



## Some Remarks on "The Social System"

David Lockwood

*The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (Jun., 1956), pp. 134-146.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0007-1315%28195606%297%3A2%3C134%3ASRO%22SS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-R>

*The British Journal of Sociology* is currently published by The London School of Economics and Political Science.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/lonschool.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# Some Remarks on “The Social System”

DAVID LOCKWOOD

---

IN the “statement of general sociological theory” which is *The Social System*,[1] Professor Parsons has attempted to sift and summarize in systematic form the significant lessons of past thinking in sociology and set out a programme for the future. This enterprise is the product of a steady and consistent growth reaching back some twenty years to his initial study of eminent sociological theorists in *The Structure of Social Action*. The intention of the present essay, however, is not to give an exposition of the Parsonian system of sociology,[2] but to develop in some detail specific criticisms which might be levelled against his conceptualization of the dynamics of social systems, and, more particularly, of societies. To treat of such a large subject within so small a space is no doubt unwise in one sense; in another it is an incentive to delineate more sharply what is at issue. In particular, emphasis will be placed on the non-normative elements of social action which seem to constitute a set of variables which Parsons has ignored by concentrating on the normative elements of social structure and process. This omission may be interpreted as an accomplishment since it is the means of giving sociology a more definite status as a special social science; but whether it is a position that can be maintained in practice without inconsistency is open to severe doubt, or so it seems to the writer. This much of the vein of criticism may be anticipated.

## I

In this section are to be considered those propositions put forward in *The Social System* and elsewhere [3] which illustrate Parsons’ analysis of social dynamics. It is impossible to do justice in so short a space to the elaborate development and application of the conceptual scheme, of which the following outline is a mere skeleton. Thus most of what is subsequently said is not in criticism of what has been substantively accomplished within a given framework, but rather questions the appropriateness of the framework that is given. In so far as misunderstanding has not occurred, the criticism concerns what has not, rather than what has been done.

For Parsons, the social system is a system of action. It is made up of the interactions of individuals. Of special concern to sociology is the fact that such interactions are not random but mediated by common standards of evaluation. Most important among these are moral standards, which may be called norms.[4] Such norms "structure" action. Because individuals share the same "definition of the situation" in terms of such norms, their behaviour can be intermeshed to produce a "social structure". The regularity, or patterning, of interaction is made possible through the existence of norms which control the behaviour of actors. Indeed, a stabilized social system is one in which behaviour is regulated in this way, and, as such, is a major point of reference for the sociological analysis of the dynamics of social systems.[5] It is necessary in sociology, as in biology, to single out relatively stable points of reference, or "structural" aspects of the system under consideration, and then to study the processes whereby such structures are maintained. This is the meaning of the "structural-functional" approach to social system analysis. Since the social system is a system of action, and its structural aspects are the relatively stable interactions of individuals around common norms, the dynamic processes with which the sociologist is concerned are those which function to maintain social structures, or, in other words, those processes whereby individuals come to be motivated to act in conformity with normative standards.

The equilibrium of social systems is maintained by a variety of processes and mechanisms, and their failure precipitates varying degrees of disequilibrium (or disintegration). The two main classes of mechanisms by which motivation is kept at the level and in the direction necessary for the continuing operation of the social system are the mechanisms of socialization and social control.[6]

The mechanism of socialization is the process by which individuals come to incorporate the normative standards of the society into their personalities; the process of social control is concerned with the regulation of the behaviour of adults who have undergone socialization and are yet motivated to nonconformity.

Although sociological analysis focusses on the dynamic processes which tend to stabilize the social system, "if theory is *good theory*, there is no reason whatever to believe that it will not be *equally* applicable to the problems of change and to those of process within a stabilized system".[7] Or again, so far as the social system is concerned, the "obverse of the analysis of the mechanisms by which it is maintained is the analysis of the forces which tend to alter it. *It is impossible to study one without the other.* . . . In principle, propositions about the factors making for the maintenance of the system are at the same time propositions about those making for change." [8] In the most general terms, then, the two major threats to a given social system are infants who have not been socialized, and individuals who are motivated to deviance or nonconformity. Since the first of these requires no special sociological explanation as a source of instability, interest must focus on the nature of deviance. Here Parsons is not so much concerned with the sources of deviance [9] as with the modes of deviant reactions in terms of the personality

mechanisms involved.[10] Pressures making for deviance are regarded as being a matter for investigation in each empirical situation as it arises. In general, there are no social processes, corresponding to those stabilizing mechanisms outlined above, which systematically make for deviance and social change.

