Lect. 1



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De: Seymour M. Lipset, Martin Trow y James Coleman, Union Democracy. New York, Anchor Books, 1956.

# SECTION I—INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

II-1

Tema 2-2 (complementaria)

## 1. Democracy and Oligarchy in Trade Unions

In recent years political democracy has proved so vulnerable to changes in social structure that the better understanding of these processes has become one of the major tasks of social science. Few still believe (as the American negotiators in Paris in 1919 seemed to believe) that formal guarantees and written constitutions can insure democracy. The most carefully worded guarantees have been swept aside, and the most intelligent of constitutions ignored, until now men seem liable to the opposite error of considering guarantees and constitutions worthless.

In few areas of political life is the discrepancy between the formal juridical guarantees of democratic procedure and the actual practice of oligarchic rule so marked as in private or voluntary organizations such as trade unions, professional and business associations, veterans' groups, and cooperatives. In fact, as many observers have noted, almost all such organizations are characterized internally by the rule of a one-party oligarchy. That is, one group, which controls the administration, usually retains power indefinitely, rarely faces organized opposition, and when faced with such opposition often resorts to undemocratic procedures to eliminate it. This is especially true for national organizations.

There is, however, one trade union—the International Typographical Union (ITU), the organization of the men who set type in the print shops of North America—which does not fit this pattern. It is the only American trade union in which organized parties regularly oppose each other for

election to the chief union posts, and in which a two-party system has been institutionalized. Since the beginning of this century, the officers of the international union and of most of the larger locals have been chosen in biennial elections, in which two or more political parties have offered a complete slate of candidates for all offices. The two major parties of the union operate much as do the Democratic and Republican Parties in American politics, though they have no connection with any group or party outside the union. The parties have been of roughly equal strength in the international since 1920, so that turnover in office occurs at least as frequently as in national politics. In the thirty-five years since 1920, five incumbent presidents of the international have been defeated for re-election. In the New York local of the union, the largest local of the ITU, containing 10% of the membership, seven out of the last fourteen elections have resulted in defeat for the incumbent president. Probably nothing like this has happened in any other trade union or other of the private governments (as we may call voluntary organizations) anywhere in the world.

## THE THEORY OF OLIGARCHY

The pattern which characterizes almost all voluntary organizations was generalized over forty years ago by the German sociologist, Robert Michels, when he laid down his famous "iron law of oligarchy" in the following terms: "It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy."[1]

The experience of most people as well as the studies of social scientists concerned with the problem of organization would tend to confirm Michels' generalization. In their trade unions, professional societies, business associations, and cooperatives—in the myriad nominally democratic voluntary organizations—men have learned, and learn again every day, that the clauses in the constitutions which set forth the machinery for translating membership interests and sentiments into organizational purpose and action bear little relationship to the actual political processes which determine what their organizations do. At the head of most private organizations stands a small group of men most of whom have held high office in the organization's government for a long time, and whose tenure and control is rarely threatened by a serious organized internal opposition. In such organizations, regardless of whether the membership has a nominal right to control through regular elections or conventions, the real and often permanent power rests with the men who hold the highest positions.

Since Michels first wrote, many books and articles have been written about oligarchy in voluntary organizations, but almost invariably they have documented the operation of his iron law in another set of circumstances. They have shown how control of the organizational machinery, combined with membership passivity, operates to perpetuate oligarchic control. From these studies it is clear that unions and other voluntary organizations more closely resemble one-party states in their internal organization than they do democratic societies with organized legitimate opposition and turnover in office. Indeed, the pattern of one-party oligarchy is so common in the labor movement that one defender of the Soviet Union has pointed to it as a justification of the one-party regime in that country:

> What is totalitarianism? A country that has a totalitarian government operates like our union operates. There are no political parties. People are elected to govern the country based upon their records. . . . That is totalitarianism. If we started to divide up and run a Republican set of officers, a Democratic set, a Communist set and something else we would have one hell of a time.[2]

Oligarchy becomes a problem only in organizations which assume as part of their public value system the absence of oligarchy, that is, democracy. In societies or organizations in which the self-perpetuation of the governing elite is the norm few people will raise questions regarding the determinants or consequences of oligarchy. In such organiza[tions] oligarchy is a thing given, not a phenomenon to be explai[ned].

1. Robert Michels: *Political Parties*, Glencoe, Ill., Free Press, 1949, p. 401. This book was first published in Germany in 1911.

2. Harry Bridges, in *Proceedings of the Seventh Biennial Convention I.L.W.U., April 7-11, 1947* (San Francisco, 1947) p. 178. See opposite page.

