Conflict in formal organizations*

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Social tension and conflict have been a major preoccupation of sociologists ever since social science first came into being. One can say without exaggeration that various lines of social thought were determined at the outset by a struggle for power in social reality.

The Marxist social science tradition for instance, was always centred on the analysis of industrial conflict and class struggle, which it viewed as the main revolutionary force in culture and society. The Neo-Machiavellians, people like Mosca, Pareto, Michels and Sorel, stressed the importance of political power and conflict for the analysis of social dynamics, while Georg Simmel formulated a series of propositions concerning the general social aspects of conflict in his essay "Der Streit".

On the other side of the Atlantic, the founding fathers of American sociology regarded themselves as social critics and reformers, and viewed conflict as a fundamental, not to say constructive force in social progress.

Interest in problems of social conflict has undergone a fundamental change in the last twenty or thirty years. "Current thinking in the field of conflict is psychologically oriented rather than, as in the nineteenth century, sociologically oriented".1) Contemporary sociologists, strongly influenced by the structural-functionalist school, think in terms of group-maintenance, consensus, socialization, adjustment and social control.

They exclude conflict as far as possible, referring to it, when at all, as a dysfunction, a disruptive force or, even, a disease. By and large, the intellectual climate of sociology may be characterized as being unfriendly, to say the least, towards the study of social conflict.2)

A reaction to this trend has recently become evident. It seems that the European classics on conflict do inspire the sociologists of different countries: Lewis Coser has reformulated the intellectual heritage of Simmel; following in the wake of Marxist tradition, the German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf has developed a theory of class

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conflict in more generalized terms; and the Englishman John Rex struck out on his
own in outlining a theory of social conflict and change.3)

Most of these writers are outspoken in their criticism of the ideas of Talcott Parsons
and his school, whose social system model they liken to Utopia in that it bears no
relation to social reality.4) Far from being studied as a type of deviant behaviour,
tensions and contradictions should be adopted as a basis on which to build sociological
theory. They reject the widespread emotional resistance to conflict as a disruptive
force, viewing the clash of social values and the struggle for power as forming, on
the contrary, the main impetus to social progress (Dahrendorf5), or regarding them
as a central stabilizing process in social groups (Coser).

The sociology of organization reflects the general trend in social science. The classics,
especially Marx, stress the fact that, because of its internal contradictions, a system
can change only through a struggle for power; modern sociologists concentrate on
consensus and integration. Even the most comprehensive sociological textbooks on
formal organizations are guilty of an almost total neglect of conflict problems.

In industrial sociology, the main subject in this field, the Human Relations school
has long suppressed any real understanding of conflict. To Mayo, industrial conflict
was no more than an abnormality, a “social disease”, unacceptable to authority in both
industry and politics. As his collaborators phrased it, there is a “logic of efficiency”
and a “logic of sentiment”, and never the twain shall meet.8) This crude interpretation
of the industrial organization, with its overt ideological presuppositions, is now
generally rejected, though the frequent use of a concept like “informal organization”
shows that there is as yet no real understanding of the clash of interests in industry.

If Mayo's misinterpretation is attributable to a normative (i.e. one-sided managerial)
evaluation of the industrial order, Parson's approach — and that of many others —
is strictly theoretical.7) His organization model derives directly from its general system
theory, which is based on an underlying “organismic” line of thought. As Gouldner
summarizes it, “organizational structures are viewed as spontaneously and homeostatic-
ally maintained. Changes in organizational patterns are considered the results of
cumulative, unplanned, adaptive responses to threats to the equilibrium of the system
as a whole. Responses to problems are thought of as taking the form of crescively
developed defense mechanisms and as being importantly shaped by shared values

