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An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements

BY ALAIN TOURAINE

THE notion of social movement, like most notions in the social sciences, does not describe part of “reality” but is an element of a specific mode of constructing social reality. Too many studies of social movements are dangerously naive. Too often, authors, while they think they are describing collective actions or historical events, express very crudely their own opinions or ideologies. The limited value of most studies of social movements becomes even more conspicuous if we compare different periods of intellectual and social history. Social movements in the postwar period were mainly considered as disruptive forces; even “liberals” like L. Coser¹ were ready at best to grant that conflicts can be functional for social integration. After the sixties, social movements, on the contrary, were identified with the counterculture, the search for “alternative” forms of social and cultural life. In the early eighties, the subject matter loses ground. How is it possible to overcome the obvious prejudices which so often make discussions about social movements useless because they inform us mainly about social opinions of some limited sectors of academia?

To overcome this naive and illusory positivism, each social scientist must make clear the meaning of the words he or she uses, situating them in a more general intellectual frame of reference. But to explain “what I think” is not enough: it is

¹ L. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956).

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indispensable to compare one's own categories with other types of construction of social reality. The aim here is not to separate and define various Weltanschauungen but, on the contrary, to integrate various approaches into a general representation of social life which gives some amount of autonomy to each approach. It is true that such an integrated and diversified view is itself related to specific "theories" and is not entirely objective. The problem, however, is not to pursue an abstract pure objectivity but to push back the limits of ideology and to make discussions among social scientists more meaningful. If we eschew this critical self-appraisal of our ideas and results, we fall into pretentious and useless expressions of our personal or national preferences and representations.

Many stays in different parts of the world have convinced me of the necessity to build an internationally transferable knowledge which cannot be identified with categories used by the actors themselves in any part of the world. The time has gone when ideas corresponding to important sectors of "advanced" countries were able to spread all over the world and to be transmitted by dependent or imitative social scientists. For these reasons, and to help eliminate superficial critiques and artificial discussions, I will try to identify what I mean by "social movement" and to relate it to a broader frame of reference which should at the same time provide space for other notions and other approaches.

Types of Social Conflicts

There is an almost general agreement that social movements should be conceived as a special type of social conflict. Many types of collective behavior are not social conflicts: panics, crazes, fashions, currents of opinion, cultural innovations are not conflicts, even if they define in a precise way what they react to. A conflict presupposes a clear definition of opponents or competing actors and of the resources they are fight-

ing for or negotiating to take control of. Such an elementary definition leaves the way open to many different approaches, but it already draws two limits which should not be trespassed. A social conflict cannot be analyzed entirely as a feature of a social system. If a "society" feels threatened or even no longer wants to survive—some examples have been described in Africa in particular—the manifestation of this societal crisis cannot be analyzed as a social conflict. The agents of this conflict must be identified as specific social categories. On the other side, if a collective actor cannot define its goals in social terms—if for example a group wants its specificity to be recognized—its struggle for freedom or identity cannot by itself create a social conflict. Even when the conflict is very far from being a zero-sum game, it must be defined by a "field," that is, by "stakes" which are valued and desired by two or more opponents. So all kinds of social conflicts have in common a reference to "real"—that is, organized—actors and to ends which are valued by all competitors or adversaries. Within this broad definition, it is necessary to separate various kinds of social conflicts.

(1) A first and easily perceived category of social conflict is the competitive *pursuit of collective interests*. In its most extreme form, it opposes individuals or groups who want to maximize their advantages on a market. In a more classical sociological tradition, it is defined as the expression of a relationship between actors' inputs and outputs in an organization, or of their relative deprivation. If employees of a company bring high or low inputs (measured by skill, for example) and receive high or low rewards (in terms of income in particular), the hypothesis has been elaborated that four main types of behavior will appear. The highest probability of conflict exists when low rewards correspond to high inputs. When both input and output are high, competition will replace grievance. On the contrary, a low input associated with low reward is likely to produce withdrawal, and a low input which receives high rewards leads to passive conformity. The actors here are

defined by their positions on a hierarchical scale, and the "stakes" of the conflicts are organizational rewards. This "rationalist" view of collective behavior has been well presented by A. Oberschall.²

(2) Both similar and opposed to the first type is the *reconstruction of a social, cultural, or political identity*. Here the opponent is defined more as a foreigner or invader than as an upper class, a power elite, or management. The actor defines himself as a community whose values are threatened by invasion or destruction. Messianic movements in Brazil at the time of abolition of slavery, for example, expressed first of all the defense of rural communities against the domination of trade and urban interests. C. Tilly, analyzing the Vendean counter-revolutionary movement in France, instead of interpreting it as an aristocratic reaction, sees in it the communitarian defense of a rural society which is threatened by a rising urban bourgeoisie.³

During recent years, many strikes have expressed, in declining industries, or in sectors which are upset by new technologies, the resistance of occupational groups. This second type of conflict can be called defensive, while the first one—the pursuit of collective interests—is offensive. Smelser's idea that collective behavior corresponds to the crisis of an element of the social system and efforts to reconstruct it fits with the definition of the second type of social conflict.⁴ The Chicago school has analyzed gangs and ghettos as forms of defense of dominated social and ethnic groups.

These two types of conflict behavior are located at the same level: they "respond" to an *organizational* status and to organizational change. Their analysis is generally made in terms of "system" more than in terms of actors. But they are opposed in most ways to each other. The first one can be called instrumental, the second expressive. Both can easily drift out of the

² A. Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

³ C. Tilly, *La Vendée: Révolution et contre-révolution* (Paris: Fayard, 1970).

⁴ N. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

limits of definition of social conflict. If the first one is reduced to rational behavior, it stops referring itself to a social conflict because the environment is described in nonrelational, purely competitive terms, and actors in competition have no common cultural or social orientation except their own interests. Sociology has constantly reminded us that *Homo socius* is not just a variety of *Homo oeconomicus*. If the second one is reduced to a prophetic defense of values and communities, it equally stops referring to a social conflict because it opposes culture and barbarism, Good and Evil, in a purely military way which excludes the definition of any kind of reference of both camps to common values.

(3) A *political force* aims at changing the rules of the game, not just the distribution of relative advantages in a given organization. In this case, the definition of the actors and of the stakes of their conflict seems easy, because either the conflict is strongly organized or it has a great capacity for mobilization. In both cases, each camp clearly defines itself, its opponent, and the aspect of the decision-making process or of the rules of the game which should be changed or maintained. Most studies of industrial relations refer themselves, often explicitly, to such an image of social conflict. The sociology of organizations has analyzed in an even broader way the efforts of various categories or individuals to control what M. Crozier calls "zones of uncertainty" and act according to what March and Simon have labeled "limited rationality."⁵ These authors among others have demonstrated that many conflicts which were considered "organizational" are in fact "political." Studying strikes, E. Shorter and C. Tilly follow the same line: instead of considering strikes as responses to "relative deprivation," they observe that they are closely connected with sharp progresses or declines in the political influence of unions.⁶

⁵ J. G. March and H. Simon, *Organizations* (New York: Wiley, 1958).

