

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

approaches concepts hypotheses

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**POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY:
APPROACHES, CONCEPTS,
HYPOTHESES**

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PREFACE

In no known human society have all individuals or all groups been treated as equals. In all societies, to some extent, existing inequalities in social advantages, and often inequalities in social rights, are the results of the use of power and authority.

People are most likely to raise questions about the system of social inequality within which they have been living during periods of rapid and extensive social change. Because social inequality is tied to power and authority, it is during such times that political theory emerges. For example, Plato's political thought appeared during the breakdown of tribalism and the emergence of the urban community and the state. This transformation meant that the relatively simple choice of conformity with or deviation from received social rules was replaced by the more complex problem of deciding what social rules to live by. The Greeks of Plato's time began to ask: What is the right way? What is justice? Are there any limits to the rules we can make? Who should govern? How should social rewards be distributed?¹

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe, the growth of science, the development of an industrial and commercial middle class, and the Protestant Reformation undermined the authority of the Catholic church, which had served as the cultural and social foundation of medieval society. Significant political theory was produced during this period. Philosophers raised questions about the validity of received opinion and about the long-existing structure of social inequality. They began to

investigate empirically the physical and social spheres with a view to making them better places for human beings.²

The central ideas of late-nineteenth-century Western European political thought were forged as attempts to understand the major transformations that followed the French Revolution and the industrial revolution and to argue for the desirability of various alternative forms of social-political organization. Modern sociology has its origins within this body of thought.

The history of the United States also shows periods of vast social change during which prevailing structures of social inequality underwent the scrutiny of political theorists. The events of the first two decades of this century, when a rural and religious society was rapidly becoming urban, industrial, and secular, generated discussion of the social and political role of science. The Great Depression and the world wars raised questions about social inequalities associated with capitalism and economic individualism, about political responses to social and economic problems in the form of the New Deal, and about the stability and maintenance of Western industrial democracies. The investigation of these and related topics was the overriding concern of American sociologists from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s. To a considerable extent the analytic approaches of American sociologists to these problems were influenced by their late “discovery” and reinterpretation of the writings of Western European theorists of the preceding century.

Throughout the world, from the early 1960s and into the early 1970s, major challenges were made to systems of social inequality and to the uses of power and authority associated with them. Internationally, this was seen in the rise and continuing transformations of the nations of the Third World. In the United States the civil rights, student, antiwar, feminist, antinuclear, and other movements made an impact on society. These challenges influenced the subject matter of American sociology as topics such as the abuse of power, social conflict, and large-scale social change became widely discussed. The attention paid to these topics was highlighted by the Watergate scandals, public disclosures of various covert activities of the CIA, the FBI, and the military, and by growing public awareness of the role played by multinational corporations in domestic and international political affairs.

In this historical perspective, political concerns from the mid-1970s to the present appear to be rather parochial and nondramatic. Despite continuing violence in Northern Ireland, revolutions and wars in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, and shifting relationships among the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, the attention of most Americans, including many sociologists who study politics, has focused largely on matters of domestic political economy—determining the size and composition of the public budget, controlling inflation through regulatory mechanisms, distributing public goods and services, and redistributing in-

come. Such relatively placid concerns are in fact linked to the more dramatic international political realities of the recent past. They are also linked to some major institutional changes that have occurred in the United States during the period, and they raise again some of the basic questions of political sociology. In one way or another, all of the concerns involve social inequalities and the uses of power and authority which created, have maintained, or can change them.

This book is an attempt to present some of what is known about power and authority. It seeks to offer a reasonably systematic interpretation of political sociology—a particular type of approach to understanding these topics. The basic thesis developed on the following pages is that political sociology can be identified as a set of intellectual concerns which originated in classical Greece, which were reintroduced during the Enlightenment, but which found their first widely influential modern expression in late-nineteenth-century political theory. These concerns center on relations of power and authority, particularly as these influence and are influenced by kinship, religion, class, interest groups of various kinds, and by shared beliefs and values. They involve questions about the ways in which family, church, class, and associations operate to create, maintain, and change the social distribution of rights and privileges through political activities.