3) Coser, op. cit.; Rex, op. cit.; R. Dahrendorf, Soziale Klassen und Klassenkonflikt in der
industriellen Gesellschaft. Stuttgart 1957; Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft und Freiheit. Zur sozio-
4) R. Dahrendorf, Out of utopia: toward a reorientation of sociological analysis. The American
Journal of Sociology, LXIV, 1958, 119; A. W. Gouldner, Reciprocity and autonomy in
functional theory. Symposium on sociological theory, ed. L. Gross. Evanston, Ill., White Plains,
5) Dahrendorf takes an extreme standpoint in suggesting that his theory of conflict presupposes
‘die ständige schöpferische Wirksamkeit sozialer Konflikt’; rightly called by Rex ‘an over-
emphasis in the other direction.’ Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft, 212; Rex, op. cit., 119.
6) F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, Management and the worker. Cambridge,
which are deeply internalized in the members." 8)

This interpretation of organizations is supported to some extent by the pretensions of the organizers, who claim to have constructed a fully integrated co-operative system for the pursuance of common goals, a system in which countervailing power is dangerous and dysfunctional and which is impervious to any disturbing influence from the environment. The real picture, however, is very different. For organizations are in fact full of antagonisms and tensions, and are deeply disturbed from time to time by more or less explosive conflicts. The point here is how this aspect of organizational reality is to be integrated into sociological theory.

II

It is not difficult, and it is certainly relevant, to reject the organismic concept of organization on the grounds of "man" himself. From the philosophical point of view there is no question of accepting the reduction of human beings to mere functional elements of a system. Man will always resist the artificial construct and will never become fully part of a superstructure.

In other words, the perfect society or institution, as organizations are thought to be, will never exist. It would presuppose perfect control of all the elements involved, and of all the relations between those elements, whereas uncertainty is, after all, the essence of human reality. That uncertainty leaves room for unanticipated change and uncontrollable conflict. In this conception, as formulated by Dahrendorf, the failure of perfect organization is symptomatic of "la condition humaine": "Gesellschaften bleiben menschliche Gesellschaften, insoweit sie das Unvereinbare in sich vereinen und den Widerspruch lebendig erhalten." 9)

Again, criticism of the organismic model, albeit in a milder form, is contained in the idea of the contradiction between man and organization as expressed by Chris Argyris: there is always, in his words, "a basic incongruency between the needs of a mature personality and the requirements of formal organization." 10) The danger of such general psychological statements, however, is that they tend to underestimate the cultural relativity of human behaviour. Anthropological research as well as recent experience with totalitarian systems indicate a very high degree of flexibility in this respect.

The main objection to each of these approaches is that it is difficult to arrive at sociological interpretations. Curiously enough, the psychologist starts from the actual existence of the closed, highly integrated organization and, in so doing, in fact legitimates this structure as a social phenomenon. The sociologist, on the other hand,

9) Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft, 130: "Unter diesen Bedingungen aber sind Konflikt und Wandel weit mehr als notwendige Übel. Wenn es richtig ist, dass Ungewissheit unsere Existenz in dieser Welt kennzeichnet, wenn also der Mensch als gesellschaftliches immer zugleich ein geschichtliches Wesen ist, dann bedeutet der Konflikt die grosse Hoffnung einer würdigen und rationalen Bewältigung des Lebens in Gesellschaft.
needs an approach combining both the processes of integration and differentiation and the elements of cooperation and conflict in one model.

If we define organizations as social systems we must avoid the organismic connotations of this concept. The basic structural condition for contradiction and conflict is a certain degree of independence of the constituent parts, no matter whether they are individual participants or subgroups. So by defining the organization strictly as a system of fully integrated parts or, to put it differently, of totally committed individuals, we cannot at the same time expect the occurrence of tensions between those parts, i.e. the participants. The organismic as well as the machine-model\textsuperscript{11)} of the organization are thus incompatible with a conflict-model.

Gouldner's concept of "functional autonomy" can be put to good use here.\textsuperscript{12)} He states that two key elements are involved in the concept of a social system, namely interdependence and self-maintenance. Not only the system as a whole, however, but each of the individual parts is expected to maintain its boundaries. In so far as those parts are likely to survive separation from the system, they have "functional autonomy".