However, when one finds an organization ostensibly devoted to the extension of democracy which is nevertheless itself undemocratically governed, some explanation seems demanded. Thus in his *Political Parties* Michels, himself a socialist at the time he was writing, raised the question of why the German Social-Democratic Party and the German labor movement, though ideologically committed to a completely democratic society and actively engaged in fighting for democratic rights within Germany, were themselves oligarchic in their internal structures. To Michels, oligarchy within the democratic socialist movement was significant because it was an "unintended consequence" of organization. For him, the fact that the conservative German political parties or other organizations were also oligarchic was not a problem, since they did not believe in democracy to the same degree as the socialists, and in fact often upheld the principle of oligarchy for the larger society. In the same way and at about the same time the oligarchic structure of American political parties attracted the interest of some observers such as Moise Ostrogorski, who were struck by the apparent contradiction between American democratic ideals and the reality of the boss and the machine.[3]

The problem had been recognized earlier, of course, but until Michels, European socialists took a generally optimistic view of the problem of machine domination of workers' organizations. Marx and Engels themselves viewed oligarchy as part of the early stage of the political emergence of the working class. They believed that the workers could come to control their institutions as soon as large numbers of them acquired class consciousness and political sophistication. Clique domination of socialist groups could not survive when workers really understood the facts of political life.[4]

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3. Moise Ostrogorski: *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1902. Bryce, examining the oligarchy endemic to political organizations, considers boss control normal. Cf. James Bryce: *Modern Democracies*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1921, Vol. 2, Chap. 75.

4. "The fact that here too [in the British Independent Labour Party] people like Keir Hardy, Shaw Maxwell, and others are pursuing all sorts of secondary aims of personal ambition is, of course, obvious. But the danger arising from this becomes less as the Party itself becomes stronger and gets more of a mass character."—Engels to Sorge, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: *Selected Correspondence*, New York, International Publishers Co., Inc., 1942, p. 507. Cf. also Nicolai Bukharin: *Historical Materialism*, New York, International Publishers Co., Inc., 1925, Chap. 8.

American political scientists, with their generally liberal and optimistic outlook, took a similar point of view. They saw the boss and the machine as social problems which would gradually be solved as democracy advanced, the immigrant was assimilated, and education was extended. They viewed the American political party as progressively moving out of close control of a small group of leaders, first to the caucus, then to open conventions, and finally to the ultimate stage of the preferential primary. During the first period of this century, this point of view found expression in a movement to extend formal popular control through the direct primary, initiative, referendum, and recall.

In Europe where the idea of a popular democracy did not actually come to fulfillment in terms of universal adult or male suffrage without class restrictions until after World War I, few efforts were made to formally democratize the structure of political parties. But the left and labor groups, which were concerned with achieving a more complete democracy, invariably set up formal blueprints which provided for a high degree of popular control over the selection of leaders and formation of policy by way of regular conventions, discussion periods, and elections.

Despite the optimistic hopes of early socialist bodies and the institution of formal democratic control, the problem remained. As the trade-union and the socialist movement grew in size and power, members who came to disagree with the policies of incumbent leaders found, with rare exceptions, that it was impossible to dislodge those leaders from office. They discovered that offices whose authority originally and formally derived from the consent of the members gave officials power over the members. In most cases, however, the opponents of an existing oligarchy did not generalize from their own experience, nor did they raise the question, is there something in the nature of large-scale organizations which engenders oligarchic control?[5] Rather, like Karl Marx they tended to view the problem in terms of evil or weak men who were corrupted by power, and to place the democratic solution in a change of personnel.

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5. Bukharin, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-7, explicitly notes this fact that itics of oligarchy are concerned only with policy, not with oligarchy.

By itself the existence of oligarchy in voluntary organizations rarely leads to great concern even in democratic societies and organizations. In most cases where men have forcefully and articulately opposed oligarchy, their concern has usually arisen from disagreement with the policies of a specific oligarchy. Thus the critics of the American party machine were not basically incensed by boss control *per se*, but rather by the fact that the machine was linked to corruption and inefficient government or refused to support the various social and economic reforms favored by the critics. In the pre-World War I socialist movement Lenin, for example, attacked the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party, not primarily for being oligarchic, but for having betrayed "Marxism." The CIO critics of AFL leadership in the mid-1930's in the United States were obviously not concerned with the lack of democracy within the AFL, but with the fact that the AFL was not organizing the mass production industries. Two American books which first brought Michels' analysis to the attention of the American labor movement were written by supporters of left-wing labor groups, and they objected more to the fact that many union leaders were restraining the post-World War I strike wave than to the fact that they were dictatorial.[6]

Occasionally the criticism of oligarchic control within the labor movement led to successful attempts to further democratize the constitutional structure of unions so as to reduce the power of the officials. A favored remedy introduced in some unions before World War I was to replace convention election of officers by a direct vote of the membership and to require referenda for constitutional changes, as well as to make it possible for members to directly initiate referenda. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) tried to insure turnover in office by limiting the number of years that a man might hold office and requiring that he return to the shop after his term as an official.