Part One of this book identifies political sociology's central approaches and concepts. Chapter One identifies the major contributions of three of political sociology's theoretical forebears: Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim. Chapter Two analyzes the ways in which the approaches, concepts, and hypotheses they introduced underwent certain modifications such that present-day formulations of their insights are quite different from those which were originally proposed. The chapter also discusses political sociology's future and its relationship to its origins and to its historical pattern of development. Chapter Three summarizes six well-known discussions of the subject matter, theoretical origins, and patterns of development of the field and compares and contrasts these with the viewpoint developed in this book.

Parts Two and Three describe some of political sociology's major substantive findings. Chapters Four, Five, and Six present the results of social-psychological research dealing with the question of who gets involved in political life and why. The chapters discuss both political support of and political challenge to systems of social inequality. Chapters Seven and Eight review findings on the structural and cultural conditions of democratic and nondemocratic political systems. Research in both of these sections is discussed in light of the view of political sociology and its history developed in section 1.

The Postscript sets forth a view of the analytic, practical, and moral significance of political sociology. Whatever one's position on these matters,

it is clear that the topics of power, authority, and social inequality are far from irrelevant to most people.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to several people who helped greatly in the long process of writing this book. My colleague Reece McGee helped keep the faith in the project even through the dark hours when there seemed to be no light at the end of any tunnel. Jeffrey Goldfarb of the New School For Social Research, Thomas Guterbock of the University of Virginia, and David Knoke of Indiana University all offered countless valuable suggestions for the organization of the manuscript and provided useful ideas for errors to eliminate, topics to include, and references to consider. Doris Fultz and Kay Solomon of Purdue's Social Research Institute always had the manuscript typed and ready when needed.

P.C.W.

NOTES TO THE PREFACE

1. Alvin W. Gouldner, *Enter Plato: Classical Greece and the Origins of Social Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1965).
2. Reinhard Bendix, "The Age of Ideology: Persistent and Changing," in *Ideology and Discontent*, D. Apter, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 294-328.

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PART ONE
THE FIELD
OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL ORIGINS: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARX, WEBER, AND DURKHEIM

LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY THOUGHT

The latter part of the eighteenth century was a period of vast social and intellectual change in Western Europe. The French Revolution and the beginnings of industrialization, both of which drastically disturbed existing social and political hierarchies, raised again many of the issues discussed earlier by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. One set of questions centers on the importance of tradition in the patterning of human affairs. What roles, if any, are kinship, religion, class, and other social relationships to play in the determination of the social rewards people receive and the part they take in making the decisions about the social rules under which they are to live? A second set of questions concerns social change. Since social structures are apparently so capable of drastic change, do past changes exhibit any regularities on the basis of which some future changes may be anticipated? To what extent is a single individual or group of individuals capable of initiating significant change in the structure of their society? What, if any, importance is to be attributed to people's ideas and ideals in the process of social and political change?

The writings of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim represent attempts to deal with these two related sets of questions. While similar questions had been raised by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, among many others, it was the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophers such as Montesquieu and Rousseau, rapidly followed by the

sweeping social changes introduced by the French Revolution and the industrialization of Western Europe, that crystallized the issues with which these late-nineteenth-century analysts were to concern themselves.

In their writings Marx, Weber, and Durkheim introduced approaches, concepts, and hypotheses that remain central to political sociology. To cite some examples, Marx's discussion of *alienation*, Weber's characterization of *bureaucracy*, and Durkheim's consideration of *anomie* each continues to stimulate numerous studies of political phenomena. Researchers still investigate relationships, suggested by Marx, between aspects of economic systems and aspects of political systems; relationships between democracy and bureaucracy suggested by Weber; relationships between an increase in the degree of social interaction and political specialization suggested by Durkheim. Marx's view of social change as proceeding from contradictions inherent in economic structures, Weber's description of *rationalization*, and Durkheim's functional analysis of social institutions each provides an approach capable of yielding new insights into political stability and political change. These examples only begin to suggest the range of valuable analytic tools and insights that the three theorists have provided political sociologists. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an examination of their contributions.

Before proceeding, however, a number of common elements in their writings should be indicated. First, each theorist focuses primarily on macroanalytic problems; that is, each tends to concentrate on discussions of nation, class, or organization rather than on considerations of the individual or of the small face-to-face group. The concepts mentioned above can serve as illustrations. In his discussion of the alienation of the worker from the means of production, Marx is not considering the problems of separate individuals that stem from special features of their private experiences but the problem of a whole social class which derives from its location in social structure.¹ Weber's writings on bureaucracy are not primarily devoted to considerations of problems concerning the relationship between certain types of social roles and individual personalities but to analyses of the qualities of a historically unique authority system and the transformations this system has introduced in modern societies. For Durkheim, *anomie* refers to a state of social disorganization in which the social guides for conduct are unclear. The concept, as introduced by Durkheim, is explicitly not to be understood as referring to the acts of individuals or to a psychological state of individual persons.

