and GATT', Caroline Walker Lecture given at the Royal Society, 16 October 1991.
67 North and Gorman, 1990, op. cit.
72 See, for example, the clarion calls against the bread tax in The Hungry Forties. Life under the Bread Tax, with an introduction by Mrs Cobden Unwin, London, 1904.
80 T. Lang, 'Local Sustainability in a Sea of Globalisation? The Case of Food Policy', paper presented at a conference on 'Planning Sustainability', Political Economy Research Centre, Sheffield, 8–10 September, 1995.
81 Gabriel and Lang, 1995, op. cit.


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