

From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology*

THE ISSUE

THE PHRASE 'SOCIOLOGY OF POLITICS' UNMISTAKABLY INDICATES A sub-field, a subdivision of the overall field of sociology – like sociology of religion, sociology of leisure and the like. By saying sociology of politics we make clear that the framework, the approach or the focus of the inquiry is sociological.

The phrase 'political sociology' is, on the other hand, unclear. It may be used as a synonym for 'sociology of politics', but it may not. When saying political sociology the focus or the approach of the inquiry generally remains unspecified. Since political phenomena are a concern for many disciplines, this ambiguity turns out to be a serious drawback. This is particularly apparent in Europe, where many scholars share Maurice Duverger's view that 'in a general way the two labels (political sociology and political science) are synonymous'.¹ This view is very convenient,² is particularly successful among European sociologists eager to expand to the detriment of political scientists, and for this very reason goes a long way towards explaining the persistent lag of political science in Europe. Nonetheless the view that political sociology and political science largely coincide hardly applies after the time of Michels and Pareto.

One may complain about excessive compartmentalization among

* This is part of a revised draft of a paper delivered at the Berlin conference of the Committee of Political Sociology of the International Sociological Association, held under the auspices of the Institut für Politische Wissenschaft, 16–20 January, 1968, and is to be published in 1969 in S. M. Lipset (ed.), *Social Science and Politics*, Oxford University Press, London and New York.

¹ *Sociologie Politique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires, 2nd ed., 1967, p. 24. Duverger has been expounding this view for the last 20 years. Already in his *Political Parties* (1951) one finds that the laws concerning the influence of electoral systems – indeed the most manipulative instrument of politics – are presented as an instance of 'sociological laws'.

² For instance it enables Duverger to publish the same volume (with irrelevant variations) under two different titles, *Méthodes de la Science Politique*, in 1954, and *Méthodes des Sciences Sociales*, in 1959.

the social sciences, but it can hardly be denied that the scientific progress of the social sciences follows from their proliferation and specialization. The reason for this is fairly obvious. To borrow from Smelser's perceptive analysis, the initial picture in the study of man is one of an enormous *multiplicity* of conditions, a *compounding* of their influence, and an *indeterminacy* regarding the effect of any one condition or several conditions in combination.³ The scientific picture is, instead, a picture in which 'givens', variables and parameters achieve some order in this bewildering maze.

Givens are diffuse factors which are left in a twilight zone under a variety of assumptions: the *coeteris paribus* clause, i.e. that the givens are constant; that the givens are implicitly incorporated in the formulation of the problem at hand; and that, in any case, givens exert a 'distal', not a proximate influence. In practice this is the basis of the division of labour among the social sciences. Whatever is a 'problem' for one discipline becomes a 'given', an external factor, for the neighbouring disciplines. For instance, economists assume political structures to be given. Likewise, sociologists assume political structures to be given. In a similar vein, political scientists assume social structures to be given. Each discipline throws light on a set of variables precisely because other factors are assumed to be external, distal and equal.

Variables are factors, conditions or determinants which have been adequately specified and isolated from one another. In practice the scientific advance of each discipline hinges on its ability to select and isolate a manageable set of variables. However, the identification and selection of the relevant variables requires each discipline to make parameters out of variables. Parameters are variables which are held constant. The distinction is as follows: 'Parameters are determinants that are known or suspected to influence a dependent variable, but, in the investigation at hand, are made or assumed not to vary. Operative variables are conditions that are known or suspected to influence a dependent variable and, in the investigation, are made or allowed to vary, so that the operation of one or a few conditions may be isolated and examined.'⁴

Givens and the interplay between parameters and variables highlight, then, the extent to which the strategy of the social sciences

³ See Neil J. Smelser, 'Sociology and the other Social Sciences', in P. F. Lazarsfeld *et al.*, eds., *The Uses of Sociology*, New York, Basic Books, 1967, p. 11. This section is largely indebted to the analytical clarity of Smelser's presentation.

⁴ Smelser, *loc. cit.*, p. 15.

consists of successive stages of drastic simplifications. A first set of diffuse sources of variation is eliminated by assuming a number of factors to be 'givens'. This is the division of labour strategy. Then other specific sources of variation are frozen by turning variables into parameters. At this point each discipline is confronted with the problem of constructing models out of a vast array of explanatory variables, each related, in turn, to a variety of schools and conceptual frameworks.

If this is so, there is little point in claiming that there is but one social science with politics as one of its topics. There is even less advantage in claiming that one of the social sciences is the 'master science'. And while nobody denies that the social system, the economic system and the political system are interdependent, surely the problem of recovering some unity among the social sciences cannot be solved by denying the division of labour strategy, or by advocating pure and simple mergers among neighbouring disciplines. In either case we would simply reintroduce chaos where some clarity has been painfully obtained. Clearly, the 'integration' among the social sciences presupposes their 'specialization'. Hence, the problem is to combine gains in specialization with gains in cross-fertilization. There are many ways of attacking the problem. One is simply to import concepts and models from other disciplines. Another is 'interpenetration', which presumably means that the barriers between the various disciplines are broken down. But the solution that recommends itself because of its more systematic (or less haphazard) nature, is to build connecting bridges, i.e. interdisciplinary hybrids, across the various boundaries. This solution recommends itself also in that it destroys barriers without cancelling the boundaries, i.e., without implying loss of identity.

