

# TWO LOGICS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION: THEORETICAL NOTES ON SOCIAL CLASS AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORM—\*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*2 plus 2 equals 4*; person X and person Y have *equal* access to higher education. It is not just playing on words if we start with the observation that the relationship of "equality" is both a logical and a sociological one. Moreover, the two dimensions of the term *equality* are connected in an interesting way. Sociological measurements of social equality/inequality of income, wealth, power, prestige, etc., provide us with information only to the extent that they indicate the distance or approximation of a given

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social reality to a normative ideal of equality. Knowing something about actual patterns of distribution is of interest only because we make at least implicit reference to a logical equation, which is stated in a normative form, the cognitive substance of which is something like the belief that “all men are equal”—that is, their rights or claims or legitimate aspirations *are* equal in a logical sense. To those who are unaware of this logical equation, and to those who are neither supporters nor opponents of the norm based on it, the sociological information about actual equality/ inequality is quite useless. What matters is not information about degrees of equality as such, but the conclusions we can draw from it regarding the degree of conformity between sociological and logical equality. In this sense, it is its critical function which makes sociology interesting.

There was no need for sociology in feudal societies or during the transition from the feudal to liberal-capitalist social formations. What was needed was *normative* political theory, which leads, in the works of the eighteenth-century philosophers, to the establishment of the normative equation: each member of civil society is entitled to the same rights and freedoms as every other member of the community, citizen equals citizen. What was needed in order to establish equations of this kind was not sociological research, but normative-deductive reasoning and sophisticated speculation about the conditions under which such equality might materialize. Why was no sociology needed? Because in order to discover the contrast between the normative equation and actual inequality, one had, not to conduct empirical research, but only to look into the legal codes and statutes that regulated the privileges and hierarchies of feudal society. The conflict was one of norm versus norm, not norm versus fact, for inequality was itself *institutionalized* by explicit privilege. All the early liberal philosophers had to do was to argue that the realization of an alternative set of norms would lead to the greater happiness of the community. They did so by attacking the *institutionalized* and *explicitly normative* order of the old society and confronting it with the new liberal equation—an equation, of course, that was victorious only because it became the program and ideology of the ascending class of merchants and industrial capitalists. The basic schema of their social *philosophy* was to demonstrate that what *deserves to be treated as equal was actually institutionalized as unequal*. On the philosophical plane, the two sets of normative statements opposed each other.

Quite different from this model of critique is the way in which the radical critique of bourgeois society proceeds. Its *modus operandi* is the demonstration that, *although* the liberal equation has been institutionalized, granting free and equal access to the market and even free and equal access to the political process, the institutionalization of bourgeois freedom and equality has not, in fact, led to anything approach-

ing *actual* equality; it has, rather, produced and continually reproduces factual inequality on the largest scale. The difference between the two modes of critique is this: while the power of the aristocracy over peasants was institutionalized and sanctioned as part of the political order in feudal society, the power of the capitalist class over the working class is not only not institutionalized in bourgeois society but is even apparently neutralized by the institutional pattern of equal citizenship. How then can inequality emerge under the auspices of the institutionalized liberal equation? Any answer to this question must be sociological. It must leave the plane of a normative discourse, which challenged the legitimacy of the feudal order, and engage in the "subinstitutional" analysis of the facts and causal links among facts which lead, *on the basis* of institutionalized equality, to the inequality of classes and groups. The confrontation is no longer between one set of norms and another, but between norms and systematic causal theories of social life. The critical objection is no longer that what properly deserves (according to a normative theory) to be treated equally is treated unequally, but that what is strictly equal by institutionalized norms still turns out (according to causal processes established by sociological research) to be vastly unequal, in actual fact. The objects of the two models of critique are reciprocal. The philosophical tradition criticizes doctrines that help to institutionalize and defend inequality where equality *should* prevail. The sociological model of critique demonstrates that inequality prevails for systemic causes where economic and political equality *are* institutionalized. The one puts into question and challenges the false "*hierarchization*" of the equal; the other, the ideological *equalization* of those who in fact remain unequal. What the philosophers attacked were doctrines that treated equals as nonequal; the radical sociologists and political economists attack ideologies (such as liberal pluralism) that created the mere appearance of equality, where, in fact, vast inequalities persist. Social philosophy aims at the normative critique of institutionalized *inequality*; its historical place is the ascending bourgeois-capitalist social formation. Sociology aims at the empirical critique of institutionalized *equality* (of universal citizenship and market participation) and at a theoretical understanding of how such equality is perverted into actual inequality; its historical place is industrial capitalism.<sup>1</sup>

What this crude schematization of the history and political implications of social thought should be able to demonstrate is this: there are two categories of errors or mistakes that we can fall victims to as social scientists. One is to conceive of the equal as hierarchical—the mistake of the reactionary defenders of the old order; the other one is to conceptually equate the elements of what in fact remains a hierarchical structure—the business of the liberal ideologists. It is in both of these cases true that

mistaken logic, i.e., the muddling of identicalness and difference, turns not only into bad sociology but also into politics.

Although the first mistake has a longer history, it is hardly to be found less frequently than the second one. A familiar example is the conceptual distinction between blue-collar workers and white-collar workers.<sup>2</sup> The problem here *is not* that sociologists take into account the many and well-documented differences in character of work, lifestyle, political behavior, and attitudes that exist between the two groups. The problem is rather, that in doing so, many sociologists fail to take into account the possibility that (a) such *differentiations* within the working class as a whole may well be different responses to the *identical* situation of wage labor, and (b) that the underlying sameness of this situation becomes increasingly clearer under the impact of mechanization, de-skilling, and the increasing job insecurity that affects white as well as blue-collar workers. The criticism of such elliptical conceptualizations is that they are wholly concerned with the *subjective awareness* of differences, while ignoring the equality of the objective conditions to which all wage workers are subject.

In our present context, the reverse mistake is of greater interest, namely the mistake of conceptually equating the unequal. An example is the juridical treatment of strikes and lockouts as "equivalent" and therefore equally legitimate measures of the supply and demand sides of the "labor market". Another example is the economic concept of the "labor market" itself—to the extent that it suggests the principal sameness (a) of markets (i.e., markets for goods and services and markets for labor) and (b) the equality of freedom of choice that "partners" in markets (i.e., agents on the supply and demand sides) enjoy in making contracts with one another. Such conceptual equations tend to de-emphasize, to say the very least, structural differences between labor power and any commodity,<sup>3</sup> and the resulting asymmetry of power and freedom that emerges between the supply and demand sides as soon as labor power is allocated through markets, i.e., as soon as it is institutionally treated *as if it were* a commodity (while in fact it is not—because it cannot be physically separated from its "owner"; because it does not come into being due to the expectation of its salability; because it is of no use-value for its (propertyless) "owner"; and because its owner is therefore forced to enter into a wage contract). Such intellectual categorizations of the world correspond quite neatly to the real categorizations according to which social and economic life is organized, and they tend to neglect differences which are not recognized by the practice of capitalist social arrangements. Liberal social science does not perform its ideological (and thus political) function by normatively advocating certain policies, supporting established elites, or giving advice to the ruling class. Though it does all these things, too, they are contingent upon *individuals* acting within the system of science

and do not constitute part of its *intellectual structure*. This intellectual structure itself performs an ideological and political function by committing either the "feudal" error of "false differentiation" and/or the "liberal" error of "false identity". Consequently, the intellectual practice of coding reality by the dramaturgic use of nonequations and equations is—and has always been—the object of criticism, not only of the Marxian tradition in social science, but also of all social scientists who do not want truth to be perverted by the positivistic standard of conformity to existing social arrangements.

It is in this spirit and on the basis of these epistemological premises that we want to examine the hidden difference that is ignored by the prevailing practice of "coding" social reality by employing the concept of "interest group" (or "organized interest"). Our argument will try to provide theoretical evidence for the proposition that, just as much as economic concepts (of market, commodity, freedom of contract, supply and demand, as they are applied to both capital and labor) tend to deny (and even to block the cognitive access to) the reality of class, the political science concept of interest group (as the outgrowth of some classunspecific "logic of collective action"<sup>4</sup> and a neutral *form* that can be filled equally by heterogeneous "interests") performs the same function of obscuring the category of social class by the intellectual practice of equating the unequal. Again, the link between logical and sociological uses of "equality" is obvious—if, as interest-group theory suggests, the pure organizational form of organized interest representation is equally accessible (and in this sense logically equivalent) to the "groups" of capital, labor, and others, then there is no reason to assume that the use of this perfectly neutral instrumentality will result in anything like systemic asymmetry of wealth and power (i.e., social inequality). Charles Lindblom remarked in his recent book: "One of the conventional insensitivities of contemporary social science is revealed in scholarly works on interest groups. By some unthinking habit, many such works treat all interest groups as though on the same plane, and, in particular, they treat labor, business and farm groups as though operating at some parity with each other" (1977:193). Let us see what can be done about this "unthinking habit."

## 2. BEYOND THE "INTEREST GROUP" STEREOTYPE: THE ASSOCIATIONAL PRACTICES OF LABOR AND CAPITAL

If one compares associations of business firms with labor unions solely with respect to properties of formal organization, there seem to be, at first glance, a number of similarities; these are normally used to define the concept of "interest groups", of which both types of organizations are

then said to be subcases. For instance, in these kinds of organizations we find voluntary membership, a more or less bureaucratic structure of decision making, dependence upon material and motivational resources, efforts to change the respective environments into more favorable ones, and so forth.

What we want to do in this section is to go beyond these formal analogies in order to analyze the different functions that the common practice of formal association performs for labor and capital, and, more specifically, to find out in which way each of the two succeeds in gaining power through organization. Such an analysis requires more than merely looking into the process of organization itself. What is needed in addition is to look into the specific characteristics of what, in terms of organizational analysis, may be called the *input factors* (i.e., *what is* to be organized) and the nature of *outputs*, i.e., the conditions of strategic success that are to be found in the organizations' environments. These contextual factors are seen here as major determinants of those structures and practices that make up the *internal process* of the two types of organization.

In dealing with class-specific differences of the respective types of input factors, internal processes, and relative organizational advantages (outputs) of the two types of organizations, we will focus on the principal relations that unions, on the one hand, and business and employers associations, on the other, entertain in their environments. Our aim is to demonstrate that, in each of the three aspects, labor and capital show substantial differences with respect to the functioning and performance of their associations. These differences, we will argue, are consequences and manifestations of antagonistic class relations.