A second similarity lies in their historical-comparative perspective. This refers simultaneously to the manner in which the theorists characteristically go about defining their concepts and to the process of explanation each commonly, though by no means exclusively, employs. Marx, Weber, and Durkheim often take considerable care to point out the historical specificity of the concepts they introduce. Modern alienation refers to a condi-

tion of a particular class of individuals in a historically unique type of society. Marx describes the alienated condition produced by capitalism by contrasting the situation of workers in capitalist societies with that of people living under the conditions of feudalism and primitive communism. Bureaucracy refers to a uniquely modern mode of the social relations of work developed in the West which, Weber thinks, can best be understood by contrast to that organization of work relationships found in traditional, non-Western societies such as India and China. Durkheim's discussions of anomie center on its description as a peculiarly modern social fact, most clearly comprehended by contrast to the social organization of traditional societies.

The three theorists tend to favor historical explanations. That is, they set out to explain why it is that a given subject of study has certain characteristics by describing how the subject evolved out of some earlier one. The objective of this pattern of explanation is to establish the sequence of major events through which some earlier system has been transformed into a later one. The same three concepts which are used above for illustrative purposes can serve here as well. Much of Marx's analysis of the alienation of the working class in capitalist societies consists in locating its historical sources in the breakdown of feudalism. Weber views bureaucracy as an administrative structure which arises subsequent to the disintegration of traditional or charismatic systems due to certain inherent incapacities of these systems. Durkheim's explanation of anomie consists of an analysis of the loosening of the social bonds which served to integrate premodern societies.

A third similarity in the interests of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim is implicit in the preceding—a basic concern with social change. Central to Marx's theory of social change is the notion that history proceeds from conflict between classes generated by contradictions inherent in the economic structures of all previously existing societies. While Weber does not present an explicit and elaborate theory of change comparable to that of Marx, his interest in this topic is nonetheless present. Bureaucracy, for example, is an expression of rationalization which has differentiated Western societies from non-Western societies and from their own traditional past. Central to Durkheim's sociology is his analysis of the transformation of traditional societies and an investigation of bases for the integration of the newly emerging industrial systems. Anomie refers to the state of social disorganization which accompanied this transformation prior to the development of a moral basis for the new industrial life.

Each of the three theorists also has as a major objective the elaboration of a set of hypotheses which are applicable across national boundaries. For example, certain relationships Marx notes between economy and polity are intended as assertions about processes operative in all societies at specific stages in their historical development. Weber's contentions concerning

the democratizing implications of bureaucratic development are intended to hold for all Western societies. Durkheim's claims about the relationship between *dynamic density* and the development of the division of labor are clearly intended to be universally applicable.

While the interests of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim do exhibit these broad similarities, it must be recognized that even with respect to these, differences in approach are present. Even though the concerns of each are predominantly macroanalytic, Marx tends to focus on social classes, Weber on social institutions, and Durkheim on the division of labor and problems of normative order. Each theorist introduces many of his central concepts through the use of historical contrasts. However, they are far from showing an equal interest in presenting laws of social development. Marx's dialectic theory specifically centers on a discussion of societal change. Weber's discussion of rationalization focuses more on the differentiation of Western from non-Western societies than on the dynamics of change in Western societies. Durkheim concentrates on the bases of social stability and on establishing an appropriate moral foundation for the incipient order of Western Europe. These and other differences in approach, as well as the differences which divide them on many substantive questions, should be apparent in the following descriptions of some of the central ideas each has contributed to political sociology.

KARL MARX (1818–1883)

Karl Marx's interests were both in describing, explaining, and predicting aspects of the social world and in changing many of the contemporary social structures and processes about which he wrote. His importance to political sociology lies not only in the rich conceptual and theoretical materials he presents, but also in the fact that his writings continue to play an important role in the political lives of many nations. Any description and/or explanation of the political structures and processes of these nations requires at least some reference to his thought.

An Overview of Marx's Social Thought

People continuously modify and change the tools they use and the activities they perform in transforming the physical world to meet their needs. According to Marx, as people alter these tools and productive activities they also necessarily change their relationships to one another. The technological means of production determine the relationships which workers form to produce goods more effectively than they could if acting separately.