The organization of a social system, including the formal organization concept, is usually defined as the integration of parts in connection with a common goal. Gouldner, however, states, that "organization" not only serves to link, control, and interrelate parts but also functions to separate them and to maintain and protect their functional autonomy. Organization is seen then as shaped by a conflict, particularly by the tensions between centripetal and centrifugal pressures, as limiting control over parts as well as imposing it, as establishing a balance between their dependence and independence, and as separating as well as connecting the parts.\textsuperscript{13)} This approach can be used for many subprocesses of organization. Firstly, organizations do indeed try to orient the efforts of all members toward a common goal, but this goal is divided into many different parts — "subgoal formation" — which are regarded as the legitimate focus for certain groups inside the total structure.

Secondly, the distribution of rewards is designed to overcome the variability of individual motivation. But even though "money is a very effective generalized means to a wide variety of specific goals", the employment contracts are often highly diversified and reward systems are rarely internally consistent,\textsuperscript{14)} which tends to stimulate the autonomous position of the organization members.

Thirdly, the existence of a formalized division of labour as such helps to establish


\textsuperscript{12)} Gouldner, Organizational analysis, 419ff.; Gouldner, Reciprocity, 252ff.

\textsuperscript{13)} Gouldner, Reciprocity, 257.

\textsuperscript{14)} March and Simon, op. cit., 126: 'One reason is that most systems are 'designed' by bargaining and piecemeal engineering in which consistency is not always a clearly recognized virtue. Another reason is that no single institution defines the reward system. As we have noted in earlier chapters, the formal hierarchy is not the only agency rewarding and punishing behavior.'
functional autonomy. The actual duties and responsibilities are focused on the smooth functioning of the whole, but they also serve to safeguard individual independence: specific duties imply specific rights, which means, that the employee's obligations to the organization are somehow limited.

Finally, hierarchization may be mentioned as a basic mechanism in the process of creating functional autonomy on the vertical levels. Though it is true that the power hierarchy restricts the subordinates' choice of behavior — that is, their independence — it is also true that the more formalized the hierarchical relations, the less likely the participants are to be exposed to unlimited obligations.

Regarded in this light, the organization is seen to consist of a combination of processes: the integration of the parts in the total system and, at the same time, the separation of the parts to protect their relative independence of the system. After all, this interpretation is only a more abstract way of defining phenomena found in all organizations, such as the tension between centralization and decentralization, between top and rank and file, and between departments. All in all, these tensions are directly related to the relative independence of the parts, which makes it possible to examine the connection between conflict and functional autonomy in general.

There is no simple, straightforward relation between the degree of functional autonomy in organizations and the frequency of intra-organizational conflict. Everyday experience has shown that close-knit unities, such as marriages, rural communities or political parties, may be wracked by antagonism and discord, while on the other hand loosely interconnected coalitions like many voluntary associations or political leagues may exist in perfect harmony. It may even be asserted that lack of social distance sometimes stimulates strife, a fact which has been pointed out, inter alia, by Simmel and Coser.15) It has been proved beyond all doubt, for instance, that the closer the departmental interconnections, the more likely they are to provoke conflict.16) But it is also true that heterogeneity within the organization leads to more frequent conflict, thus increasing the vulnerability of the system as a whole.17)

If the frequency of conflict is not affected by the degree of functional autonomy, the pattern of conflict is. A high degree of functional autonomy carries with it, as stated above, a chance for the sub-system to survive clashes with the whole. For there are resources which make it easier for it to accept conflicts and endure pressures. It can be predicted that such relatively independent participants will react more rationally and that conflict will be more "realistic": conflict is viewed as a means, not as an end in itself, or, to put it differently, "conflict is only one of several functional alternatives."18)

A low degree of functional autonomy, on the other hand, makes conflict the only way out of a difficult situation, since alternative means are usually lacking. In such

16) March and Simon, op. cit., 121ff.
cases, the lower toleration of the power-centre implies that the conflict will entail a much greater risk for the sub-system, which will not only be facing serious sanctions but will also be lacking the resources needed to withstand pressure. Conflicts arising in situations of this sort tend to be more non-realistic, "not occasioned by the rival ends of the antagonists, but by the need for tension release of at least one of them." 19) In addition, the conflict will be more contagious because of the interdependence of the parts, and will spread throughout the organization.