With very few significant exceptions all the efforts to reduce oligarchic control by formal mechanisms have failed. In those cases where an entrenched oligarchy was finally dislodged, the new leaders soon reverted to the same tactics as they had denounced in the old in order to guarantee their own permanent tenure in office and reduce or eliminate opposition. Even anarchist political and labor groups, whom we might expect to be highly sensitive to the dangers of oligarchy on the basis of their ideology, have succumbed to the blight. In pre-Franco Spain an in other countries where the anarchists had large organizations, a small semipermanent group of leaders maintained itself in power and selected its own replacements through a process of cooptation (selection by the leaders themselves). There is no more persuasive illustration of the unanticipated consequences of men's purposeful social actions than the recurrent transformations of nominally democratic private organizations into oligarchies more concerned with preserving and enhancing their own power and status than in satisfying the demands and interests of the members.[7]

What are the factors that account for the lack of democracy in labor unions? Why do opposition groups find it so difficult to survive? Michels and others who have dealt with the problem have summed it up in broad generalizations: The nature of large-scale organizations is such as to give the incumbent officials overwhelming power as compared with that of the opposition; the situation of the leaders of most unions is such that they wish to stay in office and will adopt dictatorial tactics to do so; and the relationship of the members to their union results in a low level of participation by the members. These factors have been discussed in considerable detail in another publication by the senior author.[8] Some of these generalizations are deserving of treatment here.

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6. Sylvia Kopald: *Rebellion in Labor Unions*, New York, Boni & Liveright, 1924; William Z. Foster: *Misleaders of Labor*, Chicago, Trade Union Educational League, 1927.

7. It is, of course, true that the leaders' objectives of personal power and permanent tenure need not conflict with the needs of the members. Most voluntary organizations do in fact represent their members' interests in conflicts with other groups. But there may arise a situation in which the needs and goals of the leaders or simply their desire for peace and quiet as they remain in office lead them to oppose or not fight for membership objectives. In an organization in which the members cannot vote on alternative procedures or courses of action, it is impossible to know whether a leadership decision is in fact something that the members desire.

8. "The Political Process in Trade Unions: A Theoretical Statement," in Monroe Berger *et al.*, *Freedom and Social Control in Modern Society*, New York, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1954, pp. 82-124; cf. also Philip Selznick: "An Approach to the Theory of Bureaucracy," *American Sociological Review*, 8:47-54 (1943).

*Large-scale organizations give union officials a near monopoly of power.*

(a) Unions, like all other large-scale organizations, tend to develop a bureaucratic structure, that is, a system of rational (predictable) organization which is hierarchically organized. Bureaucracy is inherent in the sheer problem of administration, in the requirement that unions be "responsible" in their dealings with management (and responsible for their subordinate units),[9] in the need to parallel the structures of business and government, in the desire of workers to eliminate management arbitrariness and caprice, and in the desire of the leaders of unions to reduce the hazards to their permanent tenure of office.

The price of increased union bureaucracy is increased power at the top, decreased power among the ordinary members. With the increase in the power of the top officials over local units and members, the sources of organized opposition are controlled or reduced. Most unions have given their executive boards the right to suspend local officials for violating policies of the central bodies. Whether they follow a conciliatory tone (as when they call for intraunion discipline and responsibility) or a militant one (as when they call for union solidarity in a dispute with management) union leaders strengthen their own hands and justify their monopolization of internal power in the course of articulating organizational needs and purposes.

(b) Control over the formal means of communication within the organization is almost exclusively in the hands of the officials. The individual member's right of free speech is not an effective check on administrative power if the union leaders control all public statements made by members of the administrative or field staff and the union newspaper. Since the only viewpoints about union matters that are widely available to the members are those of the administration, even widespread discontent which might result in organized opposition cannot be effectively expressed.[10]

9. Cf. Joseph Shister: "The Laws of Union Control in Collective Bargaining," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 60:513-545 (August 1946).

10. Cf. in this connection P. F. Lazarsfeld and R. K. Merton: "Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action," in Lyman Bryson (ed.), *The Communication of Ideas*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1948, pp. 95-118.

(c) In most unions, one of the chief factors perpetuating the power of the incumbents is the administration's almost complete monopoly of political skills and the absence of those skills among the rank and file.[11] Within a trade union the principal source of leadership training is the union administrative and political structure itself. The union official, to maintain his position, must become adept in political skills. The average worker, on the other hand, has little opportunity or need to acquire them. Rarely if ever is he called upon to make a speech before a large group, put his thoughts down in writing, or organize a group's activities.[12] To the extent that union officers possess a monopoly of political skills, they inhibit the rise of an effective opposition.