Having placed the issue in perspective, the first question is: How are we to draw the dividing line between sociology and political science? If, as Smelser suggests, 'the focus of a scientific discipline . . . can be specified by listing the dependent and independent variables that preoccupy its investigators',⁵ sociology can be defined as the discipline that 'tends to opt for social-structural conditions as explanatory variables'.⁶ Symmetrically, political science can be defined as the discipline that opts for political-structural conditions

⁵ *Loc. cit.*, p. 5. More exactly, the criteria proposed by Smelser are four: dependent variables, independent variables, logical ordering (cause-effect relationships, models, and theoretical framework), research methods.

⁶ Smelser, *loc. cit.*, p. 12.

as explanatory variables.⁷ One may equally say that the independent variables – causes, determinants or factors – of the sociologist are, basically, *social* structures, while the independent variables – causes, determinants or factors – of the political scientist are, basically, *political* structures.

To this it could be objected that this demarcation is neat in principle but hardly applicable to the current state of political science. There is a widespread feeling, in fact, that while sociology has emerged as a core social science discipline, political science is in a serious plight. I shall explain later why I do not share this view. But two points should be clarified from the outset: first, which is the pertinent confrontation between the two disciplines? Second, where are we to search for the distinguishing traits?

With reference to the first point, the performance of political science may be compared with the overall performance of sociology, or the science of politics may be contrasted more specifically with the sociology of politics. I submit that, for the purpose of evaluation, the first comparison just falls short of meaninglessness. It may well be that sociologists are doing nicely with respect to the family, urbanization, education and the like. The relevant issue, however, is whether sociologists are performing better than political scientists in dealing with politics, in the understanding of political phenomena. This will be the major discussion throughout this essay.

Concerning the second point, care must be taken to note the difference between the formalized level of a discipline, i.e. its theoretical frameworks and explanatory models on the one hand, and its research methods on the other hand. It makes little sense to search for the demarcation between sociology and political science – indeed between any of the social sciences – at the research level, that is, with reference to the methods employed for the verification of statements. The research methods are largely decided by the kind of evidence which is available for the units and the kind of problems with which one deals. In principle all the social sciences are perfectly willing to employ all the known methods of scientific inquiry and validation. In practice the experimental method is within easy reach of the psychologist, but hardly available to the sociologist beyond

⁷ This is by no means an original demarcation. Bendix and Lipset make the same point (in less technical fashion) by saying that ‘political science starts with the state and examines how it affects society, while political sociology starts with society and examines how it affects the state’. (‘Political Sociology: An Essay and Bibliography’, in *Current Sociology*, vol. VI, Unesco, Paris, 1957, N.2, p. 87.)

the range of small group experimentation. Statistical manipulation is largely adopted, with varying degrees of mathematical sophistication, by a number of disciplines, and depends on the availability of quantitative or quantifiable data – and so forth. Hence the fact that the behavioural persuasion in politics⁸ has taught political scientists to draw heavily on the research methods of the sociologists, cannot prove that political science lacks identity at the formalized level. In attempting to spell out the essential conceptualizations of sociological thinking, Nisbet indicates the following terms as the ‘unit-ideas’ of sociology: community, authority, status, the sacred, and alienation.⁹ It is immediately apparent that these are not the unit-ideas of political science. To be sure, one may be unhappy with Nisbet and draw, for instance, from Talcott Parsons. But I would equally argue that the Parsonian-type models are of little use to political science.¹⁰ Indeed the incessant efforts at ‘reconceptualization’ which characterize the discipline testify in no small part to the frustration of the behavioural political scientist *vis à vis* the categories of the sociologist.¹¹

The point is, then, that if the demarcation between sociology and political science is sought – as it should be – at the level of their respective conceptual frameworks, it soon appears that the formal theory of the social system leaves off where the formal theory of the political system begins. Granted there are many reasons for asking where political science stands; but, as Almond puts it, ‘confusion, even loss of identity, is inevitably associated with professional growth’.¹²

⁸ This is the felicitous wording of Heinz Eulau, *The Behavioral Persuasion in Politics*, New York, Random House, 1963.

⁹ R. A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York: Basic Books, 1966, pp. 4–6. Society, power, and class are also mentioned as related unit-ideas.

¹⁰ I am confirmed in this judgement in spite of William C. Mitchell, *Sociological Analysis and Politics: The Theories of Talcott Parsons*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1967, esp. chaps. V–VIII.

¹¹ This is not to deny that in the last 20 years political science has largely profited from models and theories that have originated outside the field. My argument is that the more rewarding imports have not originated from sociology. The excellent collective volume edited by David Easton, *Varieties of Political Theory*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, is very much to the point.

¹² This is Almond’s presidential address at the 1966 convention of the APSA, now in *Contemporary Political Science* (infra) p. 17. Actually the statement should be imputed to the comparative expansion of political science into the developing areas, not to most other segments of the discipline. It should also be noted that Almond immediately goes on to say that ‘political science is not science in general and not social science’.