If these hypotheses are correct, we may expect to find a functional relation between pattern of organization and pattern of conflict. There is, on the one hand, a connection between the unit whose parts enjoy a considerable measure of functional autonomy — the coalition model — and a rational type of conflict. On the other hand, the closely integrated organization tends to provoke discord and more disruptive conflict: in other words, the dichotomy model. Both types of organization require some detailed comment and empirical evidence.

The coalition is a type of organization that may be defined as "a joint preference ordering" of a number of participants: "for a price, the employee adopts the "organizational" goal." 20) Once that agreement is established, the coalition may be treated as a single unit. The stabilization process will progress, since organizations have memories in the form of precedents: "as a result of organizational precedents, objectives exhibit much greater stability than would typify a pure bargaining situation. The "accidents" of organizational genealogy tend to be perpetuated." 21) This process of institutionalization never ends in a fully-integrated and interdependent system; it goes no further than semi-permanent arrangements. The existence of relatively autonomous sub-systems is characteristic of the coalition-model. Bargaining will be renewed from time to time, whereby the distribution of resources will be adapted to the changed power-relations between the parts of the system. In extreme cases, the participants will have only one interest in common: a concern for their survival as autonomous units.

The coalition is a familiar model in political theory, where it is connected with the power equilibrium of political parties and pressure groups and with the international balance of power. 22) But the classic pattern, involving markets, competition, bargaining and contract, comes from the sphere of economic life. It presupposes a high degree of consensus only in those areas relating to instrumental activities, so that it is typical of utilitarian organizations. 23)

19) Coser, op. cit., 49.
21) Cyert and March, op. cit., 85: 'Past bargains become precedents for present situations. A budget becomes a precedent for future budgets. An allocation of functions becomes a precedent for future allocations.'
22) Cf. Theodor Geiger's concept of 'intercursive power' and Parsons' concept of 'economic power' in contrast with 'integral' or 'political power'; J. A. A. van Doorn, Sociology and the problem of power. Sociologica Neerlandica, I, 1962/1963, 16ff., 34ff.
In any case, the enterprise may be regarded as a coalition, in that those who provide the capital and the entire personnel participate in the organization by contracting regularly alternated by bargaining. "Informal bargaining" sometimes takes place inside the plant, completing the "formal" bargaining process in the same way as "informal organization" completes the formal structure. On the internal market, various highly cohesive groups, often consisting of workers in key jobs, bargain consistently and skillfully in this way.

It is of course necessary to differentiate between the more and the less integrated enterprises. Only a minority accepts casual work or work on a contract basis under the pressure of workload cycles (seasonal work, building trade, dock work, etc.). Nowadays most workers show a marked preference for organizational continuity and stability. Dockwork is not the only occupational field in which "decasualization" is being attempted.

The coalition model is also found in other organizations. Armies, for instance, were based for centuries on explicit bargaining between governments and sub-contractors, and between the latter and the men they hired. The mercenary army was characterized by business-like contractual relations and the officer was essentially an entrepreneur.

The political scene in the United States furnishes us with another example of non-economic units organized as coalitions. The American parties are much more temporary associations of interest groups than are their counterparts in Europe. "The political system is saturated with the atmosphere of the market. Groups of electors and individual electors come to the political market with votes to sell in exchange for policies."

In this type of system, which is characterized either wholly or partly by a high degree of functional autonomy possessed by its sub-systems, conflict is clearly a realistic, rational and well-calculated means toward a specific end. The strike weapon is typical of the conflict pattern being, as it is in modern industry and as it was in the former mercenary army, a deliberate means of applying pressure to the other party without severing the ties with the organization.

Where the resources are inadequate, associations with other equally powerless individuals or groups are formed: the unions and the professional associations, for instance, which furnish both financial and moral support for the collectivity under pressure. As long as the antagonists do not lose sight of reality, the existence of the organization will not be endangered. We can even endorse Coser's statement that the continued incidence of conflict, criss-crossing as it does the modern large-scale organization, can prevent the formation of a united front. This conflict pattern may thus be said

to promote the stability of the organization.\textsuperscript{28)}

There is always a certain amount of unrest in coalitions, however, and troubles and difficulties are a common occurrence. But this situation is functional in that an organization of this sort must always be prepared to respond to new challenges.