⁶ E. Shorter and C. Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1930–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

(4) In the same way, as the defense of an identity is the opposite side, the negative equivalent, of the collective pursuit of interest, *the defense of a status or privileges* is the negative equivalent of a political pressure. P. Schmitter, following an idea introduced by J. Linz, has demonstrated the importance in Europe and in Latin America of neocorporatist policies which appear when an interest group is incorporated into the State in which it defends its interests by emphasizing its functional importance, its usefulness for national life.⁷ Farmers or teachers, instead of defending their income directly, proclaim that a high priority should be recognized for agriculture or education. At a broader level, political movements can express the fear of crisis and a call to a national integration which defends moral or communitarian values and denounces dangerous minorities. Since the end of the nineteenth century our political and intellectual life has been repeatedly influenced by the fear of a mass society which often expresses the protection of norms and interests which can no longer be efficiently defended by usual institutional channels.

In Latin America, the fact that many important economic decisions are taken by foreign companies or the international banking and trade system entails as an indirect consequence the extreme autonomy of the political and ideological forces in relation to economic interests. This mechanism, which I call "disarticulation," weakens representative democracy. The result is that political movements are often oriented by a defensive nationalism which gives a priority to the defense of national integration against foreign influence and "dualization" of the country over the organization of directly conflicting political parties.

(5) Above this political, institutional level of analysis, exists a different type of social conflict, whose stake is *the social control of the main cultural patterns*, that is, of the patterns through

⁷ P. Schmitter, "Corporatism and Policy-Making in Contemporary Western Europe," *Comparative Political Studies*, April 1977, pp. 7-38.

which our relationships with the environment are normatively organized. These cultural patterns are of three main kinds: a model of knowledge, a type of investment, and ethical principles. These representations of truth, production, and morality depend on the capacity of achievement, of self-production, of a given society. Society is opposed to community, because a collectivity which has a high capacity to act upon itself and to transform itself is necessarily divided between leaders or ruling groups, which impose savings, deferred gratification patterns, abstract ideas, and moral principles and at the same time identify their own interests with these universal principles, and "people" or "masses," which are both subordinated to the control of cultural values by ruling groups and eager to eliminate this domination and to identify themselves with these cultural values. This central conflict is endless and cannot be solved. If the masses win, they transform an active society into an immobile, reproductive community; if the elite imposes its identification with values, it transforms the "self-production of society" into private interests and entrepreneurship into speculation or privileges.

(6) These last remarks make clear how short the distance is between this "positive" conflict behavior and the "negative" ones which correspond directly to them. *Creation of a new order* is the opposite of the conflict-loaded self-production of society. The most extreme form of such a "critical action" is *revolution*, which always aims at recreating a community, establishing a new social order, more rational or more national, but defined by its integration and its capacity to eliminate conflicts, a capacity which is rapidly demonstrated by the police. The ruling group, in a parallel way, tends to impose order as a precondition for economic development, but order often becomes an end in itself and an instrument for protecting privileges. The influence of the French and Russian revolutions has long imposed the idea that a revolution was the political expression of a popular class movement. This continuity from social mobilization to revolution, which is still

accepted by Tilly, has been efficiently criticized by historical studies. While V. Bonnell demonstrated that the development of labor movement in Russia before 1914 was quite independent of revolutionary political groups,⁸ T. Skocpol emphasized in an important book that revolutions are not direct results of a social upheaval but must be explained first of all by a breakdown of the State and of the political system.⁹ Earlier, F. Furet had criticized the traditional image of the French Revolution and of its "natural" radicalization from 1789 to 1794.¹⁰ This major transformation of political analysis is obviously a consequence of the disenchantment with the political regime born from the 1917 revolution.

The six types of conflict behavior which have been rapidly described correspond on one side to three levels of social life—organizational processes, political institutions, and cultural orientations—which cannot be separated from "class" conflicts, and, on the other side, to two opposed and complementary types of conflicts—offensive and defensive. The first type distinguishes conflicting actors and implies a somewhat autonomous expression of the stakes of this conflict; the second tends to identify an actor with social and cultural values and to exclude the opponent as an external enemy or as a traitor.

None of these types should be confused with others which are no longer defined by a certain level of social life but which manifest conflicting efforts to control a process of *historical change*, that is, the passage from one cultural and societal type to another one. In more concrete terms, we must separate the internal conflicts of an industrial society from conflicts which are linked to the process of industrialization. This distinction is still somewhat difficult to accept for Western countries be-

⁸ V. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁹ T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

¹⁰ F. Furet, *Penser la révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

cause their specific experience is that their own industrialization has been mainly endogenous, rooted in science, technology, education, "achievement motive," and the open market, so that their central image of themselves identified functioning and change, modernity and modernization. Modern societies were defined, from the Enlightenment on, by their capacity to destroy traditions, particularisms, and religions and to open the way to Reason and its achievements.

But after a long century of development policies—that is, of voluntaristic actions of States against the political and economic domination exerted by foreign countries and resulting in the growing dualization of society, actions that reinforce traditional social and cultural controls and impede protest movements—the distance between internal endogenous processes of change and State-led or foreign-led modernization has become obvious. We are even sometimes tempted to give up the idea of internal, structural conflicts, and to consider that all social problems should be understood as parts of processes of change. Such a view is as erroneous as the opposite identification of structural problems with modernization processes.

A complete typology of conflicts should elaborate a classification of "historical" conflicts, parallel with the one which has been presented for "social" conflicts. Diachronic conflicts belong to the same categories as synchronic conflicts. They are located at a certain level of social life, and they are offensive or defensive. But it is sufficient here to mention only the two types of "historical" conflicts which correspond to the highest level of social conflicts, in both its positive and negative aspects.

(7) It is appropriate to give a very concrete name to the positive historical conflicts at their highest level: they are *national conflicts*, because the identity and continuity of a changing, developing country cannot be based on social actors and social relations which are precisely transformed, destroyed, or created by the process of historical change—for example, of

industrialization. State and nation are the only actors which can maintain their identity and proclaim their continuity throughout a process of change. In all countries, conflicts about the control of change are conflicts about the State. That indicates the necessity to separate the political system as representative of internal economic, social, or cultural interests from the State as central agent of historical transformation. Here again, the experience of "central" countries and especially of the hegemonic ones, like Britain in the nineteenth century and the United States in the twentieth, is misleading, or has been ideologically misrepresented when the State was identified in these countries with a ruling class, with the people, or with the balance of social forces. The separation between highest level social and historical conflicts can be represented by the opposition between class conflict and national conflict which has dominated contemporary history since Austro-Marxists tried to combine them and the First World War demonstrated the limits of "proletarian" internationalism.

(8) The negative equivalent of national conflict is *neocommunitarianism*, the effort to reject a historical transformation which comes from abroad and destroys traditional values and forms of social organization. It could be called an antirevolution, and it is as important at the end of the twentieth century as the revolutionary movements were a century ago. From limited Western neocommunitarian tendencies or sects to fundamentalist, nativist, indigenous ideologies and to the powerful Islamist movement, the planet is more dominated today by the opposition between social and democratic movements on one side and neocommunitarian States or political groups on the other than by the internal social conflict between capitalism and socialism. The Leninist revolution corresponds to the hinge which permitted the passage from the central role of social conflicts and ideologies to the predominance of historical, State-oriented conflicts.

