

Seminar on the State¹
October 22, 1964

Memorandum to all members

Enclosed is a copy of Otto Kirchheimer's paper which will serve as the basis for discussion on Monday, October 26th, at 12 noon in the Men's Faculty Club.

At the last session of the seminar, individual checks were not distributed for your signature. This does not mean that you will not be billed, but rather that a list of members present was given to the accounting office. This week individual checks will be at each place.

Wayne Wilcox
Secretary

Elite – Consent – Control in the Western Political System

Otto Kirchheimer

The following remarks are centering around political processes in advanced industrial society. I am not searching for ways and means to compare institutions and attitudes operative in societies in different stages of social development, but am concentrating on pinpointing configurations common to one specific type of society. I want to explore some select political core problems of Western industrial society characterized by the following traits: a high degree of urbanization, numerical preponderance of dependent labor showing a considerable degree of skill differentiation, a high rate of technological rationality of society's productive apparatus, allowing in its turn for various admixtures of welfare and warfare policies. The absence of central direction of production, consumption and political processes allowing many strata of the population to compete openly and incessantly for advantageous positions in state and society marks the difference between this form of industrial society and its Eastern European counterpart.

In this Western industrial society formal processes of unification via federation have stopped short of either embracing all individual territorial units or

all relevant subject matters; individual territorial units have kept both the legal capacity and a greatly varying degree of practical ability to make meaningful decisions of their own. Nevertheless, their relations with each other are characterized by a high degree of mutual interpenetration and increasing interdependence, even in the absence of formal agreements. In evaluating the political processes within the framework of the individual units the following, frequently cumulative interpenetration variants should be kept in mind:

1. indirect and unintended impact of domestic policies and trends, e.g., imported inflation or effect of change in internal policy style of another country
2. direct interference; customs war or vetoing of accession to power of so-called hostile political organizations in other countries
3. diffusion and assimilation of institutional devices: spread of the Ombudsman
4. simultaneity of action patterns indicating a narrow frame of choice: mass importation of foreign workers, educational and university reforms, mild varieties of monopoly supervision.

Certainly there are variations in constitutional organization of governmental structures. There may be also "tradition reserves" such as the Italian Catholic Church. But the common phenomena discussed above still persist. Do these various social phenomena then result in related ways of handling political problems? A selection of such ways will be discussed under the triple heading: elite-consent-control.

Political Elite

a) Elite and counterelite

The political elite consists of personnel continuously involved in molding political decisions (Raymond Aron). By its very nature such personnel must be small even if its professional and social recruitment bases may be quite large. However, social background[s] as distinct from professional career and ties are not necessarily indicative of the political orientation of respective elite members.²

Differences in the degree of elite unification are indicated by assertions pertaining either to the existence of an establishment (Great Britain) or of a political counterelite (Italy). However, the Italian case of stiff competition between a social class based and a denomination based political organization (CP and DC) partly³ aside, Western society shows few tendencies towards the formation of total political counterelites. Mild political competition concerns entrance in, rather than total substitution for existing political elites. It is therefore possible to treat questions of elite composition, elite access, cohesion and

legitimacy formulae as referring to the self-same political elite with deviations entering mainly as national variables.

b) Criteria for membership in political elites:

1. general bureaucratic skill
2. specific professional skill to the extent that it is a precondition for the continuity of the state apparatus
3. professional politicians and opinion manipulators,
4. practitioners of internal and external violence
5. authority with or representativeness of those social groups, whose continuous support is deemed necessary for the functioning of the political elite.

Both cumulation and interchangeability of skills are on the increase in line with the diminishing differentiation between the prerequisites, for holding public and private jobs. The mutual substitutability of private and public positions is making for closer integration of bureaucratic office holders with the larger society at whatever cost to the latter's traditional standards.

c) Variations in elite formula among countries of industrial societies

The respective political formula of the regime provides the most important variable: prevalence of classical type parliamentary regime, or alternatively, variants of executive predominance formulae. They determine the more or less rapid rate according to which the decline of the older species of parliamentary political manipulator takes place.