*The leaders want to stay in office.*

There is a basic strain between the values inherent in society's stratification system and the democratic values of the trade-union movement. With few significant exceptions, every trade-union official has moved up in the status hierarchy by becoming an official. The leader of a large local or national union has the income and prestige of a member of the upper-middle class,[13] and often wields more power than the average upper-middle class person. Most high-status positions carry with them some security of tenure. Democracy, on the other hand, implies permanent insecurity for those in governing positions: the more truly democratic the governing system, the greater the insecurity. Thus every incumbent of a high-status position of power within a democratic system must of necessity anticipate a loss of position.

It is hard for the persons in such positions to accept this insecurity with equanimity. Once high status is secured,

11. Cf. Max Weber: "Politics as a Vocation," in H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1946, pp. 77-128.

12. The history of the British labor movements testifies to the value of such training. Many of its early leaders were men who first served as officers or Sunday-school teachers in the Methodist or other nonconformist churches. Cf. A. P. Belden: *George Whitefield the Awakener*, London, S. Low, Marston & Co., Ltd., 1930, pp. 247 ff.

13. Cf. Cecil C. North and Paul K. Hatt: "Jobs and Occupations: A Popular Evaluation," in Logan Wilson and William A. Kolb (eds.), *Sociological Analysis*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1949, pp. 464-73.

there is usually a pressing need to at least retain and protect it.[14] This is particularly true if the discrepancy between the status and the position to which one must return on losing the status is very great. In other words, if the social distance between the trade-union leader's position as an official and his position as a regular worker is great, his need to retain the former will be correlatively great.[15]

The strenuous efforts on the part of many trade-union leaders to eliminate democracy (the possibility of their defeat) from their unions are, for them, necessary adaptive mechanisms. The insecurity of leadership status endemic in democracy, the pressures on leaders to retain their achieved high status, and the fact that by their control over the organizational structure and the use of their special skills they can often maintain their office, all help in the creation of dictatorial oligarchies.

*The members do not participate in union politics.*

Although high participation is not necessarily a sign of democracy (dictatorships also find participation useful), the maintenance of effective opposition to incumbent leaders requires membership participation and interest. Ordinarily, however, few members show much interest in the day-to-day political process within the union; apathy of the members is the normal state of affairs. There are good reasons for this. Most union members, like other people, must spend most of their time at work or with their families. Their remaining free time is generally taken up by their friends, commercial entertainment, and other personally rewarding recreational activities.[16]

14. Furthermore, as Shepard points out, "The demands on leadership are heavy and their positions precarious. . . . To survive, leaders must be extraordinarily able, and able leaders are capable of consolidating their positions." Cf. Herbert A. Shepard: "Democratic Control in a Labor Union," *American Journal of Sociology*, 54:311-316 (1949).

15. Public officials in a democratic society are also faced with this problem. Most of them, however, come from occupational positions or social strata which permit them to return to private life without a sharp decline in income.

16. Cf. Bernard Barber: "Participation and Mass Apathy in Associations," in A. W. Gouldner, *Studies in Leadership*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950, pp. 477-504.

Most trade unions in addition are concerned with technical administrative matters, which cannot be of deep interest to the average member. The typical union appears to its members as an administrative agency doing a specific technical job for them. Union leaders will often attempt to sustain this image to prevent "interference" with their conduct of their job. Consequently only a small minority finds the rewards for participation in union affairs great enough to sustain a high level of interest and activity.

The leaders of the trade unions and other formally democratic organizations must in some way explain and justify the suppression, and to do so they make two points: that trade unions are organized for political or industrial conflicts; and that their membership is more homogeneous in background and interests than the citizens of a nation or some other civic political unit. Officials of trade unions have argued that since the group is engaged in perpetual conflict with management, internal opponents only serve the objective interests of the external enemy. They argue further that there is no basis for factionalism in their organization (other than the illegitimate selfish desire for office of ambitious individuals, or the outside interference of Communists) since all the members are workers and have common interests and objectives. According to this thesis, organized political conflict should take place only among classes, not within them. These same two arguments are, of course, used by the Communists to justify the contradiction between the one-party state and democratic values in the Soviet Union. They explain that since the Soviet Union is surrounded by the capitalist enemy, any domestic opposition is in effect treason; and that in any case in a one-class workers' state there is no legitimate basis for disagreement.

Strengthening the force of these arguments is the fact that the political decisions of trade unions and of other groups which are totally or in part political pressure groups, such as the American Legion or the American Medical Association, often fall into the realm of "foreign policy": that is, they involve the tactics and relations that these groups should adopt towards outside groups or the state. And just as in national politics there are many pressures toward a unified bipartisan foreign policy, so in trade unions and other voluntary groups we find similar pressures. Potential oppositionists are consequently faced with the likelihood that if

they exercise their constitutional democratic rights, they will be denounced for harming the organization and helping the enemy.