## II

Although it would be tempting to begin the criticism of such a conceptual scheme by questioning the validity of some particular assumption, such as the existence of a common value system, or the meaning given to the concept of social structure, it is more rewarding to begin by asking a rather more general question. It is true to say that in principle the concepts with which we try to analyse the dynamics of social systems ought to be equally applicable to the problems of stability and instability, continuance and change of social structures ; but this does not necessarily hold true of a particular conceptual scheme such as the one outlined above. It would not hold unless general concepts had been developed which would enable us to take any concrete social system and grasp the balance of forces at work in it. We may ask, therefore, is there anything about the framework just described which would suggest that a certain class of variables, vital to an understanding of the general problem—why do social structures persist and change—has in fact been ignored ?

I believe there is. The first point of note in this connection is that Parsons' array of concepts is heavily weighted by assumptions and categories which relate to the role of *normative* elements in social action, and especially to the processes whereby motives are structured normatively to ensure social stability. On the other hand, what may be called the *substratum* [11] of social action, especially as it conditions interests which are productive of social conflict and instability, tends to be ignored as a general determinant of the dynamics of social systems. For the moment, the substratum of social action may be defined as the factual disposition of means in the situation of action which structures differential *Lebenschancen* and produces interests of a non-normative kind—that is, interests other than those which actors have in conforming with the normative definition of the situation.[12] Although, according to Parsons, such interests must be integrated with the normative patterns governing behaviour in a stabilized social system, it is inherent in the conception of deviance and social instability that non-normative interests have to be treated as a discrete and independent category in sociological analysis.[13] What then is the status of these non-normative elements in the analysis of social action ? Is it useful to distinguish between norm and substratum as general points of reference in dynamic analysis ? If so, why has Parsons given conceptual priority to the normative structuring of action ?

Let us look at the genesis of Parsons' own concern with the normative regulation of conduct. It is the famous Hobbesian problem of order.[14] ‘‘ If any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies ; and in the way to their end, which is principally

their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only, endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another.”[15] Relationships of power and social conflict are inherent in the scarcity of means in society. The notions of power and conflict are mutually implicative : power is involved as men seek their interests against the opposition of others ; and a division of interests is implicit in the relationships of power that obtain. If conflict is thus endemic in the scarcity of means and the struggle to acquire them, in the fact that the means which one man holds give him power over another man to whom they are also necessary, how then is social order possible ? The answer which emerges from *The Structure of Social Action*, the proposition which is at the core of Parsons’ subsequent sociology, is that order is possible through the existence of common norms which regulate “ the war of all against all ”. The existence of the normative order, therefore, is in one very important sense inextricably bound up with potential conflicts of interest over scarce resources. This functional dependence of norm on conflict, however, does not correspond to an actual succession from a state of nature to a state of civil society : the relation is analytical, not historical. In the present context it is fundamental to the subsequent argument that the presence of a normative order, or common value system, does not mean that conflict has disappeared, or been resolved in some way. Instead, the very existence of a normative order mirrors the continual potentiality of conflict. To be sure, the degree of conflict in the social system is always a matter for empirical investigation ; but so is the existence of a common value system.[16] Indeed, the varying degrees of acceptance of, or alienation from, the dominant values of the society may be regarded in large measure as reflecting the divisions of interest resulting from differential access to scarce resources. Most important of all, it would seem to follow quite naturally from this situation that when we talk of the stability or instability of a social system, we mean more than anything else the success or failure of the normative order in regulating conflicts of interest. Therefore, in an adequate view of social dynamics it is necessary to conceptualize not only the normative structuring of motives but also the structuring of interests in the substratum. In other words, it is necessary to know about the forces generated by norm *and* substratum if we wish to understand why patterns of behaviour persist or change.[17]