Behind this cold classification, it is easy to perceive hot ideological and political problems. For example, the very defi-

dition of the leftist intellectual, especially in France, since the Dreyfus case, is one who proclaims the convergence of liberal reforms, class conflicts, revolutions, and national liberation movements. Jean-Paul Sartre was the most influential of these intellectuals: he defined himself as a *petit bourgeois*—that is, as a defender of Western democracy—but located himself within the untrespassable horizon of Marxism and supported actively the Algerian independence movement. These intellectuals opposed colonialism or “imperialist” wars, at the same time that they were supporting leftist reforms in their own country. But it became more and more difficult for people who approved the Vietnamese liberation movement to support the Hanoi regime, without mentioning Cambodia, and it is impossible to consider Stalinist regimes as expression of proletarian revolutions. So the convergence between liberties and liberation appears more and more contradicted by historical experience. The separation of various kinds of social and historical conflicts help us to understand the conflicts or tensions which oppose them to each other and which confront each of us with difficult, sometimes impossible choices.

It is relatively easy to see that many analyses of “social movements” limit themselves to one type of conflict, generally because this type is predominant in a given type of society. It is difficult in many Third World nations to analyze class conflicts where anti-imperialism struggles, neocommunitarian movements, and the creation of a “State bourgeoisie” are the more visible forces. In an opposite way, many Western observers discovered “social movements” only in the sixties and were mainly preoccupied to understand how social integration could be restored either by reform or by a neoconservative tide.

But such relativist remarks can be misleading. It is necessary to propose a general interpretation of conflicts rather than to limit ourselves to classifying and separating types. So we must now proceed to a more difficult task, which is to give a general analysis of the differences and relations among various types

of conflicts. More concretely, that means that we must now introduce the notion of *social movement*, a term that we have until now carefully avoided using in the strict sense. Two solutions are possible. The easiest one is to consider a social movement as a generic category which includes all kinds of social and historical conflicts. But what is the use of such a wide notion which is only synonymous with collective conflicts?

To propose a more elaborate analysis of conflicts, we must integrate the previous classification into a general hypothesis which gives a different importance to various conflicts. From the beginning, we actually had to introduce such a hierarchization when we constructed a typology which opposes positive and negative movement and three levels of conflicts, an image which clearly gives a priority to the "highest" level, where conflicts are organized around the control of central cultural patterns and resources.

The Unity of Social Conflicts

To make my hypothesis quite clear, I will use the concept "social movements" *only* to refer to conflicts around the social control of the main cultural patterns, that is, type 5. This is an arbitrary semantic decision. Others may prefer to keep a much wider and more vague definition of social movements, but, if they do so, they run the risk of falling into the confusion we criticized at the beginning.

(1) A privilege can be given to a specific type of social conflict if other types of conflict can be considered as disintegrated or partial forms of the central type. The type of conflict I will from now on call a "social movement" is defined by a clear interrelation between conflicting actors and the stakes of their conflict. These three components, which I identified long ago as the definition of the identity (*i*) of the actor, the definition of the opponent (*o*), and the stakes, that is, the cultural totality (*t*) which defines the field of conflict,

belong to the same universe; they express the central conflict of a societal type.¹¹ For example, in an industrial society management and workers are in conflict about the social control of industry. These three components, management, workers, industry, are homogeneous; moreover, they are interdependent: industry never exists per se—this cultural mode of investment is always managed by a ruling group which has the capacity to impose on workers some form of division of labor. On the contrary, a *political pressure* represents a more limited integration of its components: there is no direct interdependence between political forces and political decisions. Political parties are generally multidimensional, particularly in representative democracies, and their aims are defined by strategies and tactics as much as by principles or directly expressed demands. Competitive parties do not represent a permanent opposition like the couple management–workers does. That can be symbolized by writing that a social movement is *i–o–t* and a political struggle *i–t*, *o–t*, or *i–o*. The collective pursuit of *interests* corresponds to an even lower level of integration of these elements: the actors are self-centered and the field of their competition or conflict can even be defined as a market, which is defined independently from actors. That corresponds to *i*, *o*, *t*, where each element is separated from the others. So political pressure and defense of interest must be defined not only by their specific nature but as nonintegrated and lower-level social movements.

This hypothesis has an important consequence: political pressure and collective pursuit of interest are always completed by expressions of a nonactualized, *virtual* social movement. A political pressure is not just part of a political game; it refers to interest and, at a higher level, to a social movement that it represents, and it affirms that its own action will never entirely reach its goal. Most negotiators refer to nonnegotiable

¹¹ A. Touraine, *The Self-Production of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

demands, to basic rights of workers, or, on the other side, to superior interests of the industry and of the nation. What a social movement expresses directly and practically appears here as principles, ideas, or convictions which are relatively separate from actual practices. The same holds for the defense of interests. Before the First World War, in Western Europe and in the United States, business unionism was predominant, but its instrumental orientation was completed by intellectual and political radical movements which created myths, like the Sorelian idea of the general strike. That does not mean that every form of defense of interest reveals a possible social movement, but rather that the defense of interest is always a combination between rational economic behavior and social movement. In a parallel way, a political pressure is intermediate between a social movement and a strategy. Here we go much beyond our classification; we introduce the hypothesis that social movements in a given society can be observed not only directly but indirectly, in partial, disintegrated forms, or, to put it more precisely, that *some* component of social movement must be found in all social conflicts. The only limit here of the penetration of social movement is the territory of *Homo oeconomicus*, but where this territory begins, if it really exists, social conflict actually disappears, is displaced by the triumph of economic rationality.

(2) "Negative" conflict behavior, as has already been suggested, can be analyzed as overintegrated forms of social movements. Here the actor identifies himself with values, eliminates the idea of an internal structural conflict, and presents the image of an homogenized community to opponents who are transformed into enemies. A revolution refers first to an internal conflict which, after its triumph, builds a new social and political order, looks for purity, and wages war against external enemies and traitors who undermine the new community. Thus every revolutionary creation of a new order is led to destroy the social movement it is based on. Saturn ate his children, revolutions eat their fathers. This self-destruction

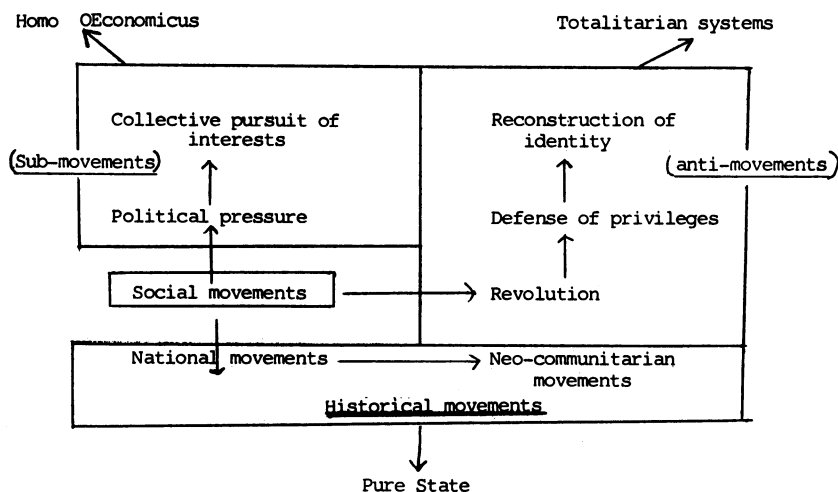
mechanism is supported by the ideal of a homogeneous system that we call sect at a microsociological level and totalitarian regime at a macrosociological level. These systems are not just communities, precisely because their main logic is the destruction of social conflicts, of all kinds of social relations, and, by way of consequence, of all actors. So social movements are limited on one side by *Homo oeconomicus* and, on the other, by Big Brother.