Both the coalition-model and the bargaining pattern are typical of a social order with a strong emphasis on pragmatism and instrumentalism, placing a high premium on the success striving of individuals and groups.

\section*{IV}

The type of organization opposite to the coalition from the point of view of functional autonomy is the \textit{sect} and kindred groupings such as the \textit{social movement}, the small political party, the Kibbutz, and other highly cohesive ideological institutions.\textsuperscript{29)} They demand both a high degree and a wide range of consensus, any deviance from the central values being regarded as heresy and apostasy. Toleration of independence inside the group is minimal. Close control of behaviour is accepted by the members, who often seek to demonstrate their orthodoxy and loyalty to the cause.

The extremely low degree of independence accorded the participants both individually and collectively is consistent with the embryonic development of organization. Centralized formal authority, hierarchical and functional differentiation and official allocation are generally limited.\textsuperscript{30)} If the coalition is a marginal type of organization because of the overemphasized functional autonomy of its parts — to the point where there is danger of its disintegrating as a system — the sect is marginal because the outgrowth of organization is hindered by its over-accentuation of unity, loyalty, and homogeneity.

When tensions arise, the pattern tends to become one of extremely radical and, sometimes, ruthless internal conflict. The members' total involvement with their sect implies a total commitment to intrasect contradictions. This is due in part to the "objectification" of conflict\textsuperscript{31)} in collective values and an ideology which, transcending personal interests, provides the opponents with "a clear conscience" in defending their rights. But it is also partly due to the absence of organizational formalization, which fact stimulates the "total" character of intragroup strife.

Large goal-seeking social systems, including those of an ideological and instrumental nature, must, however, adopt a formal organizational pattern if they are to function smoothly and, often, to survive as a system. Though such organizations always imply some functional autonomy of the constituent parts, the degree of independence may be very restricted. Frequent interaction, close supervision, stern discipline, a pains-

\textsuperscript{28)} Coser, op. cit., 77.
\textsuperscript{29)} Etzioni, op. cit., 134ff.; Thompson, op. cit., 396ff.
\textsuperscript{30)} Thompson, op. cit., 397; Erzioni, op. cit., 5: 'Social movements are not organizations. They are not oriented to specific goals; their dominant subsystems are expressive and not instrumental; their is little segregation between the various institutional spheres; and there is no systematic division of labor, power, and communication. Nevertheless, most movements have an organizational core which does have all these characteristics of a typical organizational structure.'
\textsuperscript{31)} Coser, op. cit., 112.
taking system of controls and a high visibility of behaviour and norms, with its consequent continual reference processes amongst the members, all combine to form a body of forces directed against any effort the participants might make to gain some measure of independence for themselves or for their subgroups. Nonconformity is necessarily "dysfunctional" in organizations of this sort.

The concept of unity of command, which is common in this type of organization, can take no account of non-hierarchical authority. In fact, all specialization is ignored and claims to authority based on expertise are denied. Grievance procedures may be institutionalized, but the managers tend to regard the process as incompatible with the principle of the chain of command. The bargaining process is equally difficult to accept, for the very existence of bargaining is seen as an acknowledgement and legitimation of a heterogeneity of goals in the organization.

Given, however, the multitude of goals, the complicated technology and skill structure, and, in general, the highly differentiated labour force in all large-scale organizations, the amount of latent tension and antagonism and the potential for feelings of relative deprivation and frustration are enormous. Where there is a certain amount of toleration this stress will be expressed in numerous open conflicts cutting through all official and unofficial distinctions. If all conflict is suppressed there are grounds for fearing the development of a dichotomous structure, a splitting of the organization into two hostile camps.