The step from Hobbes to Marx in this matter is a short one. The introduction of the division of labour transforms the war of all against all into the war of one class against another. Marx agrees with Hobbes that conflict is endemic in social interaction (except in communist society), and goes one step further and asserts that interests of a non-normative kind are not random in the social system, but systematically generated through the social relations of the productive process. This, as Parsons himself has acknowledged, is Marx’s fundamental insight into the dynamics of social systems.[18] In a given society, so runs the recommendation, if we wish to understand the balance of forces working for stability or change we must look not only to the normative order, but also and principally to the factual organization of production, and the

powers, interests, conflicts and groupings consequent on it. Here are two notions of "social structure", both characterized by "exteriority" and "constraint", the one *de jure*, the other *de facto*. Marx's own analysis tended to focus on the latter meaning. And what emerges from his thinking is a view of the social system and its operation startlingly different from the framework provided by the Parsonian theory. To pursue this theme a little further, it is not accidental for instance that the process of *exploitation* in the Marxian theory represents a radical conceptual antithesis to the social process which has a central place in Parsons' analysis: that of *socialization*. It is not accidental again that a societal typology is based in the first case on the forms of ownership and control of productive means, in the second on the dominant value patterns of the society.[19] Social stratification for Marx is the differentiation of competing economic interest groups in the society on the basis of productive relations; for Parsons it is the differentiation of individuals in terms of social superiority and inferiority on the basis of the dominant value system of the society.[20] It is unnecessary to multiply instances, for in the almost polar opposition of the two sociological systems we witness the logical outcome of fundamentally different abstractions from the nature of social action. One centres on the phenomenon of social conflict and the constraint of the factual social order; the other on that of social solidarity and the constraint of the normative social order.[21] Both theories, moreover, claim generality, both purport to be concerned with social dynamics. Such a conceptual dichotomy can only be reconciled with these claims if it is recognized that a general theory of social systems which conceptualizes one aspect of social structure and process is of necessity a particular theory. Parsons' claim that to study the forces making for stability is at the same time to grasp those making for instability and change, does not hold in his own analysis because of a selective emphasis on the normative elements of social action. The only other explanation is that the alternative system of generalized concepts is intellectually dispensable. The question here is not whether Marx was wrong or right in his specific empirical predictions (in most of them he appears nowadays to have been falsified), but whether the categories with which he approached social reality as a sociologist are generally relevant to our understanding of social process.[22] Is it possible to understand the nature of twentieth-century American society in terms of its "universalistic-achievement" value pattern without mentioning the changes which its capitalist institutions [23] are undergoing? And if the frustrated dependency needs of the middle-class male caught up in a competitive world produce "one of the focal points of strain in American society", [24] are the relations between unions and business corporations which Professor Lindblom has recently analysed [25] of no account in the dynamics of that fateful social system?

Such questions, it is submitted, can only be asked because of the bifurcation of sociological analysis represented by the conceptual schemata just discussed. On the one hand, it is suggested that society is unthinkable without some degree of integration through common norms and that sociological theory should deal

with the processes whereby this order is maintained. On the other, society is held to be unthinkable [26] without some degree of conflict arising out of the allocation of scarce resources in the division of labour, and sociological analysis is given the task of studying the processes whereby divisions of interest are structured and expressed. The latter view, which seems to be the general import of the Marxian sociology, does not necessarily imply that resources refer only to productive means, or that conflict is necessary and not contingent. In the expansion of these points it may also be shown that there is no real rivalry between the two sociological systems, but that they are on the contrary complementary in their emphases.