The theoretical ferment of the discipline is undeniable.¹³ If one is alerted, moreover, to the developmental logic of the social sciences outlined above, *in perspective* one should expect that the need for mutual articulation between sociology and political science will grow, and that 'the relations between sociology and political science will come to resemble more those that now obtain between sociology and economics'.¹⁴

Having drawn the dividing line between political science and sociology, the question turns on how to bridge the gap between them – the problem of building interdisciplinary bridges. *Political sociology* is one of these connecting bridges – under the strict condition, however, that political sociology is *not* considered a synonym for sociology of politics. I propose, in fact, to use the two labels in contradistinction. Political sociology is an *interdisciplinary hybrid* attempting to combine social and political explanatory variables. The sociology of politics is, instead, a *sociological reduction* of politics.

Admittedly the proposed definition of political sociology is largely normative. That is to say, the establishment of political sociology as a real interdisciplinary approach, as a balanced cross-fertilization between sociologists and political scientists, is more a task for the future than a current achievement. In actuality much of what goes under the misnomer of 'political sociology' is nothing more than a sociology of politics ignorant of political science; in substance, an exploration of the polity that sets aside as 'givens' the variables of the political scientist. My argument is, then, that if we are interested in interdisciplinary achievements we must abandon the view that political sociology is a sub-field of sociology, thereby separating political sociology from the sociology of politics.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF PARTIES

It is both unfeasible and unnecessary to review the whole range of political topics investigated by the sociologist.¹⁵ I shall select, there-

¹³ See the recent, remarkable symposium edited by Ithiel de Sola Pool, *Contemporary Political Science – Toward Empirical Theory*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967. James C. Charlesworth ed., *Contemporary Political Analysis*, Free Press, New York, 1967, testifies also to this intellectual ferment.

¹⁴ Smelser, *loc. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Seymour M. Lipset has contributed more than any other author to this task. See: 'Political Sociology 1945–55', in H. L. Zetterberg ed., *Sociology in the United States*, Paris, Unesco, 1965, pp. 43–55; 'Political Sociology: An Essay and Bibliography' (together with R. Bendix) in *Current Sociology*, vol. VI, Paris,

fore, a major stream in the sociology of politics, namely, the stream that investigates the imprint of social classes and stratification upon political behaviour. While the investigation can be carried out at various levels – the electoral level, the party level and the élite level – the various threads are amenable to the general heading of ‘sociology of parties’. For the question ‘do parties represent classes?’ presupposes, on the one hand, that we inquire about class voting, and is conducive, on the other, to the sociology of élite studies.

It should be stressed, however, that the sociology of parties will be used here as an emblematic device. It would be foolhardy to say that the sociology of politics can be reduced, in its major substantive achievements, to the sociology of parties. But one may generalize – I suggest – from this particular body of literature to certain overall characteristics of the sociology of politics as such.

Since the study of parties is equally a concern of the political scientist, let us first draw the boundary. As already implied, the political scientist is likely to consider parties and party systems as explanatory variables, whereas the sociologist tends to perceive parties and party systems as dependent variables – that which is to be explained. With the boundary drawn, I now propose to examine the sociology of parties on its own grounds and merits. That is, I shall not be concerned with whatever the political scientist might have to say from his point of view. My position is that the sociologist *should* proceed according to his own disciplinary focus. Indeed the distinctive contribution of the sociologist to the study of parties *is* to investigate to what extent parties and party systems are a response to, and a reflection of, social stratification, the solidarity structure of the society, its socio-economic and socio-cultural cleavages, its degree of heterogeneity and of integration, its level of economic growth and the like.¹⁶

The classic formulation of this approach is concisely presented in Lipset’s *Political Man* as follows: ‘In every democracy conflict among different groups is expressed through political parties which basically

1957, No. 2; ‘Political Sociology’ in R. K. Merton *et al.*, eds., *Sociology Today*, New York, Basic Books, 1959; *Political Man*, Doubleday, Garden City, 1960, chap. I; ‘Sociology and Political Science: A Bibliographical Note,’ in *American Sociological Review*, October 1964, pp. 730–4.

¹⁶ This is not to say that the sociologist does not have other interests, but to sort out the most distinctive concern. Other subjects, such as the problem of inner-party democracy, are of great interest to the sociologist, but are not particularly distinctive, for the political scientist is equally interested.

represent a “democratic translation of the class struggle”. Even though many parties renounce the principle of class conflict or loyalty, an analysis of their *appeals* and their *support* suggests that they do *represent the interests* of different classes.¹⁷

To be sure, Lipset makes the point that ‘there have been important exceptions to these generalizations . . . and class is only one of the structural divisions in society which is related to party support’. Nevertheless it is clear that Lipset’s thread is, in *Political Man*, the class thread.¹⁸ ‘More than anything else,’ he goes on to say, ‘the party struggle is a conflict among classes, and the most impressive single fact about political party support is that in virtually every economically developed country the lower-income groups vote mainly for parties of the left, while the higher-income groups vote mainly for parties of the right.’¹⁹

It is unnecessary to stress that these views display a familiar Marxist ring. In their 1957 perceptive review of the state of the art Bendix and Lipset themselves acknowledge that the chief impetus in the voting behaviour studies ‘stems from an “interest theory” of political behaviour and goes back ultimately to the Marxian theory of class consciousness’.²⁰ Given the fact that the sociology of parties relies heavily on correlations with voting behaviour, the statement is equally true for the party topic: the chief impetus of the sociology of parties also goes back, ultimately, to Marxist assumptions.