#### (1) *Input Factors*

What do unions organize? This simple question cannot be answered in quite such simple terms. Do they organize labor, or workers, or the interests of workers; or is it what Marx thinks of as the only valueproducing potency, namely labor power? For a better understanding of exactly what the "input" of unions is, we must, first of all, keep in mind that unions are associations of members who, *before* they can become members of unions, are already members of other organizations, namely employees of capitalist enterprises. Thus, unions are "secondary" organizers, and capital itself functions as a primary organizer.

In what sense does capital organize workers? Its function is to combine labor and capital goods in such a way that surplus value is produced. *Both* of these elements that capital combines consist, however, of social labor; they differ only in that the one is the result of labor power that has been applied in the past (past labor congealed into *capital goods*, which there-

fore are sometimes referred to by Marx as "dead" labor) and the other is labor power as a *present potency* ("living" labor).

Before the capitalist can start to combine these two categories of elements, he first has to acquire them. The form in which he acquires them is, in both cases, that of a contract. Such contracts do not involve any problems in the case of "dead" labor, or capital goods; the capitalist simply transforms money capital into particular machinery and raw materials. However, contracting with the bearers of labor power, i.e., employing "living labor", is by no means as simple as buying and installing "dead" labor. Obviously, the capitalist cannot buy labor itself—a certain quantity of activity, as it were. Instead, he has to apply incentives, force, etc., to the *bearers* of labor power—that is, to workers—in order to get them to work and to keep them working. This very special condition leads to the peculiarities of the exchange relationship between capital and labor, which are unlike those of any other markets (and which make it, incidentally, quite inaccurate to speak of labor power as a "commodity", even though it is treated *as if it were* a commodity). The fundamental problem with which the capitalist has to deal is the fact that the labor that he wants to combine with the other "factors of production" is not physically separable from the bearer of the labor power; it always remains under the physical control of the worker. His aspiration, experiences, interests, and subjective willingness to work will always influence the concrete labor process. The work can only be done *by* the worker, although his labor legally "belongs" to the capitalist. If the capitalist wants to get the work done, he has, for better or worse, to rely on the willingness of the worker to "give away" his/her physical and intellectual capacities by applying them to concrete labor tasks. In this way, the quantity and the quality of actual work performance remains subject to a permanent conflict that is not to be resolved by formal contractual relations in which both sides have engaged. Therefore, both "partners" of exchange try to improve their respective positions by resorting to a wide variety of positive and negative sanctions. This is the only way in which the "equivalence" of a certain amount of labor and a certain wage is established, challenged, and reestablished.

Looking upon this situation from the point of view of the worker, one wonders how he can deal with this condition of indeterminacy and conflict. First of all, there is very little scope of choice for him acting as an *individual* worker. But how can he possibly act otherwise? After all, labor power is, physically and legally, controlled and "owned" by *discrete individuals*. The important point here is the following: while you can add one unit of (money) capital to another unit of money capital so that you get an *integrated total* in which the constituent parts are as entirely unrecognizable and indistinguishable as if you had poured two glasses of

water into the same pot, you can do this *only* with "dead" labor, not with living labor. One simply cannot add one unit of labor power to another so as to obtain what would be a "double-worker", who could then legally contract for and physically control twice the amount of labor power; two rocks put into the same pot remain two discrete rocks. Living labor power is both indivisible and "non-liquid", and it is this *insuperable individuality* that we will show to be of the greatest consequences for labor's specific "logic of collective action."

But, first of all, this individuality of living labor is (among other things that also have to do with the fact that it is "living") the cause for the emergence of a power relationship between labor and capital. The latter normally comprises many units of "dead" labor under a unified command, whereas each individual worker controls only one unit of labor power, and, moreover, has to sell this under competitive conditions with other workers who, in turn, have to do the same. In other words, the *atomized* form of living labor that stands in conflict with the *integrated*, or liquid, form of "dead" labor causes a power relationship; the capital ("dead" labor) of each firm is always united from the beginning, whereas living labor is atomized and divided by competition. *Workers cannot "merge", at best they can associate* in order to partly compensate for the power advantage that capital derives from the liquidity of "dead" labor.

In the absence of associational efforts on the part of workers, the conflict that is built into the capital/wage labor relationship is bound to remain very limited. The workers would simply have no bargaining power that they could use to improve their conditions of work or wages, because each individual worker who started to make such demands would risk being replaced either by another worker or by machinery. The formation of unions and other forms of workers' associations is not only theoretically, but also historically, a response to the "association" that has already taken place on the part of capital, namely in the form of the fusion of numerous units of "dead" labor under the command of one capitalist employer. In all capitalist countries, the historical sequence is this: the first step is the "liquidation" of the means of production of small commodity producers and the merging of these into capitalist industrial firms; the second step is the defensive association of workers; and the third step is associational efforts that are now made on the part of capitalist firms who, in addition to their continued merging of capital, enter into formal organizations in order to promote some of their collective interests.<sup>5</sup> What follows from this sequence is, contrary to the "unthinking habit", (1) that the two types of organization that we are trying to compare emerge at distinctly different points in the history of class struggle, which can be analyzed as a sequence of strategic steps taken by the two sides, and (2)



that capital has at its command *three different forms* of collective action to define and defend its interests, namely the firm itself, informal cooperation, and the employers or business association, whereas labor has only one.

But what are the interests that unions organize? We have seen before that, whereas the capitalist is physically and legally separate from the capital he controls, labor power is inseparably tied to the worker who "sells" it. Since the worker is at the same time the subject and the object of the exchange of labor power, a vastly broader range of interests is involved in this case than in that of capitalists, who can satisfy a large part of their interests somewhat apart from their functioning as capitalists. In the case of workers, those interests that have directly to do with, and are directly affected by, the exchange of labor power that they are subject to, include not only material rewards but also such things as job satisfaction, health, leisure time, and continuity of employment. Therefore, unions are confronted with the task of organizing the entire spectrum of needs that people have when they are employed as wage workers. This multitude of needs of "living" labor is not only comparatively more difficult to organize for quantitative reasons, but also for the reason that there is no common denominator to which all these heterogeneous and often conflicting needs can be reduced so as to "optimize" demands and tactics. How much in wages, for instance, can "rationally" be given up in exchange for which amount of increase in job satisfaction? The answer to this question cannot be found by any calculus that could be objectively applied; it can only be found as the result of the collective deliberation of the members of the organization. In contrast, capitalist firms as well as business associations do not have to take into consideration a comparative multitude of incommensurable needs. All the relevant questions can be reduced to the unequivocal standards of expected costs and returns, i.e., to the measuring rod of money. The optimization problem in respect to demands and techniques is thus much easier to resolve collectively; or, more precisely, it does not have to be resolved *collectively* at all but often can be analyzed and decided upon by a staff of experts.

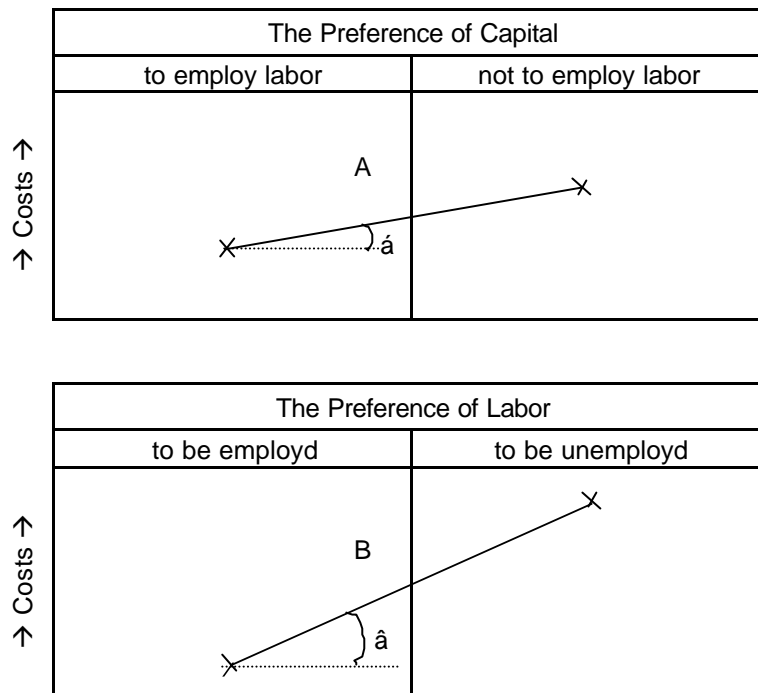
A further dissimilarity that results directly from the capitalist structure of the "input-environment" of the two types of organizations is this: capitalists, being in control of the process of production in which they combine rationally "dead" and "living" labor, are in a position to constantly evaluate and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this combination. Whereas capitalists can (and under the competitive pressure that they put upon each other, must) improve the efficiency of production, workers do not have the opportunity to increase the efficiency of the process of reproduction of their own labor power. In other words, by introducing (labor-saving) technical change, capital can release itself par-

tially from its dependence upon the supply of labor, thereby depressing the wage rate. On the other hand, labor cannot release itself from its dependency upon capital's willingness to employ it, because there are next to no possibilities of reproducing itself more efficiently, namely on the basis of lower wages or even outside the labor market. This is particularly true in view of two conditions which are typically present under industrial capitalism, namely (1) the legal prohibition and strict regulation of forms of life outside the labor market, and (2) the concentration of the working class in large urban agglomerations in which living conditions are designed to make it virtually impossible for propertyless workers to subsist in ways other than those offered by the labor market. Because of this asymmetrical dependency relationship, the collectivity of all workers must be, paradoxically, more concerned with the well-being and the prosperity of capitalists than, inversely, the latter is concerned with the well-being of the working class. This increases the lack of homogeneity of those interests that working class associations have to accommodate and the concomitant difficulties of the intraorganizational decision-making process, which we will discuss subsequently.

Our main argument throughout this paper is that differences in the position of a group in the class structure (we consider here only the classes of labor and capital), not only lead to differences in power that the organizations can acquire, but also lead to differences in the *associational practices*, or logics of collective action, by which organizations of capital and labor try to improve their respective position vis-à-vis each other; these differences tend to be obscured by the "interest group" paradigm and the underlying notion of a unitary and utilitarian logic of collective action that covers all associations.