It is unnecessary to argue that all conflicts, interests, facilities and powers are "economic" in the sense of being related to the ownership of productive means, in order to appreciate that some such generic concepts are indispensable in analysing the dynamics of social systems. The Marxian system of economic materialism is a specific case of a more general sociological materialism which has never been given anything like the careful analysis to which Parsons has subjected the concept of the normative. The division of labour may be generalized into a category that stands for the factual disposition and organization of socially effective means, and need not be equated simply with the division of functions, powers and interests associated with productive means. In this connection it has been pointed out that part of Weber's work can be seen as an attempt to " ' round out ' Marx's economic materialism by a political and military materialism ".[27] This kind of distinction is a necessary refinement in the sociological understanding of the substratum of social action. It would be difficult, for instance, to make sense of the type of social system which Hintze calls *Frühfeudalismus* and Bloch *le premier âge féodal*, without reference to the importance of military means and virtuosity for the differentiation of functions, the distribution of social power, and indeed for the acquisition and holding of productive means. Similarly, the organization of political power in modern industrial societies cannot realistically be regarded as a mere reflection of conventionally visualized " property power " but is seen to be an increasingly autonomous force.[28] In short, the interdependencies of the various types of power structures, and the groupings and interests they produce, call for sociological investigation in each type of social structure and cannot be reduced to any simple formula.

That conflict is no more inevitable than order should be evident from the foregoing discussion of norm and substratum as the basic variables in the situation of action. Every social situation consists of a normative order with which Parsons is principally concerned, and also of a factual order, or substratum. Both are " given " for individuals ; both are part of the exterior and constraining social world. Sociological theory is concerned, or should be, with the social and psychological processes whereby social structure in this dual sense conditions human motives and actions. The existence of a normative order in no way entails that individuals will act in accordance with it ; in the same way the existence of a given factual order in no way means that certain kinds of

behaviour result. The gap between the elements of "givenness" in the situation and individual or group action is one that is to be bridged only by the sociological appreciation of the way in which motives are structured, normatively and factually.[29]

It is evident, then, that the distinction between order and conflict is one that needs only to be maintained in so far as it illustrates the dimensions of the present problem. Order and conflict are states of the social system, indices of its operation, and to talk of the determinants of order should therefore be to talk of the determinants of conflict. It is only because the problem of order has become bound up with the functioning of the normative system in Parsons' work, that it is necessary to press for the analysis of conflict as a separate task, and especially for the recognition of those aspects of conflict which are non-normative. Just as the problem of order is not just a function of the existence of a normative order and the social mechanisms which procure motivation to conform with it but also of the existence of a social substratum which structures interests differentially in the social system, so the problem of conflict is not reducible to the analysis of the division of labour and the group interests consequent on it. It is rather that both conflict and order are a function of the interaction of norm and substratum. Certain kinds of normative order are more conducive to the development of conflict than others. For instance, the labour-capital conflict in its classical manifestation arose out of the actual situation of the classes under capitalistic production, but it was greatly intensified and sharpened by the existence of a dominant value system, the cardinal features of which, "freedom" and "opportunity", contrasted radically with the factual order of events. The generation of conflict, which may be taken as an index of social instability,[30] is never a simple matter of a conflict of material interest but also involves the normative definition of the situation.

To summarize the argument so far. Parsons' claim to have provided a set of general sociological concepts for the analysis of the dynamics of social systems [31] has been questioned on the ground that his conceptual scheme is highly selective in its focus on the role of the normative order in the stabilization of social systems. In order to demonstrate this selectivity it was shown that beginning with the same basic "problem of order" it was possible to derive an entirely different system of concepts which is oriented to the role of the factual order, or substratum, in the production of social conflict and social instability. At the same time, it is fairly obvious that the two conceptual schemata, though leading to the study of quite different empirical problems, are not theoretically incompatible but rather complementary, in principle at least, within a broader sociological approach.

There is one explanation for the analytical precedence which Parsons gives to the normative structuring of social action which cannot be ignored. That is the argument that sociology should not concern itself with the dynamics of the social system as a whole, but only with some aspect thereof. To this view it is now profitable to turn.