(3) The subordination of "historical" and particularly national movements to social movements is even more visible and has been for a long time at the very center of the world's political transformation. We are first tempted to recognize the separation and parallel importance of what is generally expressed as class and national movements, because our century has been dominated by national liberation movements which have dominated or destroyed class-oriented action. The Algerian example shows clearly the defeat of Marxist-oriented Messali Hadj or even of revolutionary populist Ben Bella and the triumph of the army headed by Boumedienne. In a different context, Fidel Castro, who was eventually going to build a Marxist-Leninist regime, gave in the Sierra a total priority to guerrilla war over social demonstrations and strikes organized by the July 26th movement which had a broad social basis in Havana. Communism and nationalism have often joined forces, but never has a social movement developed its autonomous action in a national-revolutionary regime. Nevertheless, such a separation, which implies a total domination of social by national movement, is never complete. In many dependent countries, especially in Latin America, "mixed" three-dimensional sociopolitical movements predominate with a class, an anticolonialist or anti-imperialist, and a national integrative dimension. There is no clear separation between social movements, political forces, and State intervention, so it is necessary to analyze "national-popular" regimes as indirect expressions of social movements. In countries with stronger State traditions, the movements or wars of national liberation

are not just national; on the contrary, they are similar to revolutionary movements. They create a new political and social order by rejecting what they call imperialism, colonialism, or decadent bourgeois life. In more general terms, it is difficult to completely separate structural conflicts and political processes of historical change. The process of industrialization is not independent of peasant, plebeian, or working-class social movements. So "historical" movements are always contradictory mixtures of social movements and of the rising power of a new State. Here appears a third and last limit of social movements: the intervention of an absolute State, "absolute" referring here to a pure definition of the State as agent of historical development and not as a center of the institutional system.

(4) If we combine these three lines of analysis, we are able to define all types of conflict by reference to the central type which has been called social movement (Figure 1). This presentation indicates the three processes of transformation of a social movement into more instrumental action, into more integrative and communitarian movement, and into historical,

FIGURE 1.



especially national movements. And it draws the limits beyond which the influence of a social movement is destroyed, in the first case by economic rationality, in the second by the logic of a totalitarian system, and in the third case by a State which is essentially an agent of economic development.

The Central Role of Social Movements in Sociological Analysis

The main meaning of this reconstruction of the analysis of social conflicts is not to isolate and underline the importance of social movement as a specific type of collective behavior but to reorganize our representation of social life around the notions of social movement, structural conflict, and cultural stakes.

The best way to understand the proposed use of the term social movement is to compare the theoretical approach it implies with others, each of which actually corresponds to one of the forms of disorganization of a social movement we have just encountered.

(1) There is a clear opposition between a sociological analysis which is organized around the notion of *society* or even *social system* and a sociology which gives a central role to social movements. The first implies that actors' behaviors are interpreted as indicators of the internal processes of differentiation, integration, and pattern-maintenance of a social system. An absence of correspondence between institutional rules and socialization agencies, asynchrony between sectorial changes, gaps between cultural values and institutional channels, or more simply inequality or upward and downward collective social mobility produce conflicts and crises which are both disruptive and adaptative. The consciousness of the actor is always misleading for this sociological school, simply because it interprets in actor-centered terms situations and behavior which must be conceived, according to it, as elements of a social system and as effects of its internal problems.

Nobody will challenge the superiority of such an approach to a "subjectivist" sociology which identifies itself with the actors' opinions and is unable to explain the visible discrepancies and contradictions between various actors' representations. But who is tempted to defend such a naive sociology which reduces the analyst to the role of a tape recorder or of a "historian of the king"? The concept of social movement implies a different view of social life. Instead of analyzing the social system as a set of transformations and specifications of cultural patterns into institutional norms and forms of social and cultural organization, it emphasizes the structural conflict in a given "society," especially when it has a high capacity of modernization and achievement, around the control of the instruments of transformation and "production" of social life. Accordingly, all aspects of social and cultural organization manifest, instead of general values, *both* cultural patterns and power relations, and the social movements which express them. This antipositivist view of modern societies opposes to the image of a rationalized, integrated, and flexible modern society the growing importance of social movements and, even more directly, the consequences of an insufficient level of integration of conflicts into a central social movement: wild conflicts of interests, pseudocommunitarian withdrawal, arbitrary power, and violence, which is the opposite of social conflict.

Our approach is centered on the representation of social actors as both culturally oriented and involved in structural conflicts. Actors in a modern society—that is, in a society which has a high capacity of achievement—are neither purely rational nor identified with communitarian values. None of them can be identified with modernity or, more precisely, with the set of cultural patterns—epistemic, economic, and ethical—that I call *historicity*. Managers are not more rational than workers, professors than students. Different social categories can participate more or less in central cultural orientations and organize social movements but can equally

develop defensive attitudes or create submovements and even antimovements.

(2) In an opposite way, the *structural Marxist school* has recently diffused the idea that actors, instead of being integrated in a society by internalizing its values, are submitted to a logic of domination and are unable to be real actors. This idea was already present in Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* Workers cannot liberate themselves because they are prisoners of a system which limits their spontaneous action to reformist negotiations. In the sixties and seventies, disenchanted Leninists recognized that the revolutionary and scientific intelligentsia which was supposed to build a new and liberated society for the workers had transformed itself into aparatchiki of a totalitarian State and that the sacrificed generation was followed by many others. So a new type of Marxist, ex- or para-Marxists, built the image of a closed society, in which conflicts and protests are no longer possible because of the growing capacity of intervention and manipulation of a central power. After the pioneering work of H. Marcuse, a group of French social thinkers, L. Althusser and N. Poulantzas, P. Bourdieu and M. Foucault, the latter with great talent and a complex and changing intellectual personality, diffused a kind of critical functionalism for which society is dominated by ideological apparatuses of the State or by omnipresent powers symbolized by Bentham's Panopticon or is identified with its mechanisms of reproduction. The decline of the labor movement, the transformation of Third World national liberation movements into oppressive or even fanatic regimes, the influence of Soviet dissidents, had destroyed the traditional eschatological confidence in some movements which were supposed to be popular and libertarian. Disillusions with all kinds of revolutionary forces led theorists to substitute the idea of an all-powerful logic of domination for the abandoned hope of liberating social movements. At the same time, these social philosophers refused to exchange their ancient creeds for a neoliberalism more and more satisfied

with Western countries which identified themselves with rationality while they were torturing in Algiers or dropping napalm on Vietnamese villages. This double rejection created a totally negative image of social life in which alienation and heteronomous integration could be challenged only by marginal revolts or by individualist aesthetic culture. Such a social philosophy played an important role in the history of ideas and ideologies, but it has been highly destructive of social analysis. The necessary critique of a declining or corrupted type of social movement ended up arbitrarily in the image of a society without actors. The image of our societies as entirely dominated by systems of control and manipulation is so far from observable fact that it lured many sociologists to replace field studies by doctrinaire interpretations. It transformed itself in some countries into the dominant ideology of a self-destroying intelligentsia.