We now want to illustrate our proposition that differences in power lead to differences in the type of collective action by which this power differential is to be balanced. We do this on the basis of a formal and extremely simplified diagram.<sup>6</sup> Figure 1 represents two corresponding options of individual capitalists and individual workers: that, on the part of the capitalist, to employ labor power or not; and on the part of workers, to be employed or not. For both sides, the respective first option is the preferred one, while both sides try to avoid the second one. However, the *extent* to which the first option is preferred over the second differs between the two classes, some of the reasons for this have been explored in the foregoing discussion. This difference is represented in the respective preference curves A and B. The steeper preference curve B means simply that the individual owner of (only) labor power is less likely to be able to afford to be unemployed than the individual capitalist is likely to be able to refrain from employing him. Of course, both want to avoid the second alternative but the worker does so more strongly than the

Figure 1



capitalist. Generally speaking, the essence of every relationship of social power is a difference between angles  $\acute{a}$  and  $\hat{a}$  and the magnitude of power can be expressed by the magnitude of this difference.

Let us suppose now that this power differential results in social conflict. What are the strategies by which the two sides will conduct this conflict? Generally speaking, the more powerful side will try to minimize  $\acute{a}$  and maximize  $\hat{a}$ , and the less powerful side will try to accomplish the opposite. However, the power position that the two find themselves exposed to in the first place does not allow them to pursue these strategies *with the same chance of success*. The reason is that the potential to *change* power relations is itself determined by (i.e., proportional to) those power relations that are to be changed. To illustrate, the individual worker has hardly any chance of making his avoidance-alternative (unemployment)

personally more acceptable (e.g., by moving to a rural commune and thus reducing his reproduction costs), nor does he have much leverage for making the preference curve of his employer steeper (e.g., by working harder and thus making himself relatively more indispensable to his employer). Compared to these highly limited options of conflict strategy, the effectiveness of power-maintaining strategies of the already powerful tends to remain superior. What we get is a more or less unchanged replica of the initial power relationship.

More interesting is the case where both the more powerful and the less powerful join with others of their respective social categories in order to conduct the conflict in an organized and collective way. However, as we know from Olson's analysis of the logic of collective action, the situation is not likely to be changed dramatically by this collectivization of conflict either. The reason is, briefly, that superior power also means superior ability to defend and reproduce power. The powerful are fewer in number, are less likely to be divided among themselves, have a clearer view of what they want to defend, and have larger resources for organized action, all of which imply that they are likely to succeed in recreating the initial situation.

How, then, is it at all possible to explain that there are cases of changes in the power relationship actually occurring? This question leads us to a third possibility: to employ a form of collective strategy of conflict which not only aggregates the individual resources of the members of the association in order to meet the common interests of these individuals, but which also overcomes the *individuality* of those resources and interests as well as the obstacles to effective organization by defining a *collective identity* on the basis of which the chance to change existing power relations is no longer *exclusively* determined by these power relations themselves. That is to say that those in the inferior power position can increase their potential for change only by overcoming the comparatively higher costs of collective action by *changing the standards according to which these costs are subjectively estimated* within their own collectivity.<sup>7</sup> Only to the extent that associations of the relatively powerless succeed in the formation of a collective identity, according to the standards of which these costs of organization are subjectively deflated, can they hope to change the original power relation. Conversely, it is only the relatively powerless who will have reason to act nonindividualistically on the basis of a notion of collective identity that is both generated and presupposed by their association. The very fact that the more powerful will find the individualistic and purely instrumental form of collective action sufficiently promising for the preservation of their power position prevents them from transcending their basically utilitarian mode of collective action. In contrast, workers' organizations in capitalist systems always find themselves

forced to rely upon nonutilitarian forms of collective action, which are based on the redefinition of collective identities—even if the organization does not have any intention of serving anything but the members' individual utilitarian interests, for example, higher wages. No union can function for a day in the absence of some rudimentary notions held by the members that being a member is of value in itself, that the individual organization costs must not be calculated in a utilitarian manner but have to be accepted as necessary sacrifices, and that each member is legitimately required to practice solidarity and discipline, and other norms of a nonutilitarian kind. The logic of collective action of the relatively powerless differs from that of the relatively powerful in that the former implies a paradox that is absent from the latter—the paradox that *interests can only be met to the extent they are partly redefined*.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the organizations in which the collective action of the relatively powerless takes place, must always be—and, in fact, always are—construed in such a way that they simultaneously express and define the interests of the members. In sharp contrast, capital associations are confined to the function of aggregating and specifying those interests of members which, from the point of view of the organization, have to be defined as given and fixed, the formation of which lies beyond the legitimate range of functions of the organization. This leads us directly to a more detailed discussion of the internal structures and functions of both types of organization.

### (2) Internal Processes

In order to succeed in accomplishing stated interests, an organization must be able to mobilize sanctions. The strike is the ultimate sanction that unions can mobilize. Although the term "capital strike" is sometimes used metaphorically to describe the type of sanctions available to capitalists, this analogy is somewhat misleading in that it obscures the differences that exist between the two types of organizations in regard to the *way in which* the respective sanctions are mobilized. Such organizational measures as strike assemblies, strike votes, picket lines, etc., are, of course, absent from the strategic repertoire of business associations. We must clearly distinguish between those sanctions that can be mobilized by the *organization* in the strict sense and those that can be mobilized by the *constituent members outside* the organization of which they are members. Once we take this distinction seriously, we see immediately that the potential to sanction, as well as to make concrete decisions to bring this potential to bear on a particular situation, reside outside the organization, namely, with the individual capitalist in the case of business organizations, whereas this potential has to be built up in a communicative process *within* the association of workers, whose *individual* potential to sanction is minimal because of their atomization.

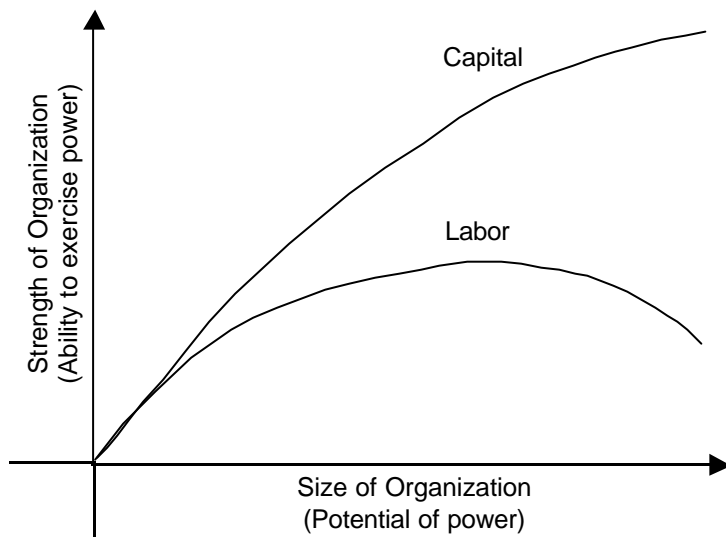
Business *organizations* have a comparatively low potential for sanctioning; what they can do, for instance, is to threaten to withdraw those functions that they perform as an organization in their environment, for instance, to withdraw the functions of information and advice that they may give to government bureaucracies. At most, they can (at least in some countries) refuse to recognize other organizations as legitimate partners in bargaining. That is to say, what there is in terms of sanctioning potential of the organization can be put into effect by the *leadership* of the organization alone.

In contrast, even in the most bureaucratic unions, the leadership is much less able to use sanctions at its own discretion. Whatever sanctioning potential there is in workers associations becomes effective only through the organized members and their explicitly coordinated action. Somewhat paradoxically, the rank and file *members thus seem to be the top executives* of unions as far as sanctions are concerned; while some sanctioning potential of business and employers associations resides with the organizations' executive group alone, the overwhelming sanctioning potential remains on the plane of the behavioral options of the constituent members who remain outside the range of organized activity. In order to mobilize power vis-à-vis the outside world, business organizations need part of the resources (such as membership fees and information) from their members, *resources* which then will be used in an instrumental-purposive fashion by the expert leadership of the association. What unions need in addition, is the conscious and coordinated *active participation* of their members, namely, as a final resort, the willingness to go on strike. In the simplest terms, a difference between the two types of organizations lies in the fact that the one depends upon its ability to generate the members' "*willingness to pay*", whereas the other depends, in addition, on its ability to generate its members "*willingness to act*". These two different organizational requirements assign different tasks to the respective leadership group.

For instance, it might appear reasonable for organizations of both types to maximize membership—that is, the ratio of actual to potential membership. This appears "rational" because it maximizes the resources that are available to the organization and it supposedly minimizes internal competition among those who are members. However, this standard of rationality does not apply equally to business associations and to unions. Whereas it would be rational for the former to follow this rule, maximization of membership involves a specific dilemma for the latter, the consequence being that they are forced to "optimize" rather than to maximize. This is so for at least two reasons. First, if the success of unions depends upon their sanctioning potential, and if the sanctioning potential of the union depends upon its ability to generate a "willingness to act" on the

part of its members, and if an increase in membership leads to a *bureaucratic* relationship between the leadership and the rank and file members, and if bureaucratization undermines the organization's ability to mobilize the particular source of sanctioning power that we have called "capacity to generate willingness to act", then we would expect union "strength" to be related to union size by an inverse U-curve. In other words, unions are confronted with the dilemma that there is an optimum size beyond which union power decreases. (See Figure 2) As an illustration of this structural dilemma of unions which results from the fact that they simultaneously depend on their members' "willingness to pay" and "willingness to act", consider the two extreme cases of (a) an extremely militant union that, however, is too small to actually conduct a strike because it lacks the necessary strike funds, and (b) a large and highly bureaucratized union that has accumulated enormous strike funds but is unable to use them because, for lack of internal communication and mobilization, members are likely to have become extremely apathetic. Second, as union size increases, *heterogeneity* of members' positions, occupations, and immediate interests tends to increase, too, which makes it more difficult to formulate generally agreed upon demands and to mobilize a common willingness to act that flows from a notion of shared, collective identities and mutual obligations of solidarity.