A comment should be added, however, with reference to the interest theory of politics; and I would rather say the ‘interest terminology’ inspired by, and derived from Arthur Bentley. The interest terminology is a convenient dilution of Marxism, but hardly offers a substantial alternative. In the Bentelean school, ‘interest’ is a synonym for ‘activity’, and when Bentley says that there can be no activity without interest he says merely that there can be no activity without motivation. Nothing could be more patently true, but to use ‘interest’ in this sense is both superfluous and equivocal. It follows that the interest terminology either leads to fuzzy theorizing, or acquires its substance from the more or less covert assumption that

¹⁷ S. M. Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 220 (italics mine). These are the opening lines of Chapter 7.

¹⁸ I underline that this is the case in *Political Man*, for the emphasis is very different in Lipset’s later writings, as indicated *infra*, pp. xxx and note 33.

¹⁹ *Political Man*, p. 221 and 223–4.

²⁰ ‘Political Sociology: An Essay and Bibliography,’ in *Current Sociology*, cit., p. 80.

interest generally is 'economic interest'. It is not surprising, therefore, that the refinement of the interest theory has made much less headway than the refinement of Marxist theory. This is also to suggest that the Bentleian side of the coin may be safely set aside.

The problem, as Lipset points out, has three aspects: i) a class-type *appeal*, ii) a *support* based on class loyalties, iii) the actual *representation* of class interests. It is superfluous to warn that these features may, or may not, hang together. It is more interesting to illustrate, on these premises, four possible ways of arguing the case.

- a) The class appeal is played down to a point of invisibility precisely because the support of class loyalties is firm (e.g. when the appeal is directed to cross-class floating voters).
- b) Conversely the class appeal is very visible and explicit precisely because class support is low (or class loyalty dwindles).

Since the foregoing suggests that class *appeal* is an equivocal indicator, we are left with the indicator provided by a class *support*, and the rest of the argument can be developed according to the two following possibilities:

- c) Class support is beyond question, and yet class interests are misrepresented: in actuality the party betrays class interests.
- d) No class support is apparent, and yet the party is an interclass disguise for representing and serving class interests.

The first three arguments suggest, then, that neither class appeal, nor class support, can show that class interests are actually represented. And the fourth argument shows that there is no way of pinning down a true believer: under any and all circumstances he can maintain that politics is class politics. This is tantamount to saying that the theory winds up at a formulation that escapes empirical verification. When we come to the notion of 'representation of class interests', we are referred to a conjecture that is beyond proof and cannot be falsified.

The thorny point is, then, the *representation of class interests*. Lipset is very cautious on this matter, but one finds only too often, in the literature, the assertion that 'parties act as representatives of different class interests'; that 'political parties have developed largely as instruments of various class interests', and 'historically have come to represent specific coalitions of class interests'.²¹ Given the fact that statements of this sort are delivered by many sociologists as if they

²¹ R. R. Alford, in Lipset and Rokkan eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, Free Press, New York, 1967, p. 69. I am not discussing, however, a particular author; the quotations are merely for the sake of illustration.

were self-evident, let me present the view that I find them obscure, historically incorrect and scientifically unacceptable.

The first question is: what is the assumption? Surely we are referred, more or less implicitly, to a *general theory of politics*, according to which politics is ultimately a struggle between classes pursuing their class interests. However, this reply does not suffice to clarify the assumption. The interest of a class can either conflict or coincide with the interest of other classes. More technically, inter-class relations may be zero-sum but may also be positive-sum; and, clearly, a zero-sum class theory is radically different from a positive-sum class theory. Yet the sociology of politics is seemingly unaware of the distinction. As a result, we are left to wonder what the theory of class interest and conflict is supposed to mean, and what each author is actually trying to say.

If the general assumption remains obscure, the same conclusion applies to a second, more specific question, namely, what is *class interest*?

Assuming that interest means economic interest, an economic-minded orientation may be imputed to an actor without being consciously held by the actor himself, or pursued by the actor according to his perception of self-interest. In the first case both the interest and the class are 'reconstructed': we are saying only that all the people to whom the observer attributes the same economic interest can be placed in a same categorical class. And the fantastic distance between these 'reconstructions' and the real world of politics hardly needs underlining. It is only in the second case, then, that economic interests may lead to class voting, class parties and so called class politics. If so the thesis applies to *some*, not *all* parties; and can be applied only, historically, to the post-enfranchisement developments of party systems.

The third, and even more crucial question, is: What do we mean by *representation*? Once more, we are confronted with an astonishing lack of sophistication, for it appears that representation is conceived as a pure and simple *projection*. The argument seems to run as follows: since individuals have a 'class position' which is reflected in their 'class behaviour', it follows that millions of such individuals will be represented by thousands of other individuals on account of similar social origins. If one is reminded, however, that not even *individual* representational behaviour can be safely inferred from class origin and position, one is bound to be dazzled by the transplantation of such a naïve projective logic at the level of entire *collectivities*.