(3) A sociology of social movements and more generally a sociology of action can be more concretely defined by opposition with another sociological approach for which any reference to "structural" problems or conflicts should be deleted. We no longer live in a social system, says this school, but in situations which cannot be defined except as a diversified flow of changes. They take so seriously the ideas of modernity, achievement, and development that they define social actors entirely by their strategies, by their roles and relative influence in the process of change. The most conspicuous example of this approach is the critique made against scientific management, as defined by Taylor, Ford, and business schools, in the name of a strategic view of management. Symbolically, the Japanese model replaces the American model of management. This sociology proposes a pragmatic view of actors and conflicts and rejects any reference to a "center," be it defined in terms of cultural values, of a logic of domination, or as a central social movement. What is generally known as sociology of organizations has been the stronghold of this theory, which actually destroys the concept of organization and replaces it

with concepts like decision and strategy. It recognizes as a central value not reason and its general principles but the capacity to elaborate an efficient strategy in a moving environment. Like structural Marxism, this *political* view of society deserves credit because it contributed efficiently to destroying both analysis of industrial conflict, which had been transformed into ideologies or even myths, and the naive identification of our own society with universal values. Moreover, when collective conflicts are still loosely formulated and organized, the strategic approach is a kind of spontaneous natural sociology of the elite groups who are rich or powerful enough to elaborate complex strategies in a highly competitive world. But it does not correspond to the experience of most people, who resist the initiative of the elite groups by withdrawing into an individualistic, hedonistic search for identity or into marginality or fighting back in the name of traditions, principles, or alternative views of social life.

The notion of resource mobilization has been used to transform the study of social movements into a study of strategies as if actors were defined by their goals and not by the social relationships—and especially power relationships—in which they are involved. Such a transformation is sometimes acceptable when apparently radical or ideological movements are actually instrumentally oriented interest groups. But in too many cases, this notion is used to eliminate enquiries about the meaning of collective action as if resource mobilization could be defined independently from the nature of the goals and the social relations of the actor, as if all actors were finally led by a logic of economic rationality.

(4) If we consider the world today, the most dynamic representation of social life is neither optimistic functionalism, pessimistic structural Marxism, nor pragmatic strategic conception of social action but the call for identity and community. Through a series of meetings and programs organized by the United Nations University in Tokyo, especially under the leadership of Anouar Abdel Malek, can be perceived a

passionate defense of the specificity of different national or regional civilizations,¹² which is directly opposed to a universalistic rationalist approach and the privileges it gives to *Zweckrationalität*. Of course wide differences exist between intellectuals who give total priority to cultural pluralism—that is, to the struggle against cultural colonialism—and social scientists who try to combine the universalistic values of development—science, technology, efficiency—with respect for or revival of cultural and national specificity. But all of them are linked with the neocommunitarian movements which are the “negative” form of national movements and develop an idealist and often religious view of social life.

(5) This review of four schools of social thought which are different from a sociology of collective action and social movements raises the problem of the relationships between them and the sociology of social movements. Here we must follow the same principle of analysis as before. Each of these sociological schools must be granted a certain autonomy, but at the same time it corresponds to a specific form of disorganization of a sociology of action, which deserves a central place precisely because of its capacity to understand and reinterpret other approaches.

The four schools we opposed to a sociology of action—functionalism, structural Marxism, “strategic,” and “civilizational” schools—correspond to the forms of decomposition of social movements which have been represented in the schema already presented.

When we pass from social movements to submovements, before crossing the frontier of sociological analysis and entering the territory of *Homo oeconomicus*, we tend to use a *functionalist* analysis, because the actors of a political pressure or of the defense of collective interests are defined no longer as “producers” of social organization but as “consumers”—that

¹² A. Abdel Malek, *Project on Sociocultural Development Alternatives in a Changing World: Final Report* (Tokyo: United Nations University, 1985).

is, by their level of participation. Instead of analyzing a form of social life as the result of a central conflict and of its institutional, political consequences and solutions, functionalist approaches identify values and norms with forms of organization and processes of integration or disintegration. But a sociology of action objects that no situation can be reduced to institutional rules and hierarchized statutes: there is always a certain amount of uncertainty, negotiation, conflict, transformation.

The *structural Marxist school* rightly underlines the constant transformation of an open conflict between opposed social movements into a "closed" order which has a certain inertia reinforced by mechanisms of social and cultural control. What we object to is that no society is completely closed, and certainly not industrial and democratic societies, so that the main error of this approach—which can transform itself into a self-fulfilling prophecy when it is predominant—is to deny and ignore the ubiquitous existence of actors. When I met Herbert Marcuse in the streets of Paris in May 1968, near mass demonstrations and barricades built by middle-class students in the heart of the city, I was entitled to express to him my misgivings about his idea that our societies made movements of protest impossible. At the same time, students and blacks in the United States, sometimes inspired by Marcuse's ideas, were demonstrating his excessive pessimism.

The "*strategic*" school is not directly included in the general schema presented above because its representation of social life as a complex flow of change without any structural conflict is the direct opposite of a sociology of social movements and cannot be considered as one of its forms of decomposition. But social actors are not oriented only toward their environment; they are not only agents of change; they belong to a certain type of social life, of production and culture. A sociology of strategies is rightly predominant in the study of international relations; it cannot be central in the study of social relations in general. It is arbitrary to merge structural prob-

lems and historical transformations into one central category, social change, and it is excessive to react against functionalist and structural Marxist theories by isolating the actor from a system which is reduced to an environment in which the actor is oriented by his interest.

Finally, the sociological school which gives priority to *national culture* and the defense of the specificity of civilizations which are threatened by the cultural and economic imperialism of universalist-oriented countries, capitalist as well as communist, maintains the long tradition which was created by the German historical school of law and other forms of historicist thought. Our main critique against it is that it identifies social life with ideologies and political philosophies and neglects the real social actors. It is dangerous to identify Egyptian peasants or Moroccan workers with Islam or Japanese white-collar employees with Buddhism, even if it is necessary to give the greatest importance to the specificity of each civilization. Cultural orientations cannot be separated from social relations and in particular from relations of power or domination.

The Nature of Social Movements

Let's now present more directly some principles of analysis of social movements which have been already implicitly introduced.