In contrast to other social structures, practitioners of violence, while forming part of the political elite show persistently little inclination to transform their indubitably high potential of control into actual control. Given the complexity of the governmental business, they are satisfied to be fully represented in the political elite (Seeckt, the great majority of the French military leadership in the 50's, De Gaulle not a military leader)[.]

d) Access

The political elite is permeable in the sense that there exists no fixed distribution quota among different elite categories. It is open in the sense that both within each group and between them there is an amount of competition. The composition of the elite changes when there are changes in the regime itself, when elections lead to partial replacements in elite personnel, when members, of the elite itself think their needs require it and when they perceive changes in the relative strength of social or political groups represented on the elite or seeking representation in it.

e) Cohesiveness

Distribution of power within the political elite depends on the legitimacy formula in use, on personal skill and function exercised. But irrespective of variation in the legitimation formula of the regime, so-called personalization of power, hallmark of mass society, involves concentration of political sales formula on the creation of pseudo-individualized leader images. This operation may carry with it a considerable potential for power differentials within the political elite. But in contrast to charisma resting on lived experience in regard to leaders and at times liable to be transformed into permanent Amts-charisma, pseudo-personalization resting on the creation of stereotype images through endless repetition offers smaller chance for routine transfer, therefore enhancing potentials for succession crises. While the rise of charisma is not altogether excluded, its chances in politics are likely to be less than in religious sects where personal relation is not smothered by mass communication formulae.⁴

f) Stability

Political elite stability increases through disappearance of instruments for instantaneous and decisive attacks which can be used by central banks as representatives of an independent business counterelite. Collection and distribution agencies centralizing political interests of business have no power comparable to those of credit refusing central bank organizations in the inter-war period.⁵

The relations of functional groups with political elites depend on the evaluation of mutual strength, and the degree of compatibility of elite styles and goals with those of functional groups rather than on the degree of the latter's direct representation on the political elite. Issue by issue treatment by the political elite limits dangers of elite disruption deriving from struggles with functional groups.

Without denying the value of the achievement – equalitarian criteria recently used by Lipset for differentiating political processes in English speaking democracies from each other⁶ – different criteria may be more useful for the characterization of political elites in all advanced Western industrial societies. With the impact of organized interest on elites held constant, national variables may be identified according to the greater or lesser prevalence of bureaucratic, plutocratic, populist, or traditionalist traits. For example, the plutocratic-populist style of the US political elite may be opposed to the more bureaucratic-traditionalist style of European political elites. A weakening of both the plutocratic and traditional components raises the problem of interrelation and accommodation between populist and bureaucratic elements.⁷

Consensus

“A Two-Tiers” arrangement indicates the necessity of simultaneous interest and political consent.⁸ The three-cornered relation between political elite,

functional elite and functional constituency raises the question of the functional elite's potential for transfer of surplus constituency confidence to the political elite. The criteria allowing functional leaders such transfer for group transcending tasks seem to be the same as those which determine variations in dependency relations between functional powerholders and their constituency: size of group membership, educational and technical qualifications and information sources of members and their elites, degree of freedom of choice of members.

a) Party

Present party structure is dominated by the business of generating consent: mass-class and mass-denominational parties, frequently predominant (US excluded) in the first half of the century represented conflicting goal structures and prevented the rise of fully representative political elites, while creating potential counterelites. Transition to present day catch-all parties characteristic of the combined welfare-warfare society restricts party function mainly to the effective selection of political personnel according to the competitive criteria of mass-consumer's society. This change puts a premium on consent engineering and elite cohesion.

b) Character of consensus

Change to catch-all party allocates to the party mainly electioneering or referenda engineering functions and de-emphasizes anything more than symbolic participation of the mass of the people in the political process. It therefore shifts burden of people's integration into the polity to the more general aspects of mass-consumer's society, whose style, methods, and forms of expectation are transferred to the political sector. Deideologization on the strictly political level is therefore balanced by a far-reaching ideologization on the general cultural level. Compared with Eastern Europe, where ideologization under the conditions of primitive accumulation has not been able to overcome the cleavage between ideology and reality, the developed industrial society has seen a far-reaching degree of internalization of ideology: there exists no qualitative difference between ideology and lived reality.⁹

Services and objects used by the individual, the economic system which produces them and the attitudes prescribed for and accompanying their use enter the individual's mind as a unit.

c) Limits of internalization

Internalization of mass consumer ideology is less apparent where experiences and/or frustrations enter as powerful and constant enough factors to model political images. A number of studies of industrial sociology dwell on the same characteristics of invisibility of decisive power structures and deeply resented

dependency relations accompanied by resentment against the sum-total of the barriers between the “we” and the “they”. They reappear in the political sociologists’ findings as general cynicism and alienation from the political process.¹⁰

To what extent is the feeling of powerlessness and political alienation in the lower ranks an inevitable concomitant of advanced Western society?¹¹ Do there exist any factors in the structure of industrial society which may foreshadow changes in the relations between the political elite and those large segments of the population which oscillate between attitudes expressing a desire for identification with the political leadership and pronounced cynicism and apathy?