The fantastic irreality of the argument that an entire 'class' is being 'represented' (in some meaningful sense of the term) by such a complex organization as a mass party, has been recently spelled out in a very cogent manner by Mancur Olson. According to this author it is contradictory to assume that individuals are motivated by material self-interest, and that individuals so motivated will seek to achieve their common or group interests. In other terms, the more individuals pursue their self-interest, and the more numerous these individuals, the less their interests can be represented by large scale organizations – for this reason: 'if the members of a large group rationally seek to maximise their personal welfare, they will *not* act to advance their common or group objectives.'²²

In conclusion, the theoretical status of the class sociology of parties is poor. In the first place, the concept of representation is patently abused. Projectively speaking we are only permitted to say that parties *reflect*, or may reflect, social classes. This means that one may find 'class resemblance' between party voters on the one hand, and the party personnel on the other hand. From this finding one may infer that voters and leaders are linked by a state of socio-psychological *empathy* – but one cannot infer more. The difference between empathy and representation is abysmal, as jurists, constitutional thinkers, and, in everyday experience, anyone involved in representational dealings have known for some twenty centuries. Empathy facilitates understanding; representation poses the intricate problem of replacing one or more persons with another person in such a way that the representative acts in the interest of the represented. Hence it is entirely gratuitous to assert that parties 'represent' classes. In fact, we can only verify, on sociological grounds, whether parties 'reflect' classes. It would be much to the advantage of clarity, therefore, to drop the notion of representation altogether, both with reference to 'class' and to 'interest'. For no scientific progress is in the offing whenever a highly technical concept is brought back to the year zero, i.e. to a generic common nonsense meaning.²³

The theoretical status of our subject matter is equally unsatisfactory with regard to the notion of conflict. In this respect the problem is

²² Mancur Olson Jr., *The Logic of Collective Action – Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1965, p. 2 *et passim*. The italics are in the original.

²³ For a summary overview of the technical complexity of the concept, see e.g. my article 'Representational Systems' in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York, Macmillan-Free Press, vol. 13, pp. 465–74.

how classes relate to one another. Most of us seem to abide by a 'conflict model'. However, the class theory of conflict is radically different from the pluralistic theory of conflict. In his philosophical writings Marx is unquestionably Manichean.²⁴ Therefore conflict – i.e. the class struggle – is only a temporary necessity, and is necessary only insofar as it is conducive to the victory of the (good) slave over the (bad) master.²⁵ This is clearly shown by the fact that his end-state – the classless society – is imagined as a conflictless monocromatic society. On the contrary, in the pluralistic approach, conflict – or antagonisms, contestation and dissent – is positively valued not only because all parties may stand to gain, but especially because conflict results from variety, and variety is *per se* seminal.

Clearly Marxists and pluralists are not speaking of the same conflict. The word has a very different descriptive and evaluative meaning in the two approaches; whereas much of the current sociology of politics confuses a class conflict with a pluralistic conflict. This is not only to say that the notion of conflict remains hopelessly cross-contaminated, but also to suggest that by testing whether social conflicts are zero-sum or positive-sum, we would also be in a position to decide which of our conflict models applies – the Marxist or the pluralistic.

Finally, the theoretical poverty of the class sociology of parties (and politics) is particularly striking with regard to the very notion of 'class', which is also hopelessly cross-contaminated with the notion of 'status'. In the words of Raymond Aron,²⁶ we are 'at the same time obsessed by the notion of class and incapable of defining it'.²⁷

²⁴ The specification is necessary because in his more circumstantial writings – especially historical essays or occasional pamphlets, such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* – Marx is more concerned with empirical details. But the *Weltanschauung* of Marx refers us to his historical materialism, or his dialectical materialism, which is outlined in his philosophical writings. In my opinion, the best introduction to the understanding of the philosophy of Marx remains Karl Löwith, *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche*, Europa Verlag, Zürich, 1940.

²⁵ This is to remind one of the patent derivation of Marx from Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, and particularly from the 'dialectics between master and slave' (Section A, chap. 4). A classic analysis is Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la Lecture de Hegel – Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit*, Gallimard, Paris, 1947.

²⁶ *La Lutte de Classes*, Gallimard, Paris, 1964, p. 87.

²⁷ Two sections of the original text are here omitted, 'Class Voting' and 'The Hypothesis Reversed'.

TOWARD POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

It would be unfair, however, to conclude the review at this point. In fact, a fundamental and most promising reorientation is under way, as is shown by Lipset and Rokkan's introductory chapter in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments – Cross National Perspectives*,²⁸ which represents, in my view, a landmark. In the Lipset-Rokkan approach the question which *is* conducive to causal explanations and does grapple with the real problem is: How are conflicts and cleavages translated into a party system?

The first advantage of this approach is that it gives equal attention to *any kind* of conflict and cleavage. Race and ethnic origin, region and locality, culture and tradition, religion and ideology, all point to dimensions of cleavage which may be as important as its class dimension. In other terms, conflicts are not only economic and related to the class structure, but also regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious and ideological. To assume that these latter sources of conflict are destined, in the long run, to give way to 'objective' economic factors amounts to a naïve view of the complexity of human nature, at least in politics. The second advantage is that the inquiry is now correctly focused on the real problem – *translation*. This is indeed the crucial consideration, as a couple of reminders will help to underline.