(1) Social movements are always defined by a social *conflict*, that is, by clearly defined opponents. Actors often live their own actions first of all as a rupture with predominant cultural values or institutional rules. Alberoni insisted on this opposition between institution and movement.¹³ But many revolts or uprisings can be nothing but signs of an internal crisis and reorganization of a social system. A social movement cannot be defined by its intensity, its emotions, or its "volcanic"

¹³ F. Alberoni, *Movimento e istituzione* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1977).

force—images which correspond better to disruptions which can be better analyzed from a functionalist point of view.

(2) The most controversial idea which has been defended here is that in a given societal type there is only *one* central couple of conflicting social movements. This idea seems very near to the Marxist concept of class struggle and is constantly challenged by observers who describe a great variety of conflicts which cannot be considered as specific “fronts” of a general war. These observers reject the ideological or even eschatological connotation of such a view, which seems to express a religious belief in the end of the prehistory of mankind.

I share these criticisms and agree that it is indispensable to eliminate the eschatological aspects of many nineteenth-century theories. But the concept of social movement has very little in common with the ideas which are here rightly criticized. Social movements are not positive or negative agents of history, of modernization, or of the liberation of mankind. They act in a given type of social production and organization. This is the reason why we emphasize the priority of social, structural conflicts over historical movements. Once this misunderstanding has been eliminated, it becomes clear that the multiplicity of social conflicts or, more precisely, the idea that there is no central conflict corresponds to a system-centered analysis. In the same way as a car can break down for a series of reasons and as there is nothing in common between a flat tire, a lack of gas, and a broken gearbox, many people are satisfied with observing that there is apparently nothing in common between ethnic minorities protest, women’s lib, industrial unions, urban crisis, and antiwar movements. Who is going to deny that these conflicts are largely separated from each other? But this pedestrian observation is no argument to reject the idea that a central conflict exists in a given type of society. And even in industrial societies, it was easy to observe great distances between unions, socialist parties, cooperatives, popular culture movements, municipal action, and so on.

If I devoted the preceding pages to a rather long definition of a given approach in relation with others, my purpose was to get rid of a primitive type of social thought which identifies analytical categories with historical facts. We have no right to say that the United States is an industrial or postindustrial, democratic or capitalist country, as if all aspects of American life should be considered as attributes of one of these definitions. Only concrete research and discussions can define the degree of integration of specific conflicts into a general social movement.

I devoted a series of research projects to the analysis of what is often called new social movements, that is, more precisely, new social conflicts. My goal was and still is to detect whether or not there are some common elements in some of them, if there is *some* social movement in conflicts which have obviously other components. What is striking today is that this hypothesis is often accepted, even if it is in rather vague terms. Many observers are aware of the fact that central conflicts deal less with labor and economic problems than with cultural and especially ethical problems, because the domination which is challenged controls not only "means of production" but the production of symbolic goods, that is, of information and images, of culture itself. These brief remarks do not intend to demonstrate such a general hypothesis but only to make clear that the preceding pages can help us to understand how a central conflict and social movement can appear through a great variety of conflicts in which other components can have more weight and be even predominant.

(3) The reason why so many people are spontaneously convinced of the plurality of conflicts is that they identify social movements with opposition or "popular" movements which challenge "social order." On the contrary, a popular social movement cannot be separated from a social movement of the "ruling class," and only their conflict can be considered as central. Holders of economic or political power must be analyzed as a social movement instead of being identified with

central cultural values and social norms. Referring to an industrial society, I would consider management a social movement exactly in the same way as labor, and Ford as a movement leader or an ideologist in the same way as Gompers or Reuther. So the centrality of social movements never means their hegemony, their capacity to identify themselves with social order, modernity, or rationality. Such an identification is never obtained, even by a "ruling class," but only by an absolute State, which destroys social actors, both powerful and powerless.

(4) If we often feel uncomfortable with the idea of a central social movement, it is because we are still influenced by a long tradition which identifies social movements and political action, that is, organized action aiming at controlling State power. This confusion has been central in European thought where the labor movement has often been considered synonymous with socialism, both in Communist circles and in social-democratic States. American intellectual life has proved more able to understand the concept of social movement while Europeans and Latin Americans for a long time spoke only of revolutions or of State-led reforms.

It is typical of evolutionist social thought not to separate structure and change, "social" and "historical" movements. Classical sociology defined Western society both as a system and as a process of modernization. Durkheim insisted more on one aspect and Weber on the other, but Parsons reached an extreme point of identification of modernity, as a process of rationalization and secularization, with principles of unity and integration of modern Western societies. In the same way, in Latin America and in other parts of the world today, sociological analysis is still identified with the study of the formation of a national State.

The novelty of the concept of social movement as I use it here is that it opposes itself to this type of social thought and emphasizes the analytical separation between social movements and transformations of the State. To put it in traditional

terms, it is based on the eighteenth-century idea of the separation between civil society and State. That is why the idea of social movement interprets very powerfully the attempts of "society" to liberate itself from "power," to use the exact words by which Solidarity defined its action against the party-state in Poland.

It would be a mistake to look today in our countries for a political principle of unification of social movements. For Lenin, the class in itself was transformed into a class for itself only by a revolutionary avant-garde party. The idea of social movement is clearly anti-Leninist and implies that the nature of a social movement can be defined only in terms of cultural stakes and conflicts between social, "civil" actors. That obviously supposes that the whole of civil society is not "mobilized" or repressed by an absolute State.

(5) Three main kinds of social movements should be distinguished. *Social movements*, in a strict sense, represent conflicting efforts to control cultural patterns (knowledge, investment, ethics) in a given societal type. *Historical movements* are organized actions to control a process of passage from one societal type to another one. Here actors are no longer defined in purely social terms but first of all by their relationships with the State, which is the central agent of such historical transformations. Nevertheless, historical movements, as I already mentioned, are not completely separated from social movements because they combine a class dimension with a national and modernizing one, as is visible both in Communist movements and in national-popular regimes. The same complexity characterizes *cultural movements*. They cannot be reduced to cultural innovations, which are defined in purely cultural terms as a quarrel between ancients and moderns, to refer to an episode in the history of French literature. A cultural movement, on the contrary, is a type of social movement in which the transformation of cultural values plays a central role but in which social conflict appears within this process of transformation of values. A good contemporary

example is the women's movement. It is centrally defined by a critique and transformation of women's status and image, and more broadly by the emergence of new ethical values, but it is constantly divided by a social conflict which opposes two ways of interpreting women's protest: a liberal action, aiming at achieving equality of rights and opportunities between men and women, and a more radical tendency which rejects an equality which appears to be imitative of the dominant male model and asserts the specificity of women's culture, experience, and action. This internal conflict, which has been especially visible in the United States and France, draws a clear separation between cultural innovation and cultural movement.

New Social Movements?

(1) The most serious critique of the notion of social movement, as I use it here, is that it corresponds, like all macrosociological concepts, to a specific type of society. We cannot analyze our societies with the concepts of caste or *Stand* and less and less of class. In the same way, is not social movement an abstract name for labor movement, a generalization of a given type of industrial society? Some introduce a more positive critique: let's substitute in our vocabulary "minorities" for social movements, let's abandon all references to a new society and recognize that in our mass society protest movements do not pretend to become a majority and to get legitimate power but define themselves as minorities. They do not pretend to transform society; they are liberal or libertarian, and try to lower the level of social control and integration. They fight for a society defined by its diversity, adding ethnic or moral pluralism to political pluralism and free enterprise. The most extreme form of these critiques asserts that all models of collective life should be respected and the only paramount value is individualism: the only possible movement should be

antisocial, pushing back the invasion of collective controls and organizations, destroying statuses and roles to free the individual, his desires, dreams, and imagination.