## III

That sociology should deal with a particular set of problems within the theory of social systems is the position taken by Parsons in his discussion of the division of labour between the social sciences. Here sociology is defined as having to do with the process of institutionalization of normative patterns: "that aspect of the theory of social systems which is concerned with the phenomena of institutionalization of patterns of value-orientation in the social system, and of changes in the patterns, with conditions of conformity with and deviance from a set of such patterns, and with motivational processes in so far as they are involved in all of these." [32] The sphere of "power", economic and political, precisely the factual social order, is delivered for safe keeping to the economist and political scientist.[33]

The definition of sociology which Parsons sets forth is apparently consistent with his preoccupation with the role of normative factors in social action. It provides a reasoned basis for the actual selectivity of his theoretical system. But is there consistency here; does not his very view of the scope of sociology lead to a recognition of the essential limitations of this preoccupation and selectivity? It has already been noted that the problem of conformity or nonconformity of actors with a common value pattern resolves itself into a consideration of the constraint exercised on the actors by the normative and factual orders and the processes associated with them. It is not only the continual pressure of normative expectations exerted through the processes of socialization and social control, but also the range of differential opportunities created by the division of labour, that form the effective social environment of action. Therefore, if "changes in the patterns" are to be accounted for sociologically, how is this possible without making the analysis power and means an integral part of the explanation? To take an obvious, but massive example: how is the growth of collectivistic values within the dominant individualistic ethos of British capitalism, traced in Dicey's great work,[34] to be explained without including the systematic operation of this set of factors? Or again, within this wider change of values, the trade union movement appears at its inception as a "group of deviantly motivated individuals" to use the terminology of *The Social System*. Yet is the structuring of this deviant motivation to be adequately comprehended by a system of sociological explanation so limited as that we find in this book? [35] In the analysis of actual processes of social change all the difficulties that beset a sociology whose theoretical core has developed from a concern with the normative basis of social stability become apparent.[36] Any study of social change, defined even in terms of change in institutionalized value patterns, must be based on concepts which can interrelate the realistic and normative structure of the situation with the resultant actions of individuals and groups. In any given society, the potentialities of change are not random but systematically related to the balance of indulgence and deprivation among different social groups as this is determined by the types of normative patterns defining expected behaviour,

and the types of division of labour distributing factual opportunities to realize ends. If these are elementary and readily acceptable propositions, they only serve to show that sociological analysis, even if it is formally defined as being concerned with a seemingly specialized aspect of the theory of social systems, cannot in fact avoid the role of a synthetizing discipline. In particular, sociology cannot avoid the systematic analysis of the phenomenon of "power" as an integral part of its conceptual scheme.

What is fundamentally at issue here is the form of inquiry peculiar to sociology. This should be made quite clear. There has long existed a divergence between those who favour sociology as a special social science, and those who believe that sociology should be a synthetic discipline utilizing the data of the other social sciences to gain a view of the interdependence of elements of social systems. The latter view has been dominant in Europe on the whole. The definitions of sociology as "an attempt to find out what are the basic phenomena and relationships of society in all its aspects: political, legal, literary, artistic, economic, etc.; what are the relationships between these various aspects of social life and in what ways do they interact upon each other",<sup>[37]</sup> or as a discipline, which "utilizing the results arrived at by the specialists is concerned more particularly with their interrelations and seeks to give an interpretation of social life as a whole",<sup>[38]</sup> do not delve too deeply into the precise relations between the social sciences, but at the same time point to a mode of inquiry which is immediately recognizable as characteristically sociological. The status of sociology in this definition is no doubt embarrassing, its frontiers indistinct, but its identity unmistakable. The fact that economists had written on the division of labour and explored its consequences for economic action, did not preclude its entirely different treatment at the hands of Durkheim, Marx and Weber. At the present time, this sociological mode of investigation is recognizable in a concern with the sources of cohesion and conflict in modern welfare industrialism. Such interests, it is true, are not easily to be gratified without excursions into the special fields of law, economics and politics.

This view of sociology as dealing with the interdependence of the various aspects of social organization seems to be congruent with the more abstract definition suggested in this paper, that sociology has to do with the interplay of norm and substratum in relation to the problem of stability and change of social systems. As I see it, and here I draw on the distinctions made above, Parsons' concern with the normative and his definition of sociology as a discipline exploring the dynamics of the normative, is in one way an attempt, whether intentional or unintentional, to make the status of sociology less ambiguous by making it a special social science. But this confinement, which has a definite conceptual expression, seems to break down, both on a theoretical and an empirical level, when the problems of social stability and change are tackled.