Prima facie, racial cleavages would appear the more irreducible source of conflict. However, they are not 'translated', for instance, in the party system of the United States; in other words, so far they remain below the threshold of the North American political culture. On the other hand, we are often confronted with conflicts and cleavages which appear, at least *prima facie*, far less deep-rooted, and yet prove to be irreducible. The Irish question was settled only by secession; the French-speaking Canadians are currently more bitter than they were in the past; the cleavage between Flemish and Walloons in Belgium has grown deeper and the conflict is more acute in the 1960s than it has ever been. Now, surely these conflicts could be managed better if we knew more about them, and

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 1–64. As the editors of the volume indicate, their introductory chapter 'was undertaken *after* most of the articles were completed' (p. xii). Therefore, in spite of other magnificent chapters (e.g. the two chapters by Juan Linz, or the one by Allardt and Pesonen on Finland) the Lipset-Rokkan introduction stands alone. The assertion that 'the introduction represents an effort to synthesize the knowledge . . . presented by the chapter authors' testifies more than anything else to the modesty of the authors.

particularly if political sociology could explain how they become, and why they may not become, 'translated' into a party system.

So far we have been content with saying that when cleavages are cross-cutting, or overlapping, they are likely to neutralize one another, at least on a global scale, whereas otherwise they tend to be cumulative and hence to reinforce one another. However, as Dahl rightly points out, the assumption that cross-cutting cleavages encourage conciliation does not hold 'if all the cleavages are felt with equal intensity'; it holds only under the condition that 'some cleavages are less significant than others'.²⁹ Moreover, if the notion of translation is taken seriously – as it should be – it points to an additional important question: whether cleavages are deflected and domesticated, or instead intensified and exasperated, precisely by *translation handling*. And here politics enters.

This is another novelty that also deserves to be highlighted. To most sociologists, politics is little more than a projection. To be sure, Lipset and a number of other sociologists have always refused to reduce politics to an epiphenomenon. Yet if one compares the earlier with the current Lipset, it is apparent that the 'weight of politics' is no longer the same. In the 1957 Lipset-Bendix *Essay and Bibliography* what cannot be explained by social and economic status merely is 'the competing strategies of the political struggle': the peculiar essence of politics is reduced to the 'strategy' of conflict management.³⁰ It is only on account of this element that politics is weighed on its own right, as an independent variable. In the 1967 Lipset-Rokkan *Introduction*, however, politics emerges as a major independent factor. No small part of the inquiry is focused, in fact, on the following variables: i) traditions and rules of decision-making (e.g., conciliar or autocratic); ii) channels for expression and mobilization of protest; iii) opportunities, payoffs and costs of alliances; iv) limitations and safeguards against direct majority power.³¹

The foregoing may well appear an analytical breakdown of what Lipset had in mind when speaking of 'strategies'. But now a mere chapter heading has been followed up, and stands as a chapter. Furthermore, a source of political alignments is traced back to the '*we*' versus '*they*' interaction. Here we reach to the very roots of

²⁹ In R. A. Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p. 378.

³⁰ In *Current Sociology*, cit., p. 85 and 83.

³¹ See *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, esp. pp. 26–33.

alignment-making in terms of a strictly political factor of alignments.³² All in all, then, the Lipset-Rokkan approach represents a momentous rebalancing of the discipline.³³ In my terminology, Lipset and Rokkan definitely surpass the old-style sociology of politics and unquestionably inaugurate the new political sociology. Politics is no longer a mere projection.

The turning point having been turned, let me go on to force the Lipset-Rokkan text, hopefully in accord with their intentions. The problem is not only that 'cleavages do not translate themselves into party oppositions as a matter of course'.³⁴ The problem is also that some cleavages are *not translated* at all. Furthermore, the importance of the notion of translation lies in the implication that translation calls for *translators*, thereby focusing attention on translation handling and/or mishandling. As long as we take for granted that cleavages are *reflected in*, *not produced by*, the political system itself, we necessarily neglect to ask to what extent conflicts and cleavages may either be channelled, deflected and repressed or, vice versa, activated and reinforced, precisely by the operations and operators of the political system. But now we are required to wonder whether 'translation mishandling' may largely contribute to the cleavage structure that one finds in the polities characterized by low coincidence of opinion.

Another important breakthrough of the Lipset-Rokkan *Introduction* lies in the importance given to the historical dimension. In their own words, 'to understand the current alignments of voters behind each of the parties, we have to map variations in the *sequences of alternatives* set for the . . . citizens . . . In single-nation studies we need not always take this history into account . . . But as soon as we move into comparative analysis we have to add an historical dimension. We simply cannot make sense of variations in current

³² *Ibid.* p. 3. The authors draw the inference that 'parties themselves might . . . produce their own alignments independently'. But the suggestion is not really followed up.

³³ With Lipset this evolution is already very evident if one compares *Political Man* with *The First New Nation*, Basic Books, New York, 1963; Anchor Books ed., Doubleday, Garden City, 1967. In the 1963 volume, Lipset writes that while 'sociologists tend to see party cleavages as reflections of an underlying structure', thereby putting forward an image of social systems 'at odds with the view of many political scientists . . . An examination of comparative politics suggests that the political scientists are right, in that electoral laws determine the nature of the party system as much as any other structural variable' (pp. 335-6, 1967 ed).