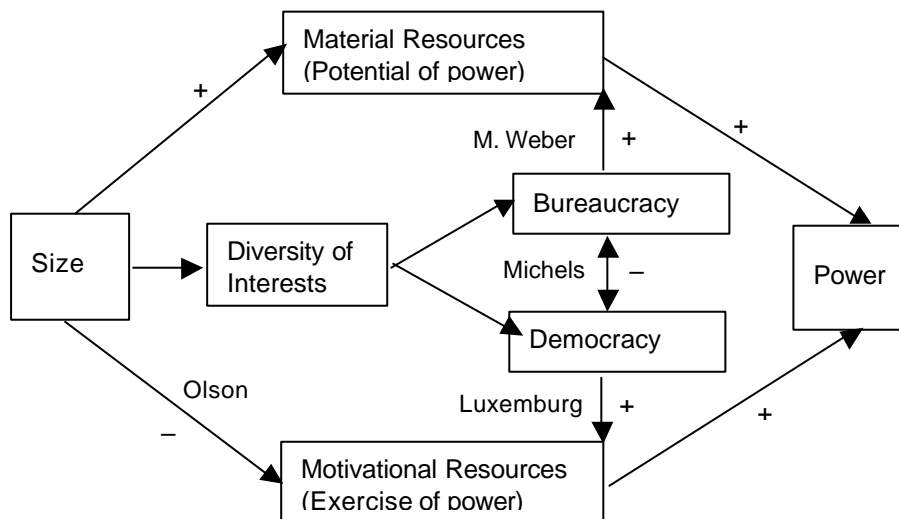
Figure 2



Both aspects of the unions' specific dilemma of size and power, can, of course, easily be traced back to the standard *problematique* of democracy versus bureaucracy. These relationships are illustrated, together with the names of social theorists who have explored some of these relations, in Figure 3. For the sake of their power, unions are forced to maintain a precarious balance between mobilization of resources and mobilization of activity, between size and collective identity, and between bureaucracy (which allows them to accumulate power) and internal democracy (which allows them to exercise power). None of these dilemmas applies with comparable seriousness to business and employers organizations for the reason that they do not depend on internal democracy, collective identity, or willingness to engage in solidary action for the very fact that they already are in a structural power position which renders complications such as these avoidable.

Let us explore the dilemma of heterogeneity versus collective identity a step further. The problem entails not only the diversity of position and interest that exists between workers, but also the diversity that exists, as it were, within the workers themselves. The three major interests that arise directly from the conditions of working class life can be categorized as interest in *wage*, interest in continuing to receive wage (*employment security*), and interest in *working conditions*. Moreover, workers are, at the same time, not only subject and object of the exchange of labor power, but also consumers of the product of labor power as well as inhabitants of the social and natural environment that is affected by the impact of

Figure 3





capitalist industrialization. The larger the unions, the more necessary it becomes for them to find some way of reconciling all or at least some of these heterogeneous concepts of interest (cf. von Beyme 1977a, 1977b). The notorious difficulty of doing this in the absence of some unequivocal standard (such as the monetary one), which makes all these diverse interests commensurable, leads to a tendency for unions to "delegate" issue areas that they find too hard to deal with internally. (This is the basis for the European pattern of a division of labor between unions and socialist parties.) Or they may restrict the agenda of demands by refusing to deal with certain sets of demands, which, although clearly related to the life interests of their rank and file, are too difficult to reconcile with other, equally essential demands and interests. (This corresponds to the U.S. patterns of recent decades.) Thus, union leadership is constantly caught between attempting to provide comprehensive representation for all the interests of its working class constituency and being limited in its ability to find a formula that reconciles these partly contradictory interests without endangering their internal acceptability and/or external negotiability. In respect to the unions' agenda of demands, we thus have another optimal size dilemma, which, again, is absent from business associations.

In what sense, now, are the problems that business associations have to deal with in their internal processes of organization, communication, and decision making different? What has already become clear from our previous discussion is (1) that formal business associations are only one of three forms of collective action of capital, (2) that business associations carry only a very limited sanctioning potential, whereas the decisive source of power remains with the individual firm and its strategic choices, and that (3) the establishment of formal organization tends to be, as a defensive response to the formation of unions (as well as to incipient state-interventionism), a relatively late development in the history of capitalism. As a consequence, the problem of creating and maintaining unity among members and of mobilizing members' resources is considerably less serious for business associations than for unions, despite the divergence of heterogeneous and conflicting interests among the former's members. Nevertheless, maintaining unity remains a problem because one would hardly be justified in assuming that such divergences (for example, divergences between large firms and small firms, firms oriented toward a domestic market and those exporting goods, firms competing with each other on the demand side of labor and capital markets, as well as on the supply side of goods markets, etc.) would be absent from the internal dynamics of business associations. What we rather wish to suggest as an answer to the previously posed question is that there are two mechanisms that facilitate a comparatively easy and noncontradictory reconciliation of internal divergences. One has to do with the greater

potential of "by-products" to maintain internal integration, and the second has to do with the greater specificity and calculability of the association's objectives (cf. Olson, 1968).

In order to provide an incentive for numerous small firms to become members of a business association despite differences of interest that separate them from large firms, the business organization can provide various services (or "private goods") on which small firms are considerably more dependent than large firms (which probably find it worthwhile to provide such services for themselves). Such services (for example, highly specific advice and information) are more valuable for small firms because the expense of producing them individually is high. To become—and remain—a member of a business association that provides access to such services becomes almost imperative in those (frequent) cases where no alternative access to such services exists.

In contrast, those services that unions can (and do) provide in order to stimulate and stabilize motivation to join (such as, in the case of West Germany, the services of insurance, book clubs, travel agencies, legal advice, automobile clubs, etc.) provide only relatively minor advantages over those services that can be obtained *outside* the union on the free market, which provides basically the same services. In contrast to unions, too, business associations do not have to be concerned that the "privatistic" type of membership motivation, which is stimulated by such individualistic incentives as the demand for "private goods", will interfere with the general ability of the association to achieve its objectives; for the achievement of these objectives does not depend, in their situation, on a sense of solidarity and the resulting "willingness to act" on the part of members. This is because the executive leadership, comprised of a staff of experts and analysts, can "speak for" members without previously having had to "speak to" them in order to form a broad consensus.

The latter point has to do with a second advantage which business associations enjoy as regards the problem of internal integration. That part of the totality of interests of individual members which arises as an issue for the association (as opposed to an issue that the member has to deal with privately)—and which must, therefore, be processed through the organization—can certainly be said to be much smaller in the case of business associations as compared to unions. There are hardly any of what have been called the "central life interests" of workers that do not, at least potentially, appear on the agenda of unions, whereas most of the "central life interests" of capital are either resolved *beneath* the level of association, namely within the individual firm, or *above* the level of association, namely within the state apparatus. Consequently, the range of issues and interests that the association has to deal with is much more limited and specific; this means there is the dual advantage of greater

commensurability and calculability of what the "right" demands and tactics are, and of a comparatively smaller probability of internal conflict. Since the organization does not interfere with, or in any way attempt to regulate, what remains within the range of decision making of the individual firm,<sup>9</sup> the obligations and commitments that the individual member firm takes upon itself are quite marginal and thus less likely to involve any disincentive to join. Taken together with the first point—the comparatively greater attractiveness of the specific by-products which the business association has to offer—this point contributes to an explanation of the empirical fact that the proportion of actual members to eligible members is regularly much higher in business associations than in unions.<sup>10</sup> The limited range of members' interests that are processed by the association rather than individually, plus the fact that these interests can relatively easily be decided upon on the basis of quantitative criteria of costs and returns, also helps to save the costs of internal communication within business associations. Furthermore, business associations do not have to bother with the problem of formulating an explicit ideology, which, in the case of unions, serves to attract some members while antagonizing others. And even if the need to rely on some explicit common understanding of interests should come up, the task is an easier one to solve because one can assume a presupposed consensus as to social, cultural, and political values to which one can always refer. Thus, the problem of creating and maintaining the integration of members within the association can be described as being solvable in a one-dimensional and "monological" way, which does not require the simultaneous and partly contradictory processes of expressing *and* forming common interests.

### *(3) Organizational Outputs*

Lindblom has forcefully argued in his recent book that capital, be it on the level of the individual firm or on the level of business associations, is in a privileged power position, which results from the fact that, in a capitalist society, the state depends on the flourishing of the accumulation process. Even before it begins to put explicit political pressure and demands upon the government, capital enjoys a position of indirect control over public affairs. "Businessmen thus become a kind of public officials and exercise what, on a broad view of their role, are public functions" (1977:172). This situation makes it advisable for governments to pay special attention to what businessmen have to communicate either individually or through their associations. "In countless ways governments . . . recognize that businessmen need to be encouraged to perform. . . . Although governments can forbid certain kinds of activity, they cannot command business to Perform. They must induce rather than command" (1977:173). Because businessmen "appeal as functionaries performing

functions that government officials regard as indispensable . . . businessmen cannot be left knocking at the doors of the political system, they must be invited in" (1977:175). The very attentive attitude toward business interests that every government of the capitalist state is structurally forced to assume substantially reduces the efforts of "knocking at the doors". The entire relationship between capital and the state is built not upon what capital *can do politically* via its association, as the critical theory of elitism maintains, but upon what capital *can refuse to do* in terms of *investments* decided upon by the individual firm. This asymmetrical relationship of control makes comparatively inconspicuous forms of communication and interaction between business associations and the state apparatus sufficient to accomplish the political objectives of capital (cf. Offe and Ronge, 1975; Block, 1977).

Compared to the communications between unions and the state, the communications of business associations with the state differ in that they are *less visible publicly* (because there is a lesser need to mobilize the support of external allies), more *technical* (because the insight into the political "desirability", that is, factual indispensability, can be presupposed as already agreed upon), more *universal* (because business associations can speak in the name of all those interests that require for their fulfillment a healthy and continuous rate of accumulation, which, from the point of view of capital *and* the state, is true of virtually everybody), and *negative* (because, given the fact that the government has to consider as desirable what is in fact desirable for capital, the only thing that remains to be done is to warn governments against imprudent, "unrealistic", and otherwise inopportune decisions and measures).

The dependency of the state apparatus upon the performance of capital—which includes the indirect dependence upon capital of all those interests which, in their turn, depend upon the state and the goods and services delivered by it—is unparalleled by any reciprocal dependency relationship of the capitalist class upon the state. This structural asymmetry is exploited and fine-tuned by the operation of business associations, but it is by no means *constituted* or created by them. Their success is not accomplished by or because of the organization itself; rather it derives from a power relationship that is logically and historically prior to the fact of any collective action of businessmen.