The fact remains, however, that the democratic political system of the International Typographical Union does exist. It is obviously no temporary exception, for the party system of the union has lasted for half a century, and regular political conflict in North American printing unions can be dated back to 1815. As we shall note in later sections of this book, there are also a few other unions which deviate from the iron law of oligarchy. Up to now almost all analysts of the political systems of private governments have devoted their energies to documenting further examples of oligarchy. Rather than do this we have undertaken an analysis of the major deviant case. From the point of view of the further development of social research in the area of organizational structure, and indeed, the general expansion of our understanding of society, these deviant cases—cases which operate in ways not anticipated by theory—supply the most fruitful subjects for study. Kendall and Wolf have noted that the analysis of deviant cases

> can by refining the theoretical structure of empirical studies, increase the predictive value of their findings. In other words, deviant case analysis can and should play a *positive* role in empirical research, rather than being merely the "tidying up" process through which exceptions to the empirical rule are given some plausibility and thus disposed of.[17]

In the course of our analysis of the ITU we have systematically looked for the various *oligarchic mechanisms*—the elements and processes which Michels and others found operative in the organizations which they studied. Many of these mechanisms—for example, the monopolies of power, status, funds, and communications channels which the officials of most unions ordinarily possess—are not found in the ITU, or if present their effects are greatly mitigated by other elements in the system. A large part of our analysis is directed at specifying those elements in the structure of the ITU and the printing industry which work against oligarchic mechanisms, and at spelling out the processes by which they contribute to the maintenance of the union democracy. And as we look for those attributes and patterns in the ITU which work to nullify the oligarchic tendencies present in large organizations, we are implicitly or explicitly setting forth the conditions necessary for the maintenance of democratic politics within private organizations. In this our purpose is not, of course, to "refute" Michels or other previous workers in this area, but rather to refine and build on their insights and findings, paying them the respect of using them more often than we quote them.

## A THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

The problem of democratic or oligarchic political institutions may be approached from two vantage points. We may ask, as we have asked in the previous section, what are the conditions which are responsible for the development and institutionalization of oligarchy, or alternatively we may ask under what conditions democracy arises and becomes institutionalized. All the literature that deals with political institutions in private governments deals with the determinants of oligarchy. We have found only one article that raises the question of under what conditions democracy, the institutionalization of opposition, can exist in voluntary organizations.[18] There is of course a voluminous literature discussing democracy as a system of civil government, but we must ask ourselves whether a variable which seems related to the existence of democracy in states is relevant to the existence of democracy in organizations.

Aristotle, for example, suggested that democracy can exist only in a society which is predominantly middle class.[19] In essence he and later theorists argued that only in a wealthy society with a roughly equal distribution of income could one get a situation in which the mass of the population would intelligently participate in politics and develop the self-restraint necessary to avoid succumbing to the appeals of

17. Patricia Kendall and Katherine Wolf: "The Analysis of Deviant Cases in Communications Research 1948-1949," in Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (eds,), *Communications Research, 1948-1949*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1949, p. 153.

18. Philip Selznick, "The Iron Law of Bureaucracy," *Modern Review*, January, 1950, pp. 157-165.

19. Aristotle: *Politics*, IV, 11.

irresponsible demagogues. A society divided between a large impoverished mass and a small favored elite would result either in a dictatorship of the elite or a dictatorship of demagogues who would appeal to the masses against the elite. This proposition still appears to be valid. Political democracy has had a stable existence only in the wealthier countries, which have large middle classes and comparatively well-paid and well-educated working classes. Applying this proposition to trade-union government, we would expect to find democracy in organizations whose members have a relatively high income and more than average security, and in which the gap between the organizational elite and the membership is not great.

A second proposition which has been advanced about democracy is that it works best in relatively small units, in which a large proportion of the citizenry can directly observe the operation of their governments:[20] for example, the small Greek city-states, the New England town meetings, and the Swiss cantons. While historical research has indicated that much of the popular mythology about the democratic character of these societies is untrue, it is probably true that the smaller a political unit, the greater the possibility of democratic control. Increased size necessarily involves the delegation of political power to professional rulers and the growth of bureaucratic institutions. The translation of this proposition to the level of private government is clear: The smaller the association or unit, the greater membership control. There can be little doubt that this is true in the trade-union movement.[21]

20. Thomas Jefferson advocated "general political organization on the basis of small units, small enough so that all members could have direct communication with one another and take care of all community affairs."—John Dewey: *Freedom and Culture*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939, p. 159. Cf. also Gunnar Myrdal: *An American Dilemma*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1944, pp. 716-19; John Dewey: *The Public and Its Problems*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1927, Chap. 5; "The Federalist, No. 10," in *The Federalist*, New York, Modern Library, Inc., 1937.

21. It has been pointed out as well that in small homogeneous societies a political democracy often succumbs to the danger of extreme democracy: intolerance of the minority by the majority. The authors of the *Federalist Papers* were well aware of this and pointed out the dangers of a small "pure" democracy. See *The Federalist*, pp. 57-59.