Such a dichotomy is always a simplified social structure. It is the expression of a situation full of uncertainty and impotence. The factual differentiation in the group is submerged in a collective feeling of frustration; the lack of homogeneity is outweighed by the common grievances. The conflict pattern is both explosive and non-realistic, for lacking in the resources needed to withstand pressure from the outside, having had no experience in handling conflict and being without a stable "combat" organization, the insurgent party reacts erratically and aggressively.

The people who are most homogeneous in social position, and who share interests and experience, will react strongly collectively. The lower participants are particularly sensitive to what Sayles had termed the "resonance factor": "Any individual’s feelings are multiplied in an environment of likeminded fellows." Resonance is simply another word for the contagiousness of tension on closely integrated units.

The classic example of this kind of conflict is what is known as the class struggle between capitalists and proletarians. Here we can observe the dichotomous situation in optima forma: a cleavage along class lines absorbing all loyalty and energy, full of nonrealistic conflict that explodes and expands without rational calculation and, being unanticipated, is difficult to prevent. Even today, when bargaining procedures are employed to limit the overt and aggressive conflict between these two parties, European


33) March and Simon, *op. cit.*, 131; Thompson, *Hierarchy*, 521: "To legitimate conflict would be inconsistent with the monocratic nature of hierarchy."

34) Coser, *op. cit.*, 77ff.

labour still retains a dichotomous image of the society at large, which is an important determining factor as regards participation in industrial organizations. In addition to this type of organization, there is a whole range of coercive institutions which as such feature a dichotomous structure. They include custodial mental hospitals, approved schools, prisons, relocation centres, concentration camps and some types of armies. The cleavage between the lower participants and their superiors is deliberately created and maintained in these organizations, for the whole institution is directed towards the fulfilment of one major task, that of keeping the inmates in. This dichotomy allows very little opportunity for the adoption of secondary organizational functions, such as therapy, resocialization and education. The behaviour of the lower participants is entirely shaped by the imposed controls, which explains their use of the well-known strategy of withdrawal: quota restriction in industry, goldbricking in the armed forces, "playing it cool" in total institutions, to mention a few instances. It is the only way out for powerless participants in organizations.

In other cases the conflict takes place at the level where general planning and detailed execution meet. Both functions require some autonomy of the relevant parts of the system. "From a functional point of view", Feld says, "armies may be regarded as composed of two distinct semi-autonomous organizations, each with its particular operational code. Military art (or science) recognizes such a dichotomy in its division of the conduct of war under the two headings of strategy and tactics." The latent antagonism between the occupants of both types of position becomes evident when strategic decisions make no allowance for the tactical conditions under which the battle has to be fought. The Great War offers numerous examples of this dissociation of strategic and tactical thought, provoking dangerous tensions and even, on a few occasions, rebellion. This example is an extreme instance of the antagonism between planning department and shop floor which has often been analysed in economic organizations.

It is an accepted fact that conflict creates associations and increases the internal cohesion of social systems. Conversely, changes in organizational structure do have an immediate effect on the pattern of conflict. There is some sort of internal antagonism in all organizations, but the type of conflict varies according to the type of organization. As has already been stated, the degree of functional autonomy is a basic determinant in the formation of the conflict pattern. This being so, changes in the degree of functional autonomy imply a shift in the conflict pattern. We shall now proceed to examine this process in the sect and the coalition.

36) Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft, 163ff.
The development of the sect and the "movement" has often been described in terms of a differentiation model, which assumes that the existing system was already functionally complete at the embryonic stage; after that, it merely becomes structurally differentiated.

This "preformist" concept of social change is useful in analysing the gradual progress of the organization pattern from its originally fully cohesive units. Studies of the development of religious sects, for instance, show an increase in formalization of division of labour, the rise of an elite, the establishment of a hierarchy and, sometimes, social strata.

We find another example of "secularization" in the development of early social movements in the direction of more instrumental organizations. Socialism is a case in point. The first stage, with its charismatic leaders, tendency towards hero worship, emotional response of the masses and primitive, sometimes ad hoc organization, was followed by the emergence of professional leaders, bureaucratization, hierarchization and, finally, the building of a "party machine".