So far, we have analyzed some general characteristics of business associations in terms of a network of communication that exists between members and their association, the association and the state, and capitalist firms—whether associated with "interest groups" or not—and the state. Let us now, for the sake of brevity, summarize the differences that we see between the ways business associations and unions communicate with

their environments. We do this in a rather schematic fashion, that is, by listing a set of dichotomies in which the first alternative always designates the characteristics of business associations and the second those of unions:

- Operation on the level of *system integration* versus operation on the level of *social integration*. Disintegration on the first level is equivalent to "*malfunctioning*", the absence of basic requirements of the material process of societal reproduction; disintegration on the second level means *conflict*, the absence of consensus and compliance.
- *Instrumental-monological* patterns of collective action versus *dialogical* patterns. In the former pattern, the association, almost exclusively, aggregates and transmits interests, and debates about the proper objectives of the organization occur only at the *leadership* level, if at all. In the second pattern, the organization plays an active role in defining and transforming members' interests; communication about objectives is therefore, at least occasionally, extended to the rank-and-file level. (This dichotomy describes structural differences between capital and labor organizations in that the first can afford to follow the first alternative *exclusively*, whereas the latter must reconcile both patterns within the organization).
- *Power potential without the organization* versus *power potential created by the organization*.
- *Exercise of power through the leadership* of the organization versus *exercise of power through the activity of the members*.
- *Defensive* use of power versus *offensive* use of power.
- Use of power *hidden and dispersed* versus use of power *open and concentrated*. (To illustrate, no one thinks of the nature of communication between business associations and their environment as consisting of "profit demands", because such "demands" are made outside the organization by individual firms; in contrast, unions, in the public eye, are most readily associated with the making of "wage demands".)
- Communication in terms of *technical imperatives* versus communication in terms of demands and explicit *normative claims*.
- Legitimation of organized activity in terms of "*interests of the whole*" versus *particularistic advocacy* of specific interests of the prospective beneficiaries of demands.

### 3. INTERESTS AND POLITICAL FORM

"There is no one who knows what is for your interest so well as yourself (Jeremy Bentham). "The sole evidence it is possible to produce that

anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it" (John Stuart Mill). "The interest is first, last and all the time strictly empirical. There is no way to find it except by observation" (A. Bentley).

It is apparently one of the basic assumptions of classical liberal, as well as modern democratic, theory that all empirical interest articulations are equally "true", that is, equally representative of the *genuine* interests of the actors. On the basis of this assumption, the very concept of "true", or "objective" interests (as distinct from "false" or "erroneous" ones) can be safely dropped from the theoretical discourse, for it is both methodologically impossible, as well as undesirable for its allegedly "totalitarian" implications, to attribute differing degrees of validity to empirical interest articulations. Schumpeter, whose book *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* made him the forerunner of much of today's liberal democratic theory, went so far as to consider any imputation of counterfactual interests as inspired by antidemocratic intentions (even if there were indications that the actors in question would be willing to accept them as their manifest interests once they were brought to their attention). The dogma is what we could call practical positivism—the belief that "an individual's interest . . . is simply what he says it is" (Bachrach, 1975; cf. Balbus, 1971).

The weakness of the naive version of this "liberal equation" is too obvious to require much elaboration. A moment's reflection (if not, indeed, elementary pre-scientific experience) tells us that there are two possible deviations from this equation—deviations which premature acceptance of the above dogma prevents us from taking seriously. The first is if a person expresses something that does not coincide with his or her interest (for instance, due to the impact of deception, self-deception, or force). The second occurs if (due to the lack of opportunity to do so) a person does not articulate what he or she actually perceives as the real interest. Confronted with the existence of these two possibilities, the liberal political theorist can respond in either of two ways: he can remain faithful to his original equation, thus methodically ignoring the distorting effects of force, manipulation, intimidation, etc., which would place him in the immediate theoretical vicinity of such advocates of the fascist state as the German law professor Carl Schmitt, who proclaimed that "in particular, a dictatorship cannot come into being by other than democratic means" (Schmitt, 1928:237). In doing this, any distinction between democratic and nondemocratic forms of political organization vanishes. Or he can respond by stipulating that the logical and methodological equivalence of empirical and "true" interests be in fact contingent upon the presence of institutional arrangements which make such deviations negligible or unlikely.

Clearly, most of today's liberal theorists would opt for the second alternative. They would assume the operation of some mechanism that reliably eliminated either of the two distortions and hence guaranteed the actual equivalence of the two sides of the equation. Supposedly, such a mechanism would be the institution of citizenship, civil liberties, and the competitive political process. Together, they are supposed to guarantee that no expression of interest deviates from actually perceived interests (due to the impact of force, etc.), and that no major interest remains unexpressed in the open and competitive political process. Thus, the "principal function of constitutional and democratic institutions is to ensure a reasonably close convergence between expressed and actual interests" (Bachrach, 1975:40).

To this hypothetical assertion, which has already reduced the original conceptual equation to an empirical one, the validity of which is contingent upon certain institutional arrangements and their effectiveness, we can again respond with two arguments. It could be argued that the dynamics of state interventionism and bureaucratization; the mode of operation of the mass media; the extent to which modern state apparatuses make use of repression, intimidation, and "symbolic politics"; as well as other structural features of the modern state, have rendered those democratic "equating mechanisms" ineffective. This is the line of argument that has been developed by such critics of the "elitist" and "realist" schools of democratic theory as Bachrach and Baratz, Crenson, Edelman, Conolly, and Schattschneider. Or one could argue that, even though we might be prepared to accept the functioning and validity of the democratic "equating mechanism" and, consequently, to work with a fairly generous definition of what constitutes "reasonably close convergence," the argument is at best only partially valid because it is restricted to the sphere of institutionalized democratic politics, whereas interests are formed to a large extent beyond the boundaries of this sphere. Clearly, the two arguments can be used cumulatively. Confining ourselves to an exploration of the implications of this second argument, we find that the spheres of "civil society"—for example, the interactions between consumer and producer, workers and management, among family members, church members, etc.—are simply not constituted according to, any principle that could be expected to bring empirical and "true" interests into close proximity.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, there is no mechanism which could conceivably neutralize distortions that lead to an incongruity between the two. Moreover, since the spheres of democratic politics and civil society are not separate, but are interconnected by the sameness of the individuals who play roles in both spheres, we can expect that unchecked distortions are transmitted

from the life of civil society into the political process; "false" perceptions of need and interest, as generated and conditioned by social life, are likely to have substantial repercussions on the political plane.

However, even if every citizen were equally likely to err as to his "true" interest, and even if deviations from accurate insight were equally likely to occur in all conceivable directions, a somewhat more cautious version of the basic liberal equation might still remain defensible. For the proponents of such a theory could argue that, due to some kind of randomization effect, the individual distortions would amount to zero, leaving the democratic process itself undistorted.

But is it really reasonable to assume that the likelihood of a misconception of interest is equally distributed among classes? We shall argue here that it is not, and that, on the contrary, the probability of distortion of interest is greater on the part of the working class than on the part of the capitalist class under capitalist relations of production. According to our argument, the members of one class experience greater difficulties in finding out what their "true" interest is; that is, they have more difficulty in bridging the gap between empirical and "true" interest. This asymmetry has to do with class domination itself. Ambiguity, alienation, mystification, and fetishism directly affect working class *consciousness* as much as exploitation and the commodity form imposed upon human labor power affect its *material* and social conditions of life. If such asymmetry existed on the level of interest awareness, then we would expect to find different types and degrees of organizational and communicative efforts to "rationalize" the respective interest, that is, to overcome the specific distortions and deviations which are a result of the specific class position. Such class-specific organizational and cognitive requirements, which are needed in order to find one's "true" interest, could then help to clarify the differences between the two logics of collective action that we have described and contrasted in the second part of this article. Finally, if we succeed in making a convincing argument concerning the structural reasons for the differential distribution of interest distortions among classes, we should also be able to draw a critical conclusion regarding the dogma of liberal political and social theory, which claims that empirical and "true" interests are congruent. Thus, the plan for the following paragraphs is (1) to establish some theoretical arguments in support of our proposition that the interests of the working class and those of the capitalist class are subject to differing degrees of distortion under capitalism and that different organizational forms are required within each class in order to overcome these specific distortions, and (2) to evaluate the liberal dogma and its intellectual, as well as political, impact.<sup>12</sup>



(1) The differential fallibility argument—Karl Deutsch has defined "power" as "the ability to afford not to learn" (1966:111). In a sense, this is an accurate characterization of the capitalist class' relation to its own class interest. Although this class, under the competitive pressure that its individual members put upon each other, has to seek constantly to find the *means*, or the most rational purposive behavior, by which its interest is to be met, the interest itself (the end) can safely remain remote from any conscious reflection or effort to learn on the part of the class members. Compared to that of any individual member of the working class, the interest of a capitalist is far less likely to be ambiguous, controversial, or wrongly perceived. To be sure, there may be numerous uncertainties as to the most effective or efficient means of meeting this interest, that is, of achieving what is valuable and desirable. But, *in a capitalist society*, the interest itself is firmly established and hard to overlook. This is because, first, the pursuit of this interest is legitimate and generally accepted within this society—this is obviously not the case with everything that workers might conceive of as in their interest. Second, it is because it is externally supported by those institutional sectors of capitalist society (most notably the state apparatus), which depend for their ability to perform *their* particular functions upon capital's successful pursuit of *its* interest in accumulation. Such an external "guarantor" and supporter of interest is clearly absent in the case of the working class. Third, in order for his interest to be his "true" interest, the individual capitalist does not have to consult with other capitalists in order to reach a common understanding and agreement with them as to what their interests are. In this sense, the interest is "monological."

In contrast, any interest that is thought of by the individual worker as his "true" interest, but about which he does not find any consensus among his fellow workers, is most likely to be experienced by him as having been an "erroneous" concept of his interest. Therefore, a "dialogical" process of definition of interest is required on the part of those who find themselves in an inferior power position and who do, therefore, depend upon a common and collective concept of their interest. Fourth, in case a false notion of what is desirable and valuable occurs, the situation is likely to be corrected much faster and more easily in the case of a member of the capitalist class than in the case of the worker. This is because errors on the part of the capitalist are fed back to him from his market environment in unequivocal quantitative-monetary terms and within a relatively short time, whereas erroneous concepts of interest are not easily and rapidly detectable in the case of the worker. Fifth, there is a strongly asymmetrical relationship between the chances of the two classes mutu-

ally to shape their respective conceptions of what is in their interest. Here we refer to the mechanisms of bourgeois hegemony (or the "preceptorial" function of capital, in Lindblom's terminology), which allows the capitalist class to partly control the symbols and values which play a role in the identities and aspirations of the members of the subordinate class. Consequently, much greater communicative and organizational efforts are required on the part of the working class if such hegemonic impact of cultural domination is to be neutralized.