Both of these approaches to democracy, that in terms of internal stratification, and that in terms of size, however, are somewhat unsatisfactory as solutions to the problem of democracy in complex societies or large private organizations. Clearly democratic political institutions do exist in large, complex, and bureaucratically run societies and in societies which have wide variations in the distribution of income, status, and power. There is a third proposition about the conditions that favor democracy that seems to be of greater value for our understanding of democracy in large private organizations. We know it under two names, the theory of political pluralism, and the theory of the mass society. Writers in English-speaking countries, trying to explain why democracy exists in these countries, have developed the theory of political pluralism. European writers, trying to explain why democracy seems so weak in Germany and other countries, have developed the theory of the mass society. Both theories say in essence the same thing. They argue that in a large complex society the body of the citizenry is unable to affect the policies of the state. If citizens do not belong to politically relevant *groups*, if they are "atomized," the controllers of the central power apparatus will completely dominate the society. Translated to the realm of the internal politics of private organizations, this theory suggests that democracy is most likely to become institutionalized in organizations whose members form organized or structured subgroups which while maintaining a basic loyalty to the larger organization constitute relatively independent and autonomous centers of power within the organization. Or to put it in another way, democracy is strengthened when members are not only related to the larger organization but are also affiliated with or loyal to subgroups within the organization.[22] Since it is this approach which we have found most useful in understanding the internal political system of the ITU, we will briefly characterize it here.

Democratic rights have developed in societies largely through the struggles of various groups—class, religious, sectional, economic, professional, and so on—against one another and against the group which controls the state. Each

22. "The stability of any democracy depends not on imposing a single unitary loyalty and viewpoint but on maintaining conflicting loyalties and viewpoints in a state of tension."—R. H. S. Crossman: "On Political Neuroses," *Encounter*, 2:66 (May 1954).

social forces and relationships as is represented by the two-party system in the ITU requires interpretation on two levels—the historical and the functional. We must consider both the historical conditions which gave rise to this social structure and the factors which support and maintain it as a going system.

## THE HISTORY OF THE ITU

In most countries in the Western world, printers were among the first workers to form permanent labor unions. American printers were no exception. An organized printers' strike occurred in New York City as early as 1776. Printing trade-union organization as such began in the United States in 1795 with the formation of a New York local. Until 1848, however, most local unions of printers which were organized either disappeared after a few years or became benevolent societies. Starting in that year, however, printing unionism in the United States began to build a stable base, with the establishment in the succeeding decades of local unions in most of the large cities. By 1860, 34 local unions of printers were in existence; in 1873 there were 103. In 1850 the printers' locals joined together to form a national trade union. This organization, now known as the International Typographical Union, has been in continous existence since that time, and is the oldest national union in the United States.

The formation of a national and later an international organization did not mean the immediate establishment of a powerful central office with power over the local affiliates. For a long time the union was a loose confederation of co-operating but wholly autonomous locals, with two major functions, neither of which was seen by the membership as requiring a central national office or field staff. The first, common to all unions, was, and is, the provision of mutual aid to locals in distress, especially during strikes. The second function of the national organization during this period, and one of crucial importance in the printing trades, was to prevent the importation of strikebreakers into cities in which printers were on strike. During the nineteenth century most printing was done for the local market. There was little competition between printing firms in different cities, but there was always "the possibility that in any disagreement with employers, workmen from other cities might be imported to take their places."[1] This latter danger was especially grave since many nineteenth-century printers were "tramp printers" who wandered from city to city.[2]



No full-time officials were employed during the first thirty-two years of the ITU's existence. Each local operated more or less as an independent entity, with international cooperation secured through correspondence and annual conventions. The president of the international continued to work at the trade and received only a small honorarium for his services. With few exceptions, presidents stepped down after one-year terms. Organization of new locals was left largely in the hands of existing locals, which were assigned responsibility for neighboring areas.

Beginning in 1884, however, the character of the national union changed drastically. Many members regarded the extreme decentralization of the union as a distinct liability, since as a consequence the organization of new locals and the distribution of strike aid to existing locals was being done on a haphazard basis. Other trade unions had grown much stronger than the ITU and seemed to bear witness to the virtues of a strong national organization. The convention of 1884, therefore, voted to hire a full-time national organizer, and in 1888 the president and secretary-treasurer were made full-time national officers, with the former placed in charge of organization work. In the same year the union also established an international defense fund and provided that grants could be made to locals only when a strike had the approval of the international officers. This latter change was decisive in modifying the character of the union, for it involved international officers more deeply in local affairs and correlatively increased the concern of local leaders and members with the nature of the leadership of the international union.

The official functions and revenues of the international increased rapidly, since the international officers continually sought greater control over organizing and strikes. By the

1. George Ernest Barnett: "The Printers, A Study in American Trade Unionism," *American Economic Association Quarterly*, 10:39 (October 1909).