Recently Crozier has analyzed two cases of public bureaucracies, one covering production workers, the other white collar workers. He has shown how relations between the various hierarchical levels have been arranged in such a way so as to minimize the factor of dependency relations between various levels, possibly resulting in increased frustration for the highest echelons but releasing subordinate levels from dependency on hierarchical orders as well as on personal favors.¹² Serge Mallet in studying work processes and intra-enterprise relations in more or less fully automated enterprises finds similar results. Concentration on and, if needed, correction and maintenance of production processes minimizes hierarchical interference – moreover it establishes closer relations and community of interests between technical personnel and workers.¹³

There is only speculation about the wider social and political effects which this changing role of the worker in the industrial process will ultimately engender.¹⁴ It is neither clear how many workers will ultimately become affected nor whether this change will speed up general developments toward the so-called “constitutional factory”.¹⁵ It is especially unclear what these changes on the factory level will mean for factory-level-trade union relations and still more for the by now often rather tenuous relations of unions with the official political transmission belt – the political parties. Will the greater competence of the worker in the economic process give him a more active political role or, at least, lessen the worker’s cynicism, which now mars the official political consent procedures which mass society lays out for its run-of-the-mill citizens?

d) Anti-consensus – violence

How far does violence play a role in the political process of advanced industrial society? How does the Western political scene in which for this purpose I want to include Japan, compare with the Eastern European regimes which have recently emphasized regime manipulation rather than regime violence? What happened to the sporadic anti-regime and regime violence of the 20’s and the massive regime violence of the 30’s?

There has been, in the last two decades, a universal revulsion against major violence. It is strongest in Western Germany though present everywhere else in Western society. Horror kept awake by the belated NS trials, and the prox-

imity of the DDR regime has led the regime to try exorcising in advance the remotest specter of violence.

There is secondly the somewhat ubiquitous case of strictly marginal violence, marginal both in mode and in aims, most often used as interest group bargaining device or threat in many a country: notably Italy, Switzerland, France, Belgium.¹⁶ The goals of such marginal violence remain strictly limited and means are carefully selected to impress both public and authorities without undue risk for the action participants. Nevertheless, such policies tend to universalize direct action as political style.

Elite and organization modification violence: limited and specifically goal oriented and carried on by organized groups: e.g., to avoid decolonization, to eliminate one set of members of the political elite and put up the principatus, to eliminate the principatus as in France, or to change the constitutional setup of a unitary or insufficiently federal state, as in Belgium, Italy or Canada.

Goal oriented mob violence: due to persist[e]nce of wide cleavages between political elite and incomplete system integration of parts of the population (Italy, Japan) it differs from violence in developing societies by a higher degree of awareness of structured goals (overthrowing of the Tambroni government or anti-US alliance rioting in Japan in 1960) by incompletely organized participants: hence the apparent contradiction – mob violence which is nevertheless goal structured. The greater the degree of organization of the regime opponents, the higher the likelihood of controlling and channeling the mob (Italian CP), the shallower the organizational roots and the more problematic such control (Japanese left-wing parties).¹⁷

Fulfillment violence: specific social and (recently) racial strata may, as they do now in the US, object to the gap between the promises of the reigning ideology and their own group status reality. Emphasis rests on ideology fulfillment, the corresponding modifications are sought for their own sake, though society is deemed to improve through the desired policy modification and ideology fulfillment. Fulfillment violence may be preceded or counteracted by violence designed to prevent the elimination of the gap.

Perpetrators of non-official violence in advanced industrial societies are less distant from the seat of power than those in less advanced societies. Consequently instead of day-dreaming of challenging the very existence of society by the perpetration of inchoate violence furthering general anomie, unofficial practitioners in advanced society are concerned rather with specific actions towards modifying the concrete social and political structure.

Advanced societies are sensitive to interruption of complex services, and they are able to take remedial action to meet the demands raised by those who resort to limited violence. Thus, such violence has infinitely greater chances of success than the unstructured violence of protesters, in less advanced societies.