To summarize, in order to achieve an *equal* amount of accuracy in awareness of the respective interests, vastly *different* efforts are required on both sides of the major dividing line of social class. This view is directly opposed to those versions of a Marxist theory of class consciousness which hold that there is a spontaneous and almost automatic development, propelled by what is sometimes called a "class instinct", toward the "true" interest of the working class as a whole. Such a view is clearly unsupported by both theoretical arguments and contemporary experience (cf. Jacoby, 1978). Moreover, it is hardly to be derived from the basic categories and conceptualizations that underlie the Marxist sociology of wage labor, which rather leads us to expect a number of objective and subjective ambiguities in the social situation of the wage worker. On one hand, the wage worker is defined by his position of being forced to sell his labor power (because he has nothing else to sell and his labor power is perfectly useless to him unless it is sold to a capitalist for a wage; this is because he does not own any means of production with which he could combine his labor power himself). On the other hand, however, labor power cannot suitably be treated like any other commodity, because it is the only "commodity" that cannot be physically separated from its "owner". Consequently, the wage worker is forced to "sell" something that remains part of his own living activity; in the labor contract, he *legally surrenders control* over something that *physically remains under his own control*. Thus, he is separated from the control over his labor power while at the same time being the subject of his labor power—a subject that is inseparably tied to everything that happens to its object of "sale" even after it is "sold". As a consequence of this paradoxical position, the wage worker is permanently exposed to "crosspressures" of the most dramatic sort; he is at the same time the object of what is sold in the labor market transaction and the partner in the labor contract, object and subject of the exchange relation. The ambiguity in interest derives from the concept of a market participant of himself as one who has a particular unit of labor power, as well as skills, experience, and so forth (i.e., a concept of *what* he has to sell) and a concept of himself in terms of he himself *being* wage-labor—thus, being implicated with all his

human potential in the process of utilization of that mysterious "commodity" (i.e., a concept of himself in terms of the fact *that* he *has* to sell). All the other ambiguities in consciousness and defining interest follow from this basic one—namely, the ambiguity between individualistic versus collective improvement of one's condition, between economic versus political concepts of one's interest, between the identities as consumer and producer, between the priorities of higher wages versus better working conditions and more secure employment, and between the behavioral alternatives of individual competitiveness and class solidarity.

The points developed so far should suffice to support the conclusions (1) that there are different degrees of interest distortion in a capitalist society, (2) that these differences are not randomly distributed, but to a significant degree determined by structural differences of class position (rather than by such factors as quantitative group size, which is emphasized as the determining factor by Olson), and (3) that differences in the organizational practice and problems, strategies and structures, that we find between workers' and capitalists' "interest groups" are either a reflection of this underlying structural difference (e.g., the fact that capitalists can organize either in cartels or in associations, whereas labor has only the second of these options because it is tied to discrete, nonsummable, individual units) or it is a specific response to a condition we have called asymmetrical interest distortion (e.g., labor, in contrast to capital, uses dialogical patterns of intraorganizational communication in order to overcome the diversity and noncalculability of those interests which are represented by unions).

(2) *A critique of the "liberal equation"*—We have argued before that the nonrandomness of the distortions of interest-awareness, together with the limited range (and effectiveness) of the neutralizing mechanisms of constitutional democratic institutions, causes a serious problem for liberal democratic theory. Once the possibility of error in one's perception of interest is at all conceded, once differential and class-specific distortions appear to play more than a negligible role, and once we acknowledge the limitations of democratic procedure, the hidden cynicism of the liberal equation becomes apparent; if every articulation of interest is to be taken at face value, then those interests which are least likely to be affected by distortion and error (which, according to the arguments in the preceding paragraphs, would be the interests of the bourgeoisie) are clearly favored. Although this conclusion may be considered fatal to the *truth* of the liberal equation and the theory it is based upon, it is not immediately, and of itself, fatal to the political forms and the institutional *practice* of liberal democracy derived from and legitimized by this theory. The practical

question that emerges from the theoretical critique of the liberal equation is this: to what extent do the political forms of liberal democracy provide asymmetrical chances to the members of different classes to be able to articulate enlightened interests? To what extent do they leave room for those mechanisms to become effective that are required to overcome the specific obstacles to nondistorted interest-awareness that we find in the ranks of the working class? Or, conversely, to what extent are liberal democratic forms of political conflict, which favor the accurate articulation of bourgeois interests and impede the organizational practices that facilitate the articulation of undistorted working class interests, imposed upon the working class? If it is true that political forms are not neutral, but are rather schemes for the preferential recognition of certain class interests (as we believe the above arguments strongly suggest), then they must themselves be considered as part of, and as objects of, the class conflict which they *appear* to merely regulate and to channel.

What needs to be explored here is the difficult relationship between class power, class conflict, and political form. The liberal equation inspires and legitimates political forms which in turn favor those interests that, for structural reasons, are likely already to be "enlightened", i.e., accurately perceived. At the same time, it opposes, usually in the name of "individual freedom", those political forms able to increase the accuracy of interest articulation on the part of the subordinate class—that is, it opposes those forms which could methodically help to resolve the structural ambiguity that characterizes the consciousness of the working class. Those interests that can be assumed to be already clarified and "identical with themselves", can be fed into the political process in an individualistic form (e.g., by voting) and over long chains of representation *without* being damaged or distorted by the form through which they are articulated. In contrast, those interests that are exposed to structural ambiguities, and which require a collective discourse for their articulation and an ongoing dialogical pattern of communication between leaders and those whom they represent in order to become "true", are less likely to be articulated with equal accuracy within the framework of these political forms. In view of such class-specific effects of differential penetrability, or selectivity, of political forms, we can think of a class conflict that goes on simultaneously on two levels: class conflict *within* political forms and class conflict *about* political forms.

The first, class conflict *within* political forms, is manifested in, and occurs between, those interests that are able to crystallize within a given organizational and procedural "rules of the game". The second one, class conflict *about* political forms, is latent, hidden by a pretense of "neutrality" concerning those very political forms that are to be attacked or defended on this level of conflict. This second conflict has to do with the

question of which political forms are most conducive to the articulation of the undistorted interest of various classes; supposedly each class tries to generalize and institutionalize those political forms which are most conducive to the self-enlightenment of the members of that class as to its "true" interest and which, at the same time, minimize the adversary class's chance of articulating its interests.

While this second level of class conflict is theoretically denied (and sometimes prohibited in practice) by liberals, it has also received little attention by Marxists, whose economic theory (which corresponds to the first level) is generally, and probably rightly, considered to be much more advanced than their political theory. It is this relatively blind spot in Marxist social theory which Esping-Andersen et al. have in mind when they write:

"The capitalist class attempts to create state structures which channel working class political activity in ways that do not threaten capitalist political dominance and objective interests. . . . It is necessary to understand the ways in which class struggle . . . is shaped by those very structures. . . . The internal structure of the state is simultaneously a product, an object and a determinant of class conflict. State structure is itself a source of power. The organization of political authority differentially affects the access, political consciousness, strategy and cohesion of various interests and classes. State structure is not neutral with respect to its effects on class conflict". (1976:190, 191)

By "state structure" or "organization of political authority", the authors obviously mean a specific set of political forms which are institutionalized in a state and which generally define to what extent and through which channels citizens as members of classes and groups are allowed to participate in the formation of public authority. The notion that these forms are themselves the object of class conflict coincides with our proposition concerning the duality and interconnectedness of the two levels of conflict. On the first level, the conflict is about distributional issues (i.e., the "who-gets-what?" issues) of normal politics. On this level, the question of *what is* valuable, and hence desirable to get, is presupposed to be a question that has already been answered through the existing political forms and the preferences that are revealed within them. The question of politics is thus reduced to: how much does each group get of what it has already defined as desirable to get? Parallel to this conflict, there is always the second-level conflict which focuses on the question: in which way do we most reliably find out *what it is* that we want to get? And: what notion of *collective identity* embraces the totality of those who want to get it? This is the conflict over political form.

In order to conduct the conflict on the first level, where the definition of cost" and "benefit" is a *fixed parameter* of the game, the Olsonian logic

of collective action describes and predicts the rational mode of behavior of all parties involved and even contributes to an understanding of why some groups are more likely to win than others. However, it is easy to see now why this logic of collective action is incomplete and why it provides only a limited understanding—it is unable to include and to describe the second level of conflict, where parameters become variable, and collective action is concerned with a redefinition of *what we mean by* "costs" and "benefits". In the absence of such predetermined parameters, the mode of action and struggle cannot be informed by any purposive-rational calculation, but rather by a notion of the *intrinsic* value and preferability of a particular mode of collective action. The purpose of this second type of conflict is, not to "get something", but to put ourselves in a position from which we can see better what it really is that we want to get and where it becomes possible to rid ourselves of illusory and distorted notions of our own interest.

Liberal political theory maintains that, since everyone knows at every point in time with incontrovertible certainty what his interest is, there is no need to shift from the first to the second level of political conflict, from one logic of collective action to the other; nor is there a need to challenge those established political forms which are *nothing but* forms for registering whatever preferences are revealed. According to this view, the possibility of level two conflicts and the corresponding logic of collective action are simply denied. Class theory demonstrates what is wrong with this position. It can do so (and often does) by claiming, on the basis of Hegelian metaphysics of history or by reference to some even more controversial intellectual standard, to have insight into a positive definition of the "objective interest". Contrary to such varieties of class theory, we have argued here, at least by implication, that such an argument claims more than is necessary for (and, in fact, is less than successful as) a criticism of the liberal dogma.<sup>13</sup> Instead, we have argued that the transition from level one ("distributive") to level two conflict (over the appropriate political and associational form of collective action) is necessary because of class-specific differences in the probability of interest distortion, i.e., there is a greater likelihood of members of the working class coming to *recognize* their own prior individual perception of interest as erroneous and distorted than is the case with the members of the capitalist class. Due to the specific ambiguities that are inherent in the economic and social conditions of the working class (and which are absent from those of the bourgeoisie), the former is, so to speak, in constant search of modes of collective action that allow for a more "reliable", less distorted conception of interest; whereas the ruling class not only has no reason to look for such alternatives, but also has good reasons to

comply with the existing ones because of the disorganizing effects that these are likely to have upon working class consciousness.

What we have called before "economic" class conflict differs from "political" class conflict in two respects. One is the fairly obvious distinction that, on the plane of the former, the institutionalized modes of collective action are respected and taken for granted by both sides, while, on the plane of the latter, these institutionalized forms themselves become the object of struggle. But there is also a second difference, which is deeper and more complicated. In economic class struggles, the working class as a whole or particular segments of it, as it is represented by unions and other working class associations, is confronted with smaller or larger segments of the bourgeoisie. In contrast, struggles over the political form involve both a confrontation between working class and bourgeoisie *and political struggles within the working class*. This is because the two types of organization, business associations and unions, which we have compared and contrasted in this paper, are by no means strictly parallel to the two logics of collective action that we have distinguished. The incongruity of the two dividing lines can be represented by the scheme shown in Figure 4.