³⁴ *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, p. 26.

alignments without detailed data on differences in the sequences of party formation . . .'³⁵ The accomplishment is superb, and the gains in depth and perspective are invaluable. On the other hand, the historical treatment acquires an overwhelming importance. The emphasis is constantly on the side of historical explanation, and this implies that some inherent limitations should also be noted.

At a certain point Lipset and Rokkan are struck and intrigued by the 'freezing' of party systems (and of voter alignments) i.e. by the fact that, in spite of the tremendous rate of socio-economic change, the 'party systems of the 1960's reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920's'.³⁶ In my terminology this freezing represents the state of 'structural consolidation' of a party system. Now, the 1920 freezing of party systems and alignments is intriguing only as long as we persist in understanding party systems as dependent variables. It is not intriguing, however, if we realize that a frozen party system is simply a party system that intervenes in the political process as an independent *system of channelment*, propelled and maintained by its own laws of inertia.³⁷ This is the same as saying that the stage of structural consolidation of party systems confronts us at the point where historical explanations leave off.³⁸

Clearly, then, my suggestion is that the final establishment of political sociology *proprie dicta* still requires another step. In the Lipset-Rokkan approach, politics enters basically *via* the historical reconstruction. But politics should enter from another door as well. The final step on our future agenda is the full recognition of the programming of the managers.

The sociology of politics deals with the consumer and ignores the producer. According to the analogy this is like explaining an eco-

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 50.

³⁷ This notion of 'structural consolidation', as well as the focus on party systems *qua* 'channelling systems', is clarified in my volume, *Parties and Party Systems* (Harper and Row, forthcoming). See also my article 'Political Development and Political Engineering', in *Public Policy*, vol. XVII, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968, pp. 261 ff.

³⁸ It seems to me, therefore, that Lipset and Rokkan evade the problem when they conclude the discussion on the 'freezing of political alternatives' by saying that 'to understand the current alignments . . . it is not enough to analyse . . . the contemporary sociocultural structure; it is even more important to go back to the initial formation of party alternatives . . .' (p. 54). The argument goes around in circles by missing the limits of historical explanations.

conomic system as if there could be buyers without sellers. Political sociology is required, instead, to follow all the cycle from both ends, from the producer's no less than from the consumer's end. In principle, the producer's market does not matter less than the consumer's market. Hence, in the perspective of political sociology a party system is not only a response to consumer's demands, but is equally a feedback of producer's options. In practice, moreover, the political entrepreneur exerts a greater persuasive influence on the voter than does the economic entrepreneur on the buyer.

To be sure, in terms of 'reconstructed explanations' a sociology of politics can recount the whole story without accounting for the initiative of the managers. But this does not even begin to prove that the *reconstruction* accounts for the *actual construction*. There are almost infinite ways of regressing *ex post facto* from consequences to causes. When the outcome is given, nothing is easier than to adjust the alleged cause to its (known) effect. And my contention is that the reconstructed explanation of the sociologist, the pure sociologist, does not account for the actual construction.³⁹

This is also, I suspect, a reason why the performance of the sociology of politics on predictive grounds borders on failure. Take the cleavage thread, the assumption that party systems reflect socio-economic cleavages. Under this premise it is fairly obvious, in the first place, that we shall detect past, not emerging cleavages. It is fairly obvious, that is, that we shall obtain not only a static, but also an eminently retrospective picture. In the second place, if we start from societal cleavages it is equally clear that we shall miss all the conflicts which have a non-cleavage origin. These are not only the *issue-conflicts* – e.g. a crisis of legitimacy and the issue about the regime itself – but also the *within-élite* conflicts which remain important even if they escape visibility. In the third place, the sociology of politics is likely to miss the fact that 'objective cleavages' can be largely manipulated, that is, used as *resources*, and thereby over or underplayed according to alignment and coalition strategies.

If we turn to the class thread, its predictive implausibility can be highlighted on similar grounds. With reference to the United States,

³⁹ As Spiro forcibly puts it, the theories that require first development of the substantive substructure, and then assume that politics will be a reflection, 'reverse the actual sequence of events. In virtually every historical instance, substantive change in economy, society, culture, or elsewhere was brought about by political action'. (Herbert J. Spiro, in *Africa, The Primacy of Politics*, Random House, New York, 1966, p. 152.)

Converse makes the point that 'if we take as a goal the explanation of political *changes* . . . as opposed to questions of more static political structure, then the explanatory utility of the social-class thread is almost nil'.⁴⁰ Now, if we cannot explain change we are even less likely to cope with forecasting. And there are good reasons for assuming that the conclusion of Converse applies to most countries.

Assuming that the class thread is actually supplied by an index of class conditions, we are confronted with this dilemma. If we construct a 'soft' index it will not register interesting variations, and hence will predict perpetuation rather than change; whereas if we construct a 'hard' index it will account for variations which may not affect in the least the political system. In any case the trouble is that we are confronted with *distal causation*, that is, with distal effects that cannot be predicted, almost by definition, with any useful degree of accuracy. Hence, objective class conditions may change and the polity may not – or may react rather than reflect.