The old pattern was often characterized by personal rivalries between the leaders, a fierce rejection of heretics (Bakunin, Trotzky) and emotional support as well as emotional resistance from the rank and file. Gradually, as the religious sect becomes a church, and the political movement a party, the conflict pattern changes. On the one hand, totalitarian tendencies suppress overt protest from the members, so that a dichotomy between clergy and laity, between party oligarchy and rank and file, comes into being. The necessary consensus is guaranteed by an unceasing flow of propaganda and continuous indoctrination. The rigidity of such systems is evident in times of accelerated social change.

Slackening of this ideological control paves the way for the other pattern, the coalition, and for a mildly dichotomous structure. Many parties, unions and denominations are dependent on the voluntary support of their followers. The leaders are obliged to ask for votes of confidence, and, in their role of supplicant, stress their external success in justification of their leadership position. "The officials must harmonize various pressures which are focused upon them in the bargaining process. These pressures emanate from a complex of political relationships surrounding the officials; relationships with the rank and file, with the employers, with other organizational levels of the union, with the rest of the labor movement, and with the government."

The real struggle for power is now limited to infrequent membership voting. The leadership succession is regulated by cooptation. The leaders want to stay in office and normally succeed in doing so, but at the same time they have to pay careful attention to the pressures emanating from the relationships with the rank and file, with the employers, with other organizational levels of the union, with the rest of the labor movement, and with the government.

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attention to the climate in the organization and to the rise of dissenting groups. The conflict pattern matches this situation in that it is both rational and realistic. The opposition has the right to be heard, and is often roused to avail itself of this right, while the leaders feel secure in their monopoly of information and in the substantial financial and moral resources at their disposal.

One danger to which the coalition is always exposed is that one of the participating groups will gradually gain more and more power and will eventually succeed in dominating the others. The "horizontal" power structure develops in a "vertical" power relation. This process is frequently observed in economic and political "markets", where a tendency toward monopolization is apparent. Coalitions, however, have received a great deal less attention. The increasing dominance of one of the earliest partners nevertheless illustrates clearly enough how the process in organizational coalitions takes its course.

In politics, the formation of European states, which has been the subject of sociological analysis by Elias and Von Borch, is an excellent example of the process, whereby a number of more or less independent units inevitably become involved in a centripetal movement from which only one, or at most a few, emerge as the power-holders. The emergence of one supreme power centre based on a monopoly of taxes and force laid the foundations for the later state order. Former competitors — the nobility — now found themselves deprived of their functional autonomy and assumed the role of court aristocracy, occupying hierarchical positions that were clearly subordinate to that of the monarch.

This transition from competition to power hierarchy is formulated in general terms in Rex' theory of conflict. The ruling-class situation can only be understood when viewed as the result of a struggle between two or more groups with conflicting aims. The plural society contains a number of interest groups; when the balance of power becomes uneven, one of them emerges as the ruling class.

Etzioni has analysed the same process of unification in terms of a gradual accumulation, which is either the formation of a new community under the guidance of the most powerful unit (Prussia in Germany) or a merger of a number of units, each contributing a more or less equal part (the Scandinavian Union).

As far as formal organizations are concerned, this process has seldom been studied by sociologists. A merger of enterprises or associations would prove a good subject for the investigation of this sort. The gradual organizational integration of the professions is another example of a pattern of fusion. Many organizations may eventually be expected to combine professional and bureaucratic models, which will in turn necessitate the adoption of procedures to segregate the tasks and relations with

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45) Elias, op. cit., 123ff, speaks, therefore, of 'Konkurrenzkämpfe' and 'Monopolmechanismus.'

46) Rex, op. cit., 122ff.