While business organizations represent a political form of individualistic rationality and thus come close to a pure example of what we have called the "monological" logic of collective action, labor organizations are always a "mixed case" that contains elements of *both* logics, a condition which leads to an ongoing contradiction between bureaucracy and in-

Figure 4

Type of Organization	Capital		Labor
Pattern of Collective Action	A <sub>1</sub>	"monological" A <sub>2</sub>	"dialogical" B

ternal democracy, aggregation of individual interests and formation of a collective identity, and all the other antinomies we have discussed. In other words, the second difference between the economic and political planes of class conflict lies in the fact that on the level of political conflict there is not only the external division that coincides with the dividing line between the two classes, but, in addition, the internal division resulting from the *unions'* *dilemma* of being *simultaneously* based on both of the logics of collective action.

Underlying the political class struggle is a dual cleavage. Accordingly, we can conceive of three alternative courses and outcomes of this struggle. As a first possibility, we can think of an expansion of the "dialogical" logic of collective action, which would eventually displace both the bureaucratic elements of collective action that we find within working class organizations *and* the "monological" mode of collective action that underlies capitalists' forms of collective action. This alternative could, within Figure 4, be described as an expansion of box B and a gradual elimination of boxes  $A_1$  and  $A_2$ . Any elaboration of such an outcome, and of the process of which it is the outcome, would clearly take us far beyond the limits of the present paper, as it would require nothing less than a model of socialist transformation. It is for this reason, and due to the absence of any concrete historical process by which such a transformation could be illustrated, that we drop this alternative from further consideration in the present essay.

As a second alternative, we could think of the opposite case, namely of the expansion of the "monological" pattern of representation of pre-established and largely fixed interests over the entire range of diverse class interests and organizations. This would mean the expansion of  $A_1$  and  $A_2$  to the right and the gradual elimination of box B. This alternative, of course, has nothing to do with socialism (but rather with the corporatist transformation of the political form of capitalism), nor are concrete instances and tendencies in which the "monological" form of collective action is *imposed upon working class organizations* absent from contemporary experience. Therefore, some of the characteristics of this process will be discussed in the following section of this essay.

There is, however, a third and intermediary case which we would have to imagine as an expansion of box  $A_2$  toward the right. If it is true that the class struggle on the political plane occurs simultaneously between classes *and* as an *antagonism within the working class*, then we could think of it as a dynamic process that leads to the assimilation of working class patterns of organization with those found within capitalist associations. In this case, however, the process could by no means be reduced to, or explained by, ruling-class initiatives leading to the *imposition* of individualistic political forms upon the associational forms of the working



class (which is what happens in the second case); but it is rather a process in the course of which the precarious balance and coexistence of A<sub>2</sub> and B, that is, of monological and dialogical patterns of association, are dissolved in favor of the former and at the expense of the latter as a result of some *internal* dynamic of the working class organization itself. More concretely, this would mean the growth of the bureaucratic and individualistic elements within unions and the virtual disappearance of dialogical patterns of collective action and collective identity. It is the dynamics of this third alternative which we want to return to and explore in the final section of this paper.

#### 4. THE IMPOSITION OF LIBERAL POLITICAL FORMS ON WORKING CLASS ORGANIZATIONS

Let us first consider the conflict over political form as an *interclass* conflict. Unions have been accepted, in all advanced capitalist states, as an indispensable element of interest representation and of order and predictability, in the absence of which labor conflict and the disruption of social peace would be much harder to control than is otherwise the case. On the basis of this general assumption, which is shared even by the most conservative political forces, there is, however, considerable controversy over the legal and institutional framework in which unions should be allowed to operate. The coincidence of stagnation and inflation, the political alliances between unions and social democratic, socialist, and communist parties that shape the political life of all Western European countries, the extension of the range of issues and conflicts on which unions take an active position, and other recent developments have given prominence to the political issue of the *appropriate institutional framework of union action*. These concerns have resulted in numerous plans and programs for a new "institutional design" and "union reform" which, if implemented, would result in a substantial alteration in the power of unions. The 1974 electoral campaign in the U.K. that was conducted under the slogan "Who Governs Britain?" (meaning, of course, "the unions" or "the government") is a case in point, as are the various experiments with the introduction of income policies, voluntary wage restraint, "concerted action", and "social contracts". What these plans, programs and experiments amount to is an imposition of political forms upon workers associations and a limitation of either the types and objects of demands that they are legitimately allowed to make and/or the tactics that they are permitted to employ in struggles for these demands.

Depending on national traditions, conjunctural circumstances, political alliances, and divergent union systems that exist in the Western European countries, these attempts to impose restrictive political forms upon work-

ers organizations and their mode of operation take a broad variety of forms, which we obviously cannot describe and compare empirically within the limits of the present article. Neither can we analyze, on any level of specificity, the complicated problem concerning the extent to which the "imposition" of certain forms of action and/or of certain exclusive categories of demands and issues is fused with "voluntary" tactics of self-restraint and the acceptance of restrictive regulations (a problem to which we return in Part 5 of this article). All we can do here is to suggest a classification of mechanisms that are presently being discussed, proposed, and have in part already been adopted in order to curb the freedom of action of unions. The common denominator of these measures is the attempt to push back the dialogical pattern of collective action and to impose the monological pattern as the dominant one. This common denominator, in other words, is the *forced assimilation* of the working class pattern of collective action to the pattern of collective action that dominates any other "interest group."

Within this general strategy of transforming the organizational and legal parameters of working class collective action, there are a number of distinct approaches. Most notably, there is a major tactical difference between conservative and social democratic proponents of the common strategy of imposing tighter formal discipline upon working class organizations. This difference is based on contrasting assumptions about why unions tend to behave "irresponsibly" unless such discipline is made operative. Conservatives generally believe that unions behave irresponsibly in their demands and tactics because *union leaders*, whom they often characterize as arrogant autocrats gifted with demagogic talents and striving for personal power, mislead the rank and file into making demands and waging struggles that will seriously hurt the members' interests as well as the health of the economy. In contrast, social democratic analysts are much more inclined to see the dangerous dynamics of unionism in the autonomous, noncompliant behavior of the *members* in their opposition to a leadership, which, in spite of its better insights and laudable intentions, is forced, again and again, to advocate militant demands and tactics.

Irrespective of such difference of attitude and assumption, which are easily explained if we look at the respective loyalties that these parties want to maintain and the electoral constituencies they want to draw upon, their common conclusion is that the formal parameters of unionism must be redesigned so as to minimize risks of "irresponsible" union behavior. The principle varieties and mechanisms of these institutional disciplines which are imposed upon—and, as we will see in Part 5—are sometimes accepted by unions for quite "rational" reasons, can be categorized in the following way.

*(1) Limitations of the Substantive Areas of Interest Representation by Unions*

Under this title, of course, we refer to an old and continuing tactic, which is aimed at a restrictive definition of the range and type of demands that unions are legally allowed to make and on which they can employ their specific sources of power. It dates back, in the case of Germany, to the 1880s, when, under Bismarck's ban on political activity for the Socialists, unions had to strictly limit their activity to "nonpolitical", economic issues. The division of labor between the political arm (party) and the social and economic arm (unions) of the labor movement, institutionalized both from within and from without the unions in the first decade of the century, has contributed to the deepening of such thematic limitations. The prohibition of "political" strikes, and of political agitation within factories, has been a further step in the same direction. Today, German unions are forced by law and by court decisions to remain formally "neutral" vis-à-vis political parties. Even more far-reaching regulations are presently in the stage of preparation. The German Employers Association (BDA) has in recent years launched a vigorous campaign against what it considers the disproportionate political power of unions. In the course of this campaign, the federation of trade unions was accused of illegitimately taking positions on such issues as abortion legislation, foreign policy, and developmental aid to Third World countries, which is considered to transcend the trade unions' legitimate range of interest representation (Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft, 1974:169) and to interfere with the prerogatives of party politics. A recent piece of draft legislation for an "association act", authored by a group within the liberal party (FDP) makes it mandatory for all interest groups (including unions) to set up for themselves an exclusive list of specific areas in which they intend to represent the interests of their members—with the implication that any activity in areas *other* than those listed becomes automatically illegal.

*(2) Institutionalization of Alternative, Nonassociational Modes of Working Class Interest Representation*

Instructive illustrations of these tactics can again be found in the case of Germany, which seems to be the most advanced instance of a development that can also be observed in other Western European systems. Since the early years of the Weimar Republic, there has been a three-level system of interest representation of the working class, namely (a) Socialist and Communist parties, (b) unions and (c) works councils ("*Betriebsräte*"). In the early fifties and in the mid-seventies, "codetermination legislation" ("*Mitbestimmungsgesetze*") was added to complement a system of class and industrial conflict in which the conflict *based on organi-*

zation was gradually transformed into a conflict *based on legal entitlement* to participation—a process to which German literature refers with the term 'Juridification' ("*Verrechtlichung*") of industrial and class relations. Advantageous as many of these legal statutes and procedural rules have been for the defense of workers' interests, the reverse side of the coin of "juridification" is clearly the uncoupling of *representation* of interests and *activation* of interests. The more the relative share of interests decreases—interests represented by unions in their capacity as parties in collective bargaining—the more limited becomes, too, that part of interest that can be defended by strikes and other forms of collective action and mobilization. The more interest representation is assigned to either state agencies and/or works councils, (which are not allowed to initiate strikes), the less room there remains for struggles that involve the activity of those whose interests are represented. As a consequence, the dialogical pattern of collective action is made "unnecessary" and is discouraged in the course of the long-term transformation of industrial relations from associational into legally constituted forms of interest intermediation. Within the framework of such legal procedures, it is almost entirely left up to the respective functionary to decide what the interests are of those whom he represents and from whose immediate control his decisions are largely exempt.

"Juridification" seemingly provides an alternative, more convenient road to those objectives for which it is no longer deemed necessary to engage in associational activity. Legal statutes replace organized activity. But thereby they simultaneously undermine the structural preconditions for such activity, even in the absence of explicit legal prohibitions concerning certain tactics and categories of demands, such as those that have been experimented with in the recent British industrial relations legislation.<sup>14</sup> The basic mechanism by which monological and bureaucratic patterns of collective action are favored and dialogical ones displaced is the *dissociation of representation and struggle*. The same mechanism underlies various schemes to grant corporatist rights of participation to unions in "concerted action" and other tripartite public policy bodies. And similar ideas of routinized, legalized, and hence conflict-free interest accommodation is what inspires advocates of "social contracts" and wage indexation (i.e., automatic escalators compensating for inflationary losses in real wages).