The sociologist may concede the foregoing points and yet argue that his socio-economic indicators are more powerful, in the long run, than the more subjective indicators utilized by political scientists. But the 'long run' argument is a convenient alibi for anyone, for the political scientist no less than for the sociologist. In long run terms there is always an ulterior future – beyond the future that has already deceived us – to which the verification of our predictions can be deferred. Therefore, either we indicate 'how long' the run is supposed to be, or we enter an entirely futile debate. For the sake of the argument let it be assumed that we agree to a deadline of fifty years. If so, I find no convincing evidence in favour of the contention that the sociologist detects long range trends, while the political scientist is confined by his subjectivism to short range predictions.⁴¹ Surely the sociological forecast is more complicated than the forecast demanded of the demographer. Yet even the record of demographic predictions is a record of persistent miscalculations – and this before the advent of birth control techniques.

I would thus rejoin my general point that the widely spread belief that socio-economic indicators have a higher predictive potentiality

⁴⁰ Philip E. Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics' in D. E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent*, Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, p. 260, note 44.

⁴¹ This is, for example, the criticism leveled against the concern of the authors of *The American Voter* with the 'perception' of conflict. Among others, Alford argues that this 'subjective' concern only affects 'short range change'. (Robert R. Alford, *Party and Society, The Anglo-American Democracies*, Chicago, 1963, p. 87.)

than any other indicator actually represents another instance of the 'objectivist superstition'. An unbiased if impressionistic view suggests, in fact, that the pros and cons are more or less evenly distributed. Socio-economic indicators are advantaged by the fact that they are quantifiable; but they are handicapped (let alone their reliability and crudity) by their 'distal' nature. On the other hand, the indicators used by political scientists may be handicapped by their non-measurability, but are at an advantage because of their 'proximal' nature.

To recapitulate on the route travelled thus far, my major points could be summed up as follows:

1) Political sociology is often a misnomer, for what goes under its name is often a 'sociological reduction' of politics. This approach is as legitimate as any other, but should be called what it actually is, namely, *sociology of politics*.⁴²

2) Political sociology is only born when the sociological and 'politological' approaches are combined at their point of intersection. If the 'sociology of politics deals with the *non-political* reasons why people act the way they do in political life',⁴³ political sociology should include also the *political* reasons why people act the way they do. A real *political sociology* is, then, a cross-disciplinary breakthrough seeking for enlarged models which reintroduce as variables the 'givens' of each component source.

3) The need for a real political sociology has been obscured by the apparent headway of the sociology of politics. This is, however, an optical illusion which draws on a false appraisal. The optical illusion magnifies the technical sophistication of the research methods of the sociologist to the point of losing sight of the poverty of his conceptual framework – a poverty revealed by the correct appraisal, i.e. by comparing political science with the performance of the sociologist *in the field of politics*.

4) The encounter that gives rise to a real political sociology is

⁴² In his already cited *Encyclopedia* article Janowitz holds that along with the stratification approach there has always been an 'institutional approach' to political sociology stemming from the influence of Weber, in which 'political institutions emerge as . . . independent sources of societal change'. (Vol. XXI, p. 299.) Without denying the influence of Weber, I would rather say that it counteracts on a more sophisticated level the influence of Marx, hardly that the 'institutional approach' belongs to the inner logic of development of the sociological focus.

⁴³ Nathan Glazer, 'The Ideological Uses of Sociology', in *The Uses of Sociology*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

hindered by two major obstacles: an objectivist superstition, and poor causal reasoning. With regard to the first fallacy, the sociologist should take stock of the fact that he deals with artifacts as much as the political scientist does. With regard to the second fallacy, the sociologist should realize that he cannot cover the whole way from the society to the polity by extrapolation, i.e. with crude projective techniques. A fundamental condition of causal inference is that the effect must be contiguous, or contiguous enough, to the cause. Hence *distal effects* cannot be demonstrated as if they were *proximal effects*.

5) With specific reference to the party topic, a real political sociology calls for a simultaneous exploration of how parties are conditioned by the society *and* the society is conditioned by the party system. To say that a party system is a response to a given socio-economic environment is to present half of the picture as if it were the complete picture. The complete picture requires, instead, a joint assessment of the extent to which parties are dependent variables reflecting social stratification and cleavages and, vice versa, of the extent to which these cleavages reflect the channelling imprint of a structured party system.

These points run flatly counter to the Bendix-Lipset agenda of ten years ago, namely, that in the long run we should look forward to establishing 'a theoretical framework for political sociology as an integral part of sociology *sans phrase*'.⁴⁴ In my opinion it is fortunate that the suggestion has been disregarded.

A final comment by way of conclusion. We live in an ever more politicized world. This does not merely mean that political participation and/or political mobilization are becoming world-wide phenomena. This means above all that the *power of power* is growing at a tremendous pace – almost with the pace of technology – both with reference to the manipulative and coercive capacity of state power and, at the other extreme, with reference to the explosive potentialities of state power vacuums. Now, the greater the range of politics, the smaller the role of 'objective factors'. All our *objective certainties* are increasingly exposed to, and conditioned by, *political uncertainty*. If so, it is an extraordinary paradox that the social sciences should be ever more prompted to explain politics by going *beyond* politics, by developing a fetishism for the 'invisible hand'. This essay is predicated upon the opposite assumption, namely, that the sociologist should catch up with the hazardous uncertainties of politics.

⁴⁴ In *Current Sociology*, cit., p. 87.