Control

In the 19th century constitutional universe consent and control were closely related parts. Our 20th century experience, however, invites reconsideration. The Oxford Dictionary defines control as “the fact of controlling, checking and directing action” and “as a method of restraint”; consent is defined as “agreement to or acquiescence in what another proposes or desires”.

If somebody controls an action, the controller determines whether and under what circumstances the action takes place. Consent describes the mental state with which an interested party faces somebody else’s action. It involves no assertion of how the interested party’s positive or negative reaction affects the eventual outcome of the action. The proposition: control involves consent seems to state the obvious. But the converse proposition: consent involves control, is not necessarily correct. It all depends on the situation. The actor may anticipate further requests for consent and may therefore be inclined to lend a favorable ear to suggestions of the consenting person. In this instance consent may lead to a certain control over or at least influence on the actor. Yet, consent may have concerned a non-repetitive situation or the actor may estimate that his chances for success or failure are unrelated to the consent. Therefore, the last two situations would not give rise to a chance of control over the actor’s behavior. This is especially true under the conditions of Western society where the Japanese concept of giri, the internalized pressure for mutual reciprocity of service, has little currency.¹⁸

Forms of Control

Which cases of consent in our society are then tantamount to control, which connote tenuous and ambiguous control situations, and where do we note a complete absence of control?

Control can be formal or informal, specific or diffuse, expert or amateur, interest or society oriented. There is little symmetry between the official status of a control authority and the effective exercise of its powers. The all[-]embracing control powers of parliaments remain, more often than not, ineffective both through lack of time and expertise of the controllers and because of the diffuse goals pursued by them. On the other hand, an interest organization without formal control authority, being both expert and specific in its aims, exercises a measure of interested control over parts of the state apparatus, the effectiveness of which is only checked by the existence of competing interests. Somewhere in the middle lies the control potential of media of communication whose unlimited reach and at least partial disinterestedness is however kept in check by the diffuse, incidental and amateur character of their respective activities.

The following tabulation serves to schematize the interrelation between various forms of consent and control.

	Consent		Control										
	formal	informal	high	med	low	formal	informal	expert	amateur	specific	diffuse	interested party	commun. oriented
Electorate	x				x	x			x		x		x
Parliament	x				x	x			x		x		x
Interest organization		x	x				x	x		x		x	
Media of communication		x		x			x		x		x		x

Consent and control converge strongly outside official channels and in the limited areas where either private groups or media of communication have both an interest in control and reasonable access to information. In the field of intelligence, diplomatic and military affairs media, or other interested parties, have no sustained control potential, while people’s and parliament’s control, incidental to their consent, remains largely in the ritual field.

The vanishing symmetry between consent and control even more than the utilization of sporadic violence as a political weapon highlights some structural problems of the Western political system. Its official and unofficial channels for elite circulation, for securing interest participation and periodical or – as in the French case – on the spot solicited formal popular consent are working satisfactorily. For the replacement of traditional authority lines to the public, now fully extinct, political organizations have utilized the system and methods of mass communication as developed in commercial advertisement practices. The advantage of speeding easily comprehensible messages to millions of political customers has not been accompanied by a corresponding degree of control over the customers’ mind which in critical situations might perform erratically and without feeling of responsibility and reference to the political organization’s propaganda machines. The contemporary Western political system is thus potentially facing a mutual loss of control: the political subjects’ over the political organization and the political organization’s over the political subjects.

Endnotes

1 The document can be found at the Otto Kirchheimer Papers of German and Jewish Intellectual Émigré Collection at University of Albany, State University of New York in Box 2, Series 4: Writings, 1937-1964, Folder 80. We would like to thank Mr. Peter Kirchheimer for permission to publish it. The footnotes have

been largely standardized and the spelling errors contained in the printed original were intentionally to a limited extent corrected for this reason. All changes are enclosed in square brackets.