2. About 13% of the members of the union took traveling cards in 1859. In 1885, when the union had grown considerably, over 40% moved from one city to another.—*Ibid.*, p. 31.

first decade of the twentieth century, the international Executive Council had the right to appoint an ever-growing number of international organizers (now known as representatives) and could suspend or otherwise penalize locals which struck without international sanction. The international officers and representatives were also authorized to take part in collective-bargaining negotiations on local levels, if the local concerned requested their assistance. Since strikes could be called only with the permission of the international, it gradually became common practice to invite international assistance in negotiations whenever employers proved difficult.

The growth in the organizing and collective-bargaining functions of the international was paralleled by the development during the same period of a number of important beneficiary activities. These included the establishment of a Union Printer's Home (for the sick) in Colorado, an old-age pension, and a mortuary benefit. While the development of these activities did not immediately and directly increase the power of the international officers over the locals, they did greatly increase the number of persons on the ITU payroll, and probably contributed indirectly to the increase in power and prestige of the international officers.

The increased centralization of the ITU was followed by the withdrawal from the international of a number of crafts which felt that the compositors, who comprised the majority of the membership, were neglecting their interests. Thirteen pressmen's locals seceded in 1889 and formed the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants' Union. The pressmen were followed out in the next two decades by the bookbinders, the stereotypers and electrotypers, the type founders, and the photoengravers. By 1910 the ITU was a craft union of composing-room workers plus a small minority of newspaper mailers and an even smaller group of journalists. Jurisdiction over the journalists was dropped in the thirties, when the CIO American Newspaper Guild was formed.

Despite the development of an ITU bureaucracy the locals remained in almost complete control of the most important function of a labor union, collective bargaining. A large part of the printing industry—almost all the newspapers together with a considerable segment of the commercial book and job shops—is not competitive with plants in other cities or parts of the country. The ITU has never attempted to establish regional or national collective bargaining on issues such as



wages and working conditions; there have been and continue to be large discrepancies in wages received and hours worked by ITU members in different cities. Even today there are small locals in the metropolitan New York area, but outside the jurisdiction of the New York local, whose wage scale is 15% to 20% below that of New York. Locals have remained in control of those matters which most affect the lives of their members. Unless a strike or serious breakdown in negotiation occurs, the international need never enter the local scene. Day-to-day grievance procedures, administration of apprenticeship regulations, disputes over the operation of seniority rules, discharge cases, and many other similar activities are largely handled by the locals. An individual who feels that his local's action in his case is unfair may appeal the local's decision to the international Executive Board and even to the international convention, but this right is exercised in only a small minority of grievance cases.

A major distinction must be made, however, between the large and small locals. The small locals, those with less than a hundred members, are highly dependent on the international for continual assistance. Their officers work at the trade and must administer the union after work, whereas some of the large metropolitan locals employ ten or more full-time officials. Small unions, therefore, are more likely to call on the international for assistance in their local negotiations and problems. The research and statistical bureaus of the international are of considerable importance to them. The officers of the large locals, on the other hand, are jealous of their prerogatives and powers. The full-time local officials in the large locals must make a record of their own to justify re-election and are reluctant to permit the international to share credit for achievements. In general, therefore, the ITU is composed of two distinct types of locals: the large, relatively autonomous locals, such as New York, Chicago, Boston, Washington, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles; and the hundreds of small, dependent locals whose strength and bargaining power is tied to that of the international. As might be expected, the smaller locals tend to be supporters of a strong international union, while the large locals have fought for the maintenance of local autonomy.[3]

3. This insistence on decentralization is not unique to American typographers. In France the Paris local of the French Typographers'

## COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND THE JOB SITUATION

The history of collective bargaining in the ITU is similar to that of other craft unions of skilled labor, with the exception that the ITU has generally been more militant, more prone to use the strike weapon, and since 1922 less inclined to submit to conciliation and arbitration proceedings. After winning recognition, which in most cities occurred in the middle or late years of the nineteenth century, the local printing unions fought for higher wages, standardized methods of payment, abolition of piece work, shorter hours, and better sanitary and working conditions. Almost from their origin they also attempted to secure some version of a closed or union shop.

While the absence of a national or regional bargaining pattern in the industry has meant that locals are on their own in making demands, there have been a number of major nation-wide struggles conducted by the ITU to force employers to accept certain minimum standards throughout the country. The first and most important union struggle requiring a consistent national policy was fought over control of the linotype machines, which when introduced in the 1890's threatened to displace many printers. The employer initially insisted that the level of skill required to operate the new machines was less than that required to set type by hand and on these grounds attempted to introduce new, lower-paid workers. The union responded to this threat by establishing schools to train its members in linotype work and then demanding that only competent printers who knew every skill of the trade and had served a regular apprenticeship should be employed on the linotype machine. A series of strikes were fought over this issue, but ultimately the employers accepted the union's conditions. The ability of the machine to increase individual productivity was utilized by

Union has constantly been at odds with the National Typographical Union and continually fought for local autonomy. In Great Britain the largest local union, the London Society of Compositors, has remained outside the national union because of its desire to protect its special rights and privileges. In Belgium the typographical union was for many decades the only union in the country to maintain local bargaining practices and resist the trend to centralization.



the union to decrease the hours of labor and to eliminate piece-rate payments.