(2) All these critiques, excessive as they sometimes are, help us to free ourselves from social and political models which were inherited from a declining type of society. I have already indicated some deep differences between industrial social movements and present-day conflicts. We must now deepen our analysis.

All social movements in the past were limited, because the field of their action—that is, the capacity of a society to produce itself—was limited, even in the most achievement-oriented societies. What I call *historicity*, the capacity to produce an historical experience through cultural patterns, that is, a new definition of nature and man, was limited by what I call “metasocial guarantees of social order.” Men thought they lived in a microcosm included in a macrocosm whose laws imposed a definition of human nature and legitimated social norms. All social movements, at the same time as they were defining stakes and enemies, were referring to a metasocial principle which was called order of things, divine rule, natural law, or historical evolution (the idea of modernity is one of the last metasocial principles). In our times, we feel that our capacity of self-production, self-transformation, and self-destruction is boundless. Industrial societies were able to transform “means of production” to invent mechanical devices and systems of organization, but our society invents technologies to produce symbolic goods, languages, information. It produces not only means but ends of production, demands, and representations. It is already able to transform our body, our sexuality, our mental life. The result is that the field of social movements extends itself to all aspects of social and cultural life. This conclusion is the opposite of the structural Marxist idea according to which social life is controlled by a central agency. The public space—*Öffentlichkeit*—strictly limited in a bourgeois society, was extended to labor

problems in an industrial society and now spreads over all fields of experience: private life becomes public and social scientists who announced some years ago that, after a long period of public life, we were withdrawing into private life, did not see that the main political problems today deal directly with private life—fecundation and birth, reproduction and sexuality, illness and death, and, in a different way, with home-consumed mass media.

(3) This extraordinary transformation, which makes all principles and rules problematic, creates two main obstacles to the formation of social movements. The first one is the disappearance of metasocial limits which provided collective action with a principle of unity which was both negative and positive. Marcuse and others raised the question: when gods are dead, when guilt and redemption lose their meaning, what can we oppose to utilitarianism or hedonism? The Western experience can be considered as a short and dramatic period of secularization, *Entzauberung*, which corresponds to the economic takeoff but rapidly ends up in a utilitarian consumer society. Big Brother is not a dangerous enemy for social movements in democratic societies; egotism is. But here is exactly the point where new social movements enter the scene. Past social movements were linked to metasocial principles, but they opposed themselves to the domination of tradition and natural principles; new social movements are threatened by utilitarianism, but they defend the self and its creativity against interest and pleasure. Domination can no longer be challenged by a call to metasocial principles; only a direct call to personal and collective freedom and responsibility can foster protest movements. In a parallel way, ruling groups are no longer motivated by a Protestant ethic or its equivalent; only self-realization and creativity can motivate them as entrepreneurs. Social movements are no longer spurred by the images of an ideal society but by the search of creativity. The utilitarian tradition is the main limit and obstacle to social movements today as religion was in more traditional cultures.

(4) New social movements are less sociopolitical and more sociocultural. The distance between civil society and State is increasing while the separation between private and public life is fading away. The continuity from social movement to political party is disappearing; political life tends to be a depressed area between a stronger State in a changing international environment and, on the other side, sociocultural movements. The main risk is no longer to see social movements absorbed by political parties, as in Communist regimes, but a complete separation between social movements and State. In such a situation, social movements can easily become segmented, transform themselves into defense of minorities or search for identity, while public life becomes dominated by pro- or anti-State movements. That is what is happening today, especially in Germany and the United States, with peace movements. It is possible that through such "historical" movements, new social movements will eventually achieve a high capacity of political action, progressing from *Bürgerinitiativen* to a Green party and inventing new forms of political life; but a different evolution is equally possible: the crystallization of an anti-State movement, more and more distinct from scattered sociocultural movements. This situation corresponds to the beginning of many industrial societies when anarchist, communist, and Christian groups were challenging State and church while, far from them, weak unions, wildcat strikes, and riots expressed a confused mixture of workers' grievances and of decline of preindustrial crafts and cities.

(5) The main condition for social movements to take shape is the consciousness that we are entering a new type of social life. During the sixties and early seventies, the crisis of industrial values prevailed over the notion of postindustrial society. The first new social movements were so closely linked with the counterculture that they collapsed when rising expectations were replaced by shrinking prospects. Thus, during the late seventies and even, in Europe, the early eighties, our historical experience has been dominated by the idea of crisis. Individ-

ual and national life seemed to be determined by unforeseeable events, like changes in the dollar or the price of oil, Japanese competition or Soviet military pressure. I criticized, as early as in 1969, the notion of postindustrial society, as it had been conceived by D. Bell, that is, as a hyperindustrial society. Fifteen years later, after a short period of enthusiasm for the "third wave," few observers, especially in business circles, are ready to speak of a postindustrial revolution. A new industrial revolution or a new leap forward in industrial productivity seems to be a more adequate expression. Americans in general have been very cautious in their judgments, while more voluntaristic countries like Japan and France are still speaking of an electronic revolution, in the first case because it is identified with the pride of a Japan made number one, in the second because French government agencies are filled with anguish as they consider the advance of the United States and Japan in many high-tech industries.

Postindustrial society must be defined in a more global and radical way today, as a new culture and a field for new social conflicts and movements. A broad occupational definition of an information society is misleading and cannot justify the idea that a different society is taking shape. On the contrary, postindustrial society must be defined more strictly by the technological production of symbolic goods which shape or transform our representation of human nature and of the external world. For these reasons, research and development, information processing, biomedical science and techniques, and mass media are the four main components of postindustrial society, while bureaucratic activities or production of electrical and electronic equipment are just growing sectors of an industrial society defined by production of goods more than by new channels of communications and the creation of artificial languages.

Only the organization of new social movements and the development of different cultural values can justify the idea of a new society that I prefer to call a *programmed* more than just

a postindustrial society. The comparison with the history of industrial society is once more useful: in the Western World, crises of old values and new economic challenges come first before new social actors and conflicts take shape; new forms of political life and new ideologies appear even later. This is a practical reason why sociology today must give a central importance to the concept of social movement—not only to separate itself from an old definition of its object as the *study of society*, which should be replaced by the *study of social action*, but, more concretely, because the construction of a new image of social life requires, right now, the concept of social movement as a bridge between the observation of new technologies and the idea of new forms of political life. This concept could not play a central role in previous forms of social thought; for the first time, it can become the keystone of sociological analysis.