I have no wish to deny that the sociological mode of inquiry should be made explicit by the formulation of particular sociological theories. Indeed,

the process of theoretical development in sociology is one by which different factors and their interrelationships are identified and evaluated. To this development, Professor Parsons' contribution has been, and continues to be, one to which all must be indebted. This is especially true of his insistence on the necessary integration of psychological and sociological thinking around the problems of social dynamics. His claim to have provided a "statement of general sociological theory" is less acceptable, however, because it seems to have sought to clarify the status of sociology at the expense of confining it within a conceptual mould in which it does not happily fit.

## NOTES

1. Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, London, Tavistock Publications; Glencoe, The Free Press, 1952.

2. For an excellent account, see Ralf Dahrendorf, "Struktur und Funktion: Talcott Parsons und die Entwicklung der soziologischen Theorie", *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 1955, pp. 491-519. I am much indebted to Dr. Dahrendorf for many discussions on this and other aspects of sociology.

3. *Towards a General Theory of Action*, edited by Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, 1951; Talcott Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory*, 1949, second edition, 1954.

4. Parsons' term is "standards of value-orientation". See Kingsley Davis, *Human Society*, 1949, pp. 52-82.

5. "This integration of a set of common value patterns with the internalized need disposition structure of the constituent personalities is the core phenomenon of the dynamics of social systems. That the stability of any social system except the most evanescent interaction process is dependent on a degree of such integration may be said to be the fundamental dynamic theorem of sociology. It is a major point of reference for all analysis which may claim to be dynamic"—*The Social System*, p. 42.

6. *Towards a General Theory of Action*, p. 227.

7. *The Social System*, p. 535.

8. *Towards a General Theory of Action*, p. 231.

9. As to the sources of deviance in the social system that are mentioned as general possibilities, the following seem to be the most important: failure of the socialization process; strains arising out of the difficulty of acting in accordance with norms which frustrate personality needs such as those for affection and dependency; strains arising when normative standards are ambiguous or in conflict. It is principally in terms of normative conflict that Parsons locates the major points of strain or tension in different types of society. For example, the conflict between the "universalistic-achievement" norms of modern industrial societies and the norms of "particularism" and "ascription" embodied in the kinship system, provides a "major focus of strain in this type of society". Strain is defined in the following way: "Let us assume that, from whatever source, a disturbance is introduced into the system, of such a character that what alter does leads to a frustration, in some important respects, of ego's expectation system vis-a-vis alter. This failure of the fulfillment of ego's expectations places a 'strain' upon him"—*The Social System*, p. 252, also pp. 267-83.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 251-67.

11. The distinction between "norm" and "substratum" is made by Karl Renner in his *Mensch und Gesellschaft: Grundriss einer Soziologie*, 1952, pp. 230-33, and employed in *The Institutions of Private Law and Their Social Functions*, 1949. The terms are employed in a somewhat different sense in the present paper.

12. In an established social relationship, and where socialization has been successful, the individual has a stake in the favourable attitudinal response of others and also acts

so as to meet his internalized moral expectations about his own behaviour, and these external and internal moral sanctions constitute a generalized interest in conformity with the normative patterns governing the relationship. Thus, "if any individual can be said to seek his own 'self-interest' it follows that he can do so only by conforming in some degree to the institutionalized definition of the situation"—*Essays in Sociological Theory*, 1949, p. 170. In general, "the structure of interests in a group is a function both of the structure of the realistic situations in which people act and of the 'definitions' of those situations which are institutionalized in the society"—*Ibid.*, p. 313.

13. "Its (the social system) stability depends on the integration of the interests of actors with the patterning of the interaction process. If interests in objects other than the attitudes of actors cannot be integrated with this mutual attitude system, such interests must constitute threats to the stability of the social system"—*The Social System*, p. 416.

14. *The Structure of Social Action*, 1937, p. 89 et seq.

15. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited with an introduction by M. Oakeshott, p. 81.

16. "A social relationship will be referred to as 'conflict' in so far as action within it is oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties . . . the communal type of relationship is the most radical antithesis of conflict . . . conflict and communal relationships are relative concepts"—Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by A. R. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, 1947, pp. 121-6.