A similar problem was presented to the ITU by the use of matrices, by which a single advertisement or column could be reproduced in scores of newspapers or magazines without the need to set type. The ITU insisted successfully that every paper using matrices, usually for advertisements, reset them in its own shop and later destroy the reset work, since the matrices are used in the actual printing. This has meant that an advertisement used in 500 publications is reset and destroyed 500 times. As other new technological devices have entered the trade, the ITU has safeguarded the positions of its members by claiming jurisdiction over each new machine.[4]

Over the years, the union has continued to win economic gains for its members. Most of these have accrued gradually through the victories of particular locals around the country. After a sizable number of the locals have been able to win a certain point, the international union will pass a union law providing that after a certain date, no local may sign a contract without that specific provision in its contract. This practice of establishing and extending minimum standards throughout the country has involved the ITU in three major nation-wide strike waves. In 1906 the union attempted to establish the eight-hour day as standard through the industry, and called strikes in many cities which did not yet have these hours. A number of these strikes were lost and the membership declined temporarily, but within a few years the eight-hour day became the rule in union print shops. In the early 1920's the union waged strikes in many cities to enforce the forty-four-hour week, and gradually made this the maximum work week.[5]

In the last decade there has been a new outburst of militancy. In the last year of World War II the ITU repudi-

4. A. R. Porter, Jr.: *Job Property Rights: A Study of the Job Controls of the International Typographical Union*, New York, King's Crown Press, 1954, pp. 56-57. A case in point is the union's current reaction to the new teletypesetter, which operates much like a typewriter; it has set up schools to train its members to operate the new machine at the union scale.

5. During the 1930's a forty-hour week or less became common. Today printers in most large cities work less than forty hours a week.

interest group may desire to carry out its own will, but if no one group is strong enough to gain complete power, the result is the development of tolerance. In large measure the development of the concept of tolerance, of recognition of the rights of groups with whom one disagrees to compete for adherents or power, arose out of conflicts among strong and indestructible groups in different societies. There were a number of processes through which tolerance became legitimate. In some situations groups such as the Catholic and the Protestant churches attempted to destroy the opposing faction, but finally recognized that the complete victory of one group was impossible or could occur only at the risk of destroying the very fabric of society. In these conflicts minority or opposition groups developed a democratic ideology, an insistence on specific minority rights, as a means of legitimating their own right to exist. These groups might then force the dominant power group to grant these rights in order to prevent a revolutionary upsurge or achieve power themselves. For them to reject their own program may then mean a considerable loss of support from adherents who have come to hold the democratic values.

Once democracy is established in a society, private organizations continue to play a positive role. These organizations serve as channels of communication among different groups in the population, crystallizing and organizing conflicting interests and opinions. Their existence makes more difficult the triumph of such movements as Communism and Fascism, for a variety of groups lay claim to the allegiance of the population, reinforcing diversity of belief and helping mobilize such diversity in the political arena.[23] This brief discussion of theories of political pluralism and of mass society does not pretend to be an adequate summary. A fuller discussion of these concepts as applied to voluntary organizations will be found in Chapter 4 and other parts of this book. We have discussed them here to sensitize the reader to the type of factors which we were looking for in our analysis of the political system of the ITU.

23. Calhoun thought these factors so important he wanted to institutionalize faction by means of the concept *concurrent majority*. Cf. John C. Calhoun: *A Disquisition on Government*, New York, Political Science Classics, 1947.

## 2. The Social and Historical Background of the ITU

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF CONTEMPORARY GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS have been notoriously deficient in historical background. This ahistoricism stems in part from sociological theory and in part from developments in methods of social research. Sociology has largely taken over from functional anthropology its tendency to account for the existence and persistence of institutions or patterns of behavior by the way in which they are related to other parts of a functioning social system. In the eyes of the functional analyst the historical explanation, which takes the form of a description of the origins and development of an institution or social pattern, cannot account for its persistence. All social patterns have histories, but some patterns persist while others disappear. The sociologist directs himself rather to the question of why given patterns persist than to the question of how they come to be in the first place, a problem he leaves to the historian.

Nor do the methods of contemporary sociology favor historical explanation. Sociologists increasingly prefer data collected from living persons through interviews, questionnaires, and direct observation. Since there are more than enough problems and hypotheses that can be explored by the favored methods, those that require the use of the necessarily less reliable and valid documentary and historical sources of information tend to be neglected.

In this study we will be dealing primarily with data relating to the current behavior of men and institutions. It is clear, however, that any analysis of such a unique set of