(6) The danger here is to be lured by voluntaristic assumptions. The concept of social movement is useful when it helps one to rediscover social actors where they have been buried beneath either structural Marxist or rationalist theories of strategies and decisions. During the seventies, the “dominant ideology” was that ethnic minorities, like all dominated groups, school students, hospital inmates, and others had to be defined by the exclusion, labeling, and stigmatization they suffered, in other words, as victims. Only an analysis based on the idea of social movement can challenge directly and efficiently such a view and help rediscover that these alienated and excluded categories are nevertheless actors and are often more able than the “silent majority” to analyze their situation, define projects, and organize conflicts which can transform themselves into an active social movement. In the same way, how many Jews today would accept to be defined without any reference to Jewish culture or to Israel? A similar use of the concept “social movement” can aid in the criticism of an image of the school system which emphasizes the impact of

social inequality on academic results and future occupational achievements. Instead of considering teachers and pupils as determined by social and cultural inequalities beyond their reach, the emphasis must be put on the autonomy of the school system, on its capacity to increase or decrease inequality of opportunities, so that education can be conceived as a field of debates and projects which can probably not be interpreted as direct social movements but, in a more limited and indirect way, as manifestations of a tension between education as socialization and as "individuation," opposition which expresses a more general conflict. In situations which are generally interpreted in terms of participation or exclusion, of conformity and deviance, the idea of social movement introduces a different approach because it tries to evaluate the capacity of various categories to transform themselves into actors of their own situation and of its transformation.

But we should distrust too simple images of social movements as "conscious and organized" actions. Especially in our times: today, as at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, it is easier to describe masses, "dangerous classes," riots, or the formation of a new elite than social movements which are not yet organized. Cultural orientations and political conflicts are more visible than social problems, and these are too easily analyzed in term of marginality and exclusion. It took some time in the nineteenth century to discover the "political capacity of the laboring classes"; we are only approaching an analogous stage of evolution of the new social movements.

Let's consider three more examples of the complex nature of new social conflicts. The actions against the industrial use of nuclear energy have revealed a new kind of protest, against decision makers who have the power to shape national life for a long period of time in a "technocratic" way. This action tries to foster a grass-roots democracy. But at the same time, they are oriented by a defensive and communitarian counterculture often loaded with irrationalism. This duality can be com-

pared with the first stages of the labor movement when anticapitalist protest was mixed with the defense of semi-independent craftsmen displaced by industry.

The women's movement, beyond its equalitarian goals, has destroyed traditional images of the "feminine nature," but it has often been linked with an ideology which was inherited from the labor movement and which imposed upon it categories of analysis and protest which did not correspond to the motivations of militant women.

In a more general way, from the seventies until today, the displacement of protest from the economic to the cultural field has been linked with an opposite tendency, the privatization of social problems, an anxious search for identity and a new interest for the body, demands which can lead to the definition of new social norms or, in an opposite way, to an individualism which excludes collective action. It takes few pages to define and defend the concept of social movement, but it should take many years for sociologists to disentangle various components of complex social and cultural actions, and to identify the presence of social movements in collective behavior which has many more components.

Conclusion

The fact that many sociologists are now interested in "social movements," even if this notion is too often used in a loose sense, reveals the end of a long period of sociological thought during which the concept of social system played a central role. This classical sociology is now challenged *on one side* by utilitarians who try to discover economic rationality behind collective action and by analysts of strategies and "limited rationality" who are interested in processes of change which respond to transformations of the environment; and *on the other side*, not only by neocommunitarian social thinkers who oppose the specificity of each civilization to a foreign-led development but first of all by sociologists who refuse to separate

cultural orientations from social conflicts, and who give, as I do myself, a basic role to the notion of social movement, defined as an agent of conflict for the social control of the main cultural patterns. These two divergent streams of critiques attack not only optimistic functionalism but, with the same strength, pessimistic structural Marxism. Then the concept of social movement, as I used it here, is part of the general debate which opposes the main sociological schools and which can be summed up by the schema in Figure 2.

If we accept that economic rationalism and defense of cultural specificities, for opposite reasons, drift out of the field of sociology, which is generally defined as the study of social relations—that is, as the explanation of individual and collective behavior by the social relations in which the actors are involved—the main debates in sociology can be defined in more concentrated terms. Each main sociological school can be defined by its emphasis on one of two main approaches: on one side, it puts the emphasis more on the actors or, on the contrary, on the system, and, on the other side, it insists more on social integration or on social conflicts. These two choices are by no means parallel; on the contrary, their combinations define the main choices for sociologists.

A first school gives a priority to the unity of the system; its main concept is *social system*. A second insists on the internal conflict of a system; structural Marxism is its most influential expression today, but it can be more broadly defined by the central role it gives to inequality. A third school gives a central importance to the management of change. The concepts of

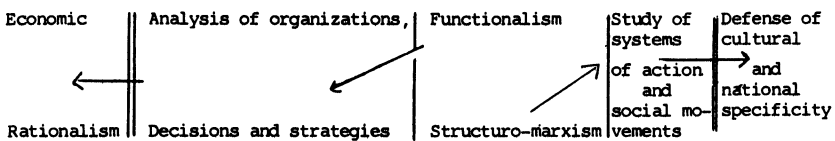
FIGURE 2.

	System	Actor
Integration	Social system (functionalism)	Strategy (neo-rationalism)
Conflict	inequality (structuro-marxism)	Social movement (Sociology of action)

organization and decision have generally corresponded to this orientation, which is best defined today by the central role it gives to the study of *strategies*. The last one emphasizes at the same time actors and conflicts; its view of social life is organized around the concept of *social movement*. It should be added that these general approaches can be used directly or at a less global level. For example, the idea of social movement can be replaced by an analysis of political pressures—as it is the case in many of Tilly's works—or even of public opinion transformations. The fact that an author locates himself at a societal, political, or organizational level should not be confused with his general orientation.

I have tried in this paper to make clear how a sociology which is organized around the concept of social movement can both recognize the relative autonomy of other schools and criticize them. But, as a conclusion, it is more useful to recognize the existence and strength of the four main orientations of sociology and maybe to suggest that today the central debate opposes the concepts of strategy and social movements while twenty years ago the hottest discussions opposed the ideas of social system and inequality. This transformation of the debates shows that sociology as a whole has moved from a study of social system and its principle of integration to an analysis of social action and social change. This fundamental transformation produces deep intellectual crises. We are probably still in a period of uncertainty about what is the most creative paradigm in sociological thought, and some are tempted to abandon not only the old functionalist model but the whole of sociology itself, by calling in nonsociological ideas like *Homo oeconomicus* or *Volksgeist* (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3.



The concept of social movement is all the more necessary to the extent to which it facilitates the transcendence of the present weakness and confusion of sociology by offering a direct critique of the model of analysis which is in crisis and by introducing a new general approach, new debates, and new fields of concrete research. The worst possible mistake would be to consider social movements as the object of one more chapter in books whose general design and orientations would not be changed, as if it were useful in certain periods to insist on crises and conflicts and, in others, on institutions and socialization.

The maturity of a field of knowledge can be measured by its ability to organize its works and discussions about a few central problems. Today, the central problem of sociology, in a rapidly changing world, is to understand the production and control of change, and its central debate must oppose the concepts of strategy and social movements. These concepts represent to some extent complementary approaches, but it is indispensable for students of each school to try building competitive general theories. Only the debate between these conflicting images of social life can give back to sociology the vitality it seems to have lost.