17. This seems also to be the position implied in the "voluntaristic" theory of action which treats human social behaviour as a function both of "normative" and of "conditional" factors; as opposed to the "positivistic" and "idealistic" theories which stress one set of factors to the exclusion of the other. *The Structure of Social Action*, pp. 77-82. Again, Parsons' position is in principle correct. The real question revolves around his success in conceptualizing both sets of factors and relating them to societal dynamics. The uncritical criticism of structural functionalism which asserts that this standpoint is necessarily "static" does not apply in the present case at all; it is rather that there is a bias towards the conceptualization of one set of factors in the dynamics of social systems.

18. "Social Classes and Class Conflict in the Light of Recent Sociological Theory", *Essays in Sociological Theory*, 1954, chapter XV.

19. *The Social System*, pp. 180-200. "Value patterns" and "ownership patterns" thus have precisely the same analytical status in both theories in that they provide the link between the general concepts of "order" and "conflict" and the differentiation of types of social structure. The resulting types illustrate most clearly the widely differing foci of the two theories.

20. "An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification", *Essays in Sociological Theory*, 1949, chapter VII; "A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification", *Class, Status and Power*, edited by R. Bendix and S. M. Lipset, 1953, pp. 92-128.

21. It is interesting to note that in the ideal-type class society, solidarity is manifested as class solidarity and is a consequence not of the common value system of the society but of the divisions and conflicts of interest in the system. "Wer Klasse sagt, sagt Scheidung. Wer von sozialer Solidarität redet, bejaht die Voraussetzung sozialer Antagonismen. Dass dabei die Begriffe Scheidung und Antagonismus genetisch die primären, die Begriffe Klasse und Solidarität die sekundären, abgeleiteten, sind, ist nach logischen und empirischen Gesetzen gleich sonnenklar"—Robert Michels, *Umschichtungen in den herrschenden Klassen nach dem Kriege*, 1934, p. 1.

22. See, for example, the recent critical evaluation by Theodor Geiger, *Die Klassengesellschaft im Schmelztiegel*, 1949.

23. See, for example, Adolf A. Berle, Jr., *The Twentieth Century Capitalist Revolution*, 1955.

24. *The Social System*, p. 269.

25. Charles E. Lindblom, *Unions and Capitalism*, 1949.

26. Unthinkable in so far as "society" involves the notion of "scarce means" and therefore the problem of order; but also as a generalization about social history: "Few who consider dispassionately the facts of social history will be disposed to deny that the exploitation of the weak by the powerful, organized for purposes of economic gain, buttressed by imposing systems of law and screened by decorous draperies of virtuous sentiment and resounding rhetoric, has been a permanent feature in the life of most communities that the world has yet seen."—R. H. Tawney, *Religion and The Rise of Capitalism*, 1944, p. 286.

27. *From Max Weber*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills, 1946, p. 47. For Weber's views on historical materialism as an investigative device see *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, translated and edited by E. A. Shils, 1950, chapter II.

28. Franz Neumann, "Approaches to the Study of Political Power", *Political Science Quarterly*, June, 1950.

29. Although there are many examples, Werner Sombart's remarkable little book, *Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?*, 1906, is instructive in this respect. It may be compared with the excellent discussion by Seymour M. Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, "Ideological Equalitarianism and Social Mobility in the United States", *Transactions of the Second World Congress of Sociology*, 1954, pp. 34-54.

30. This may not seem to hold in situations where conflict is institutionalized, as in democratically organized politics, or in collective bargaining. Here there is agreement about how what shall be done is to be done, but not necessarily about what in fact shall be done. It is therefore hard to maintain the distinction between conflict *within* the system, and conflict *about* the system. There may, for example, be agreement about democratic institutions in the political field, but disagreement about capitalistic institutions in the economic field. Quite radical social change which involves conflicts of interest about the latter may be gradually effected within the framework of the former.

31. Throughout, "social system" has in the nature of the discussion been equated with "society". Much of the weakness of the Parsonian system at the societal level of explanation seems to spring from his treatment of social dynamics again and again in terms of the "social system" of ego and alter.