The relationships of individuals to each other with respect to the materials, the instruments, and the products of work determine the general character of their social, political, and intellectual life. For any given society at any point in its history, the basic features of its political and religious institutions, its laws, morality, science, philosophy, and art are determined by the kind of social relations of production that prevail. This is Marx's basic postulate of *historical materialism*. People's ideas and ideals, by themselves, have little impact on the social conditions under which they live. Rather, it is their social life or, more specifically, the social relationships they establish in the process of production which ultimately shape their beliefs and their goals.

Marx's phrase "social relations of production" refers to property relations—ownership or lack of ownership of the materials and tools of production. Marx directs attention to the relationships within and between sets of persons who own productive property and sets of persons who do not own the means of production. While the specific work people do may have some influence upon their beliefs, attitudes, and actions, it is their status as owners or nonowners of the means of production that is of fundamental importance.

Marx distinguishes four systems of relations of production which have existed up to the present: primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, and capitalism. While influential views on each of these are developed, it is Marx's analysis of capitalism which has had the greatest impact on political sociology. Capitalism, in Marx's view, is a system of production under which the direct producers own no portion of the raw materials or of the tools with which they work, or of the goods which they produce. They are makers of commodities, that is, objects for sale in a market to be purchased and consumed by others. These commodities are produced for purposes of profit of those who own the means of production. Workers are formally free to sell their services to anyone; labor itself is a commodity in the capitalist system.

During the first phase of capitalism, which prevailed in Western Europe roughly from the middle of the sixteenth to the last third of the eighteenth century, the owners of the means of production hired the services of a number of handicraft workers. Each worker carried out similar activities; each completed every stage in the manufacture of a product. Eventually, however, an elaborate division of labor emerged. Each worker became responsible for the manufacture of some one part of a commodity, and increasingly specialized tools were developed to facilitate the manufacture of each part. While at this historical state the worker was still a craftsman, he no longer shaped a product which reflected his talent alone. The worker thereby lost another kind of control over the products of his labor and the personal significance of his work again was reduced.

Marx maintains that the value of a commodity is determined by the

amount of socially necessary labor time required for its production, that is, the amount of labor time required given the skills, technology, and intensity of effort on the part of workers that can be expected at a given time. Labor itself is a commodity the value of which is determined, like the value of any other commodity, by the amount of socially necessary labor time required to produce it. However, unlike other commodities, labor creates more value than it itself is worth. That is, the capitalist buys the worker's labor power for a wage which is less than the new value produced by this worker.

Capitalism is the modern form of exploitation. Under it the unjust treatment of the workers is simply more subtle than it was under slavery or feudalism. While the owners of the means of production appear to pay workers for their labor, in reality they pay them less than the value of that work. Whether under slavery, feudalism, or capitalism, the owners of the means of production take for themselves the profit created by the exploitation of the direct producers.

Constantly increasing the profit of the bourgeoisie, the ownership class, is the aim of capitalist production. Because exploitation of workers is the source of their profit, capitalists are encouraged to get as much labor time from their workers as possible. When, at some point, a capitalist is no longer able to get still more labor time from his workers and thus is not able to increase production and profits and meet competition, he must make a proportionately greater investment in machines.

The second phase of capitalist production emerged at the end of the eighteenth century with the increasing use of mechanical means of production. Workers ceased to be craftsmen and became machine operators. With technological advances, a few comparatively unskilled laborers could manufacture in a short time what required considerable time of skilled artisans. Consequently, with the emergence of industrial capitalism and the factory, competition between workers for increasingly scarce and decreasingly skilled jobs became greater and greater.

Although in this second phase of capitalism workers are formally free to dispose of their labor, conditions are such that the choice is really between taking any available employment or starving. The workers' relation to the owners of the means of production is impersonal and indirect. Rather than cooperating as fellow workers, they are forced by industrial capitalism to compete with each other. Rather than directing the manufacture of a product, workers are limited to the operating requirements of the machines with which they work. In sum, under the conditions of industrial capitalism, workers control neither raw materials, nor tools, nor the making of products, nor their relations to others (whether owners or fellow laborers), nor the conditions of work, nor the manner in which they are to dispose of their own labor power.

Industrial capitalism results in the alienation of the workers. By this