47) Etzioni, Epigenesis, 409ff.
greater functional autonomy from those with less.48) Changes brought about in the type of conflict by the gradual progressive dichotomization of coalitions differ according to the degree of functional autonomy of the parts. If the new formation tolerates a certain autonomy of sub-systems that were formerly fully independent, e.g. the older professions in organizations, tension will be limited. In newly-emergent states, however, strong centralization gives rise to fierce conflict and even civil war. The individual parts will cease their resistance only when the newer power centre succeeds in creating an ideology for the whole nation. Generally speaking, the formation of two opposite parties locked in a struggle on fundamental interests will replace the older conflict pattern with its numerous contradictions and tensions which sometimes flare up into open violence, and sometimes are resolved by bargaining. Though the rise of a dominant power does stimulate the integration of the system, it also stimulates the tension pattern, which will now be concentrated on the struggle for or against the new power centre. That struggle will decide whether the units concerned are to be dependent or autonomous and will be waged with all the means at the antagonists' disposal, many of which will tend to extremism.

If, on the other hand, unification progresses slowly and lacks a dominant force, the coalition pattern will not change until integration is complete. The functional autonomy of the parts, however restricted, may be expected to continue under the new conditions.

VI

The sect, the coalition and the dichotomy are, of course, abstract models. Many mixed forms exist in social reality, which is attributable in part to their intertwined lines of development and in general to the fact that they are forced to accept compromise. The coalition model underestimates the tendency of conflicts to coalesce; the dichotomy underemphasizes the extent to which parts of a system may remain unaffected by general contradictions.

The modern history of industrial relations is one of repeated open conflict, bargaining and truce. No truce is ever more than a partial victory, and it may be rejected by others as an intolerable compromise. It is the starting point for a renewed bargaining process, opening up a limited area of cooperation between the parties. At a certain point the arrangement ends in a final truce between the opponents and a new institution, key stone of a new order, comes into being.49) Consensus and contradictions are found side by side in most organizations. Research on the armed forces shows different patterns of agreement between officers and privates, and non-coms and privates. The officer tends to approve a more "official" attitude on the part of the non-com than does the private, who exhibits the opposite tendency in expecting informal cooperation from the non-com in side-stepping


regulations.\textsuperscript{50}) The evaluation and resolution of conflict are evidently related to hierarchical level in the organization.

It may be concluded from secondary analysis of this material that consensus on, for instance, the goals of the army is much greater than on hierarchical relations. "There is virtual agreement among the two status groups on matters not involving the hierarchy of which they are a part." \textsuperscript{51) }

The lower, dependent participants are never altogether powerless, even in strongly coercive organizations. On the one hand, they always have their own means (information, instrumentalities) of influencing those in higher positions, while on the other hand the latter develop what Gouldner terms an "indulgency" pattern in their relations with their subordinates.\textsuperscript{52) }

Bargaining is normal, even in prisons, so that the inmates' dependency, though formally complete, is in fact to some extent limited.

If the combination of dependence and autonomy, of truce and antagonism is replaced by the formation of two hostile camps, the existence of the organization is in real danger.

A situation of this sort is caused by a number of factors. First of all, the membership is divided into two homogeneous groups. Heterogeneity, with its neutralizing influence, has disappeared, and an ingroup-outgroup dichotomy takes the place of a multiplicity of subgroups.

Secondly, the two parties are homogeneous not only as occupants of organizational positions, but also in their "latent social identities", that is, identities that are not prescribed as relevant to formal organizations.\textsuperscript{50}) Those identities are a source of strain in all organizations, but if they add to the organizational dichotomy by introducing collective antagonism from the larger society, it becomes impossible for the unifying forces inside the organization to control the conflict. The influence of the class struggle on internal labour relations is a well-known example of the function of latent patterns.

Thirdly, the opposing parties can be supported by resources and groups outside the organization, by unions, for instance, political parties or press agencies. Strikes are no longer the manifestation of a dispute between management and personnel, but between organized capital and organized labour.

It is to these three tendencies that much of the disruptive nature of conflict can be attributed. Such conflict becomes "total", thus endangering the continued existence of the organization, which is a segmentary institution. It goes beyond the control mechanism of the organization and is then likely to destroy the whole system.


\textsuperscript{53) Gouldner,} Organizational analysis, 412; Thompson, Organizational management, 393.
The pluralistic social order of democratic societies is a major safeguard against total conflict. Paradoxically, the high incidence of conflict in our society guarantees the stability of that society and the continued existence of its many segmentary institutions.