- 2 An increasing number of inquiries into the social background of political personnel (1) shows a great disproportionality between the numerical strength of the working class and the pronounced civil service, professional, business and academic family background of the political personnel. It would be a determinist fallacy to conclude therefrom that identical social background necessarily leads to the taking of a more or less predetermined political line. From Mirabeau to Lenin many a political figure has crossed class lines, but equally revealing, if less noticed, is how many politicians from lower class or petty bourgeois social background were more concerned about easing their entry into the rank of the traditional social elite than about advancing the course of the social group from which they originally hailed. Maurice Duverger (ed.): *Partis politiques et classes sociales en France*, Paris, 1955; *International Social Science Journal: The Parliamentary Profession*, vol. XIII, No. 4, 1961, UNESCO; Giovanni Sartori (ed.): *Il Parlamento Italiano. 1946-1963*, Naples, 1963; W. L. Guttsman: *The British Political Elite*, London, 1963.
- 3 I say partly because the Italian CP seems willing to acknowledge the legitimacy of a pluralist party system; in addition to Togliatti's will see the over-all analysis of socio-political relations in Italy in: Jean Meynaud: *Les catégories dirigeantes Italiennes*, in: *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 14, août 1964, p. 639.
- 4 For a discussion of charisma in present day society, see the first section of W. G. Runciman's *Charismatic Legitimacy and One-Party Rule in Ghana*, in: *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. IV, 1963, pp. 148-165.
- 5 See the various articles, in: R. Rose and A. Heidenheimer (ed.): *Comparative Political Finance: A Symposium*, in: *Journal of Politics*, vol. 25, No. 4, 1963, and O. Kirchheimer: *Changes in the Structure of Political Compromise*, in: *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX, No. 2, 1941, New York pp. 264-289.
- 6 S. M. Lipset: *The First New Nation*, New York, 1963.
- 7 For the classic analysis of populism see E. Shils, *[The] Torment of Secrecy*, London, 1956.
- 8 The expression „Two-Tiers arrangement“ is borrowed from Stein-Rokkan's contribution: *[Norway.] Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism to [R. Dahl (ed.):] Political Oppositions in Western Democracy*, forthcoming in 1965.
- 9 T. W. Adorno: *Prismen Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt, 1955, p. 24. Jürgen Habermas: *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Neuwied, 1962. Herbert Marcuse: *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, 1964, p. 11-12.
- 10 E. Chinoy: *The Automobile Worker and the American Dream*, [New York,] 1955; H. Popitz, H. P. Bahrdt, E. A. Jueres, H. Kesting: *Das Gesellschaftsbild des Arbeiters*, Tübingen, 1957; Andrée Andrieux, Jean Lignon: *L'ouvrier d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, 1960; Pierre Belleville: *Une nouvelle classe ouvrière*, Paris, 1963; On the political side, see H. McClosky: *Consensus and Ideology in American Politics*, in: *The American Political Science Review*, vol. LVIII, No. 2, 1964, p. 361, 370-371.
- 11 For a survey of the ever-increasing literature on political alienation cf. L. Lipsitz:

- Work, Life and Political Alienation [correct title: Work, Life and Political Attitudes], mimeographed paper read at the Chicago 1964 American Political Science Association Meeting.
- 12 Michel Crozier: *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*, University of Chicago Press, 1964.
 - 13 Serge Mallet: *La Nouvelle Classe Ouvrière*, Paris, 1963. Partly similar results had already been reached in: Popitz-Bahrdt-Jüres-Kesting: *Technik und Industriearbeit*, Tübingen, 1957.
 - 14 See Mallet, in: Leo Hamon (ed.): *Les Nouveaux Comportements Politiques de la Classe Ouvrière*, Paris, 1962, p. 166.
 - 15 François Bloch-Lainé: *Pour une réforme de l'entreprise*, Paris, 1963.
 - 16 For a theoretical foundation of the usefulness and inevitability of marginal violence, see H. L. Nieburg: *The Threat of Violence and Social Change*, in: *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4, 1962, p. 865.
 - 17 For the opposite model, India, see Myron Weiner: *The Politics of Scarcity*, Chicago, 1962, chapter 8. Both Japan and Italy are rapidly expanding industrial societies with considerable „tradition reserves“, liable to be mobilized on election day, but only then. In regard to both, it seems fair to say that major components of the political elite do not look towards democratic political process as the exclusive agency for legitimizing their leadership position, even if they are well satisfied to have its devices at their disposal. To this ambiguity in the attitude of the ruling elite corresponds the theoretical and propagandistic attempts of their foes in visualizing political change in a larger framework demoting electoral processes to a subsidiary role. This reluctance to bargain with each other – which R. A. Scalapino and J. Masumi: *Parties and Politics in Contemporary Japan*, 1962, p. 80, characterized as a failure of communication between political groups – enlarges ambiguities over the respective roles of consensus and violence in the political process.
 - 18 For the concept of *giri* and its application to the field of politics, see: R. Dore: *City Life in Japan*, [Berkeley,] 1963, p. 86.