32. *The Social System*, p. 552.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 548-551, 121-127. It is economists least of all, however, who have investigated the phenomenon of "economic power" outside the limited sense of "purchasing power" in the market. For a sharp criticism of their unconcern, see Walter Eucken, *The Foundations of Economics*, 1950, p. 263 et seq. Nor is it clear, even in the case of political science, that the orthodox field of study is power in this wider societal sense and not the narrower field of formal governmental institutions. It is surely sociologists, or at least economists and political scientists with sociological orientations, who have contributed most to the study of economic and political power as it constitutes the substratum of social action. In so far as this is true, the dissociation of sociology from such problems also, means that they are ignored, at any rate so far as the formal division of labour in the social sciences is concerned.

34. A. V. Dicey, *Lectures on the Relation between Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century*, 1952.

35. Compare, for example, the approach to this type of problem in Robert Michels' "Psychologie der antikapitalistischen Massenbewegungen", *Grundriss der Sozialökonomik*, vol. IX, 1926, pp. 241-359; or G. A. Briefs, *The Proletariat*, 1936.

36. This is clear in Parson's brief discussion of the way in which the rise of National Socialism could be approached from his theoretical standpoint. *The Social System*, pp. 520-5. When the preconditions of the movement are analysed, beyond such generalizations as the necessary presence "in the population of sufficiently intense, widely spread and properly distributed alienative motivational elements", the factors which emerge

as important are the interests of economic, political and military groupings. It is hard to see that these variables can be usefully handled beyond a certain point in terms of the generalized concepts developed in the preceding theoretical discussion of social dynamics. On the other hand, they are factors which are interpreted in a penetrating way by Franz Neumann in his almost equally brief account in *Behemoth: The Structure and Function of National Socialism*, 1942, p. 17 et seq., an account which obviously owes much to the other generalized approach to social dynamics discussed in this essay.

37. Max Rheinstein, introduction to *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society*, 1954, p. xxvii.

38. Morris Ginsberg, *Sociology*, 1947, p. 14.

## Our Contributors

L. T. HOBHOUSE (1864–1929) was Martin White Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

L. P. MAIR is Reader in Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

DAVID LOCKWOOD is Assistant Lecturer in Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

HERMANN MANNHEIM is Reader in Criminology at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

## Editorial Note

Professor T. H. Marshall has been appointed head of the Social Science Division of UNESCO, and as from our next number the Editorial Board will be: M. Ginsberg, M.A., D.Litt., LL.D., F.B.A., Fellow of University College, London, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the London School of Economics; D. V. Glass, B.Sc.(Econ.), Ph.D., Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics; T. H. Marshall, C.M.G., M.A.; I. Schapera, D.Sc., F.R.S.S. Afr., Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics; R. Titmuss, Professor of Social Administration, London School of Economics. The Managing Editor will be Mr. D. G. MacRae, Reader in Sociology at the London School of Economics.

Provided that there is sufficient demand a binder is available to take one year's copies of *The British Journal of Sociology*. It is made on the wire-type principle and is in maroon leather cloth or imitation cloth blocked in gold. The price is 12s. 6d. per binder in leather cloth or 9s. 6d. in imitation cloth. If you wish to purchase these binders please write to the publishers of the Journal, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

## LINKED CITATIONS

- Page 1 of 1 -



*You have printed the following article:*

### **Some Remarks on "The Social System"**

David Lockwood

*The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (Jun., 1956), pp. 134-146.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0007-1315%28195606%297%3A2%3C134%3ASRO%22SS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-R>

---

*This article references the following linked citations. If you are trying to access articles from an off-campus location, you may be required to first logon via your library web site to access JSTOR. Please visit your library's website or contact a librarian to learn about options for remote access to JSTOR.*

## NOTES

### <sup>28</sup> **Approaches to the Study of Political Power**

Franz L. Neumann

*Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 2. (Jun., 1950), pp. 161-180.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0032-3195%28195006%2965%3A2%3C161%3AATTSOP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-H>

**NOTE:** *The reference numbering from the original has been maintained in this citation list.*