### (3) *Statutory Increases of Diversity and Conflict Within Unions*

This third category of tactics facilitates the emergence of disunity within unions by strengthening the statutory position of those who wish to criticize the ways in which leaders conduct union affairs. This can be done, for instance, by making the postal ballot mandatory in all elections

and votes within the organization. The underlying intention (although not necessarily the result) of this proposal for procedural reform is to mobilize the "silent majority" which stands outside those communicative networks and informal channels of social control which remain operative in the membership. The demand for the introduction of the postal ballot has been a favorite of conservative union "reformers" in both Great Britain (Taylor 1976:28, 38) and West Germany in recent years. Another way to accomplish the objective of accentuating disunity is the imposition of regulations that make it more difficult for unions to deny access and/or to expel dissident members and thus to narrow the spectrum of positions within the membership.<sup>15</sup> Such regulations, commonly advocated in the name of "intraorganizational democracy" or "pluralism", appear, in the light of the argument that we have developed about class-specific distortions of interest perception as measures to paralyze those associational practices which could help to overcome interest distortions or "fetishism". They also appear to perform the function of tying union members closer to that which is interpreted as their interest by the media and encountered in other expressions of the dominant liberal political and economic life and of making it proportionately more difficult for unions to partially suspend the individualistic orientations of members in a dialogical process of collective interest articulation. (For an analogous argument applying to the modern "catch-all-party", see Kaste and Raschke, 1977:52-55).

It is this point on which the numerous designs for the "reform" and modernization of unionism that we find in various stages of institutionalization in many advanced capitalist countries converge. They subvert the dialogical process of collective interest articulation on which unions' power fundamentally depends, either by declaring some of its potential results illegal, or by making its efforts apparently superfluous, or by making the already burdensome process of internal unification more difficult. It is only to the extent that these three tactics of imposing bourgeois political forms upon unions become eventually successful that the conceptual equation (of unions and any other interest group), which liberal social scientists start by presupposing, becomes justified.

##### 5. TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF OPPORTUNISM

We have argued in the third section of this paper that the empirical interests of workers and the empirical interests of capitalists are, to a differing extent, subject to the risk of distortion. Once the institutionalized practice of capitalism is firmly established, there is no longer any functional need for capitalists to clarify for themselves what type

of society and particular social institutions they want to have. In other words, collective theorizing about the desirability and the functioning of capitalism—an activity which would involve particularly high risks of error—becomes unnecessary and obsolete. From then on, they learn their lesson about "rational" modes of individual behavior, not from a shared doctrine about the nature of society, but from the market. Conversely, as long as social life is dominated by the mechanisms of the market and private accumulation, the risk is minimal that, as a capitalist, one would experience the insight that obeying the imperatives of the market was against one's interest.

In this respect, the experience of the working class is quite different. Chances are that after you have learned the lessons of the labor market, you will also learn that you have learned the wrong lessons. Both the individual and organizational problem is to find out, in the course of a process that is bound to be full of errors, misconceptions, and distortions, which are the right lessons to learn, i.e., how ambiguities in orientation can be overcome so as to lead to a definition of interest that is "enlightened" and consistent with itself. The problem is that workers can neither fully submit to the logic of the market (first of all, because what they "sell" on the market is not a "genuine" commodity), nor can they escape from the market (because they are forced to participate, for the sake of their subsistence). Caught in this trap, workers and workers' organizations are constantly involved in the immensely complicated process of finding out what their interests are and how they can be pursued in a way that does not turn out to be self-contradictory and self-defeating.

In the final section of this essay, we want to explore an alternative that has already been hinted at, namely the alternative that, even in the absence of politically imposed modes of collective action such as corporatism and "juridification", workers' organizations adopt "opportunism" as a solution. In addition to its obvious pejorative connotation, the term opportunism has a clear analytical meaning. The term, as it was first introduced into the political and theoretical debates within the European socialist movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century, refers to a tendency "of seizing tactical opportunities without any regard for principles", as Peter Nettl has most concisely described it (Nettl, 1969:130). More specifically, the term opportunism, as frequently used in the pamphlet on the "Mass Strike" and other writings of Rosa Luxemburg, refers to what she perceived and criticized as a rising tendency within German Social Democracy of her time. According to her, opportunism includes the tendency toward an exclusive orientation of the working class movement toward established and recognized channels of political action, a tendency toward an exclusive reliance upon parliamentary and electoral forms of struggle within the working class movement,

the acceptance of the "division of labor" between economic and political struggles as it became manifest in the proclamation of the "independence" of unions from the Socialist party, a strategic self-limitation of the means and forms of struggle and thus, to put it most abstractly, an interruption of the dialectic of means and ends and the resulting reification of means, which are henceforth considered to be ends in themselves (Luxemburg, 1974).

Even today, the theoretical understanding of opportunism, and specifically of the "voluntary" submission and assimilation of the working class movement to liberal-bourgeois political forms before and during World War 1, is still one of the most serious desiderata of social history and social theory. Beyond the equally trivial levels of either moralistic rejection of opportunism or its "pragmatic" acceptance, an explanation is needed of the contextual conditions and the causal mechanisms that give rise to opportunist organizational practices. These practices can be characterized sociologically by three elements:

- The inversion of the means-end relationship, leading to the elevation of institutionalized or otherwise immediately available means, and their working as a selective filter mechanism over organizational objectives and principles ("*substantive*" dimension).
- The interruption of links between the short- and long-term perspective; priority is given to immediate and short-term accomplishments, whereas future chances and consequences are ignored or discounted (*temporal* dimension).
- Emphasis upon quantitative criteria of the recruitment and mobilization of members rather than on qualitative criteria such as the formation and expression of collective identities. Such emphasis on quantitative criteria can either take the form of *maximization* ("as many as possible", in view of electoral success and/or membership dues), or of *tactical exclusion* ("only those specifically affected" by some particular issue or conflict). Both of these quantitative orientations render the question of who "we" are (and who, for that matter, "they" are with whom "we" are in conflict) secondary and obsolete (*social* dimension).

Opportunism, then, is a type of organizational practice that resolves the problems connected with the precarious coexistence of the two logics of collective action that we find as a class-specific element in working class organizations by preferring the monological pattern of collective action. If the opportunist resolution of this tension is not to be fully explained either by the forced imposition of liberal-bourgeois political forms upon working class organizations, nor by "corrupt" working class leaders or "aristocratic" elements of the working class, nor by any unsociological mystifica-

tions such as the "iron law of oligarchy"—what other and additional explanation could account for the overwhelming evidence of opportunism in modern working class organizations?

As an answer to this question, we want to suggest a model according to which the shift to opportunist practices of collective action appears to be both a rational *and* unstable solution to the dilemma of working class organizations. The model itself is a sequential one and consists of five stages. *Stage one* represents the formative period of a working class organization, during which the formation of collective identity, cultivation of the members' "willingness to act", relatively small size, militant conflict, and low degree of bureaucratization characterize the life of the organization. On this stage, the dialogical pattern of collective action is clearly dominant. The dilemma between dialogical and monological patterns emerges at *stage two*. The organization has become strong enough to derive some power (i.e., control over its environment) from its recognized *potential* of power. In other words, concessions are likely to be made not *because* members *have* struck, but *in order to avoid* a strike. The recognized potential of power functions as if it were actually exercised power, so that the exercise of power can remain virtualized at the bargaining table. In order to exploit the advantages of this situation, the organization comes under partially contradictory imperatives: on the one hand, it must see to it that the image of its being able to exercise power remains a plausible one to the adversary, which means that the organization has to recruit, to mobilize, and to activate members. On the other hand, it has to see to it that the members do not prematurely and imprudently actualize their "willingness to act", because that would lower the price that is paid by the adversary for the reliable avoidance of strikes and other forms of militant action. If the organization fails to satisfy the first condition, its *survival* is threatened; if it fails to meet the second imperative, its strategic chances for *success* are undermined. Since there is no safe and permanent solution to this dilemma within the parameters of stage two, there will be strong pressure towards a structural transformation of the organization itself. This transformation can result in a return to stage one, which, however, is likely only under contextual conditions of a high level of politicization of class struggle. In this case, existing chances for success by bargaining procedures could easily be given up because alternative sources of power, for example, those provided by a broad socialist movement and a strong socialist or communist party, could be utilized. In the absence of such favorable conditions, which allow for a regression of organizational practices from stage two to stage one, the only transformation *that neither threatens the survival of the organization nor interferes with its chances for success is the opportunist resolution of the organization's dilemma*. This is reached at *stage three*. The strategy leading to stage three, or the strategy of transformation, is one that



attempts to make the organization's survival as independent as possible of the motivation, the solidarity, and the "willingness to act" of the members. How can an organization accomplish such independence? The only way of doing so is to substitute *external guarantees of survival* for those internal ones for which the union organization depends upon its members. Consequently, the union will try to gain as much external support and institutional recognition as possible. This substitution helps the organization to escape the dilemma of size versus power that we have represented in Figures 3 and 4, and thus enables it to grow bureaucratically without risking its existence and survival, which are guaranteed from the outside. Such guarantees provided by the state can win, under these circumstances, a considerable attractiveness to the union leadership.<sup>16</sup> It will try to become, with the help of its external supporters, incorporated into the formal decision-making process on economic and other policies. It will try to have as many as possible of its bargaining positions, which it had held formerly only because of the "willingness to act" of the members, institutionalized and sanctioned by legal statutes. Simultaneously, the internal structure of the organization will be transformed into one that maximizes the independence of the organization's functionaries from the collective expression of will and activity of members. This can be accomplished by the bureaucratization and professionalization of internal decision making on the one hand and by the individualization of members (emphasis on individualistic incentives to join, provision of stable career patterns for functionaries, and the restrictive exercise of control over the means of collective communication) on the other.

In order to substitute external for internal guarantees of survival, the organization has to adopt all those practices that we have described as the elements of opportunism. For instance, external support can only be won if the organization does not put into question the established political forms, if it does not raise suspicions about its long-term goals. And it will achieve relative internal independence from members only by emphasizing quantitative and individualistic, instead of qualitative, criteria in its interaction with members. Seen this way, opportunism no longer appears to be an organizational pathology that results from treason or external manipulation; it rather appears to be a perfectly rational strategy of transformation, which, in response to the above dilemma, in fact *secures the chances for success* while *escaping the threat to survival*. Empirically, it seems particularly likely that stage three, the establishment of external guarantees of survival, is reached when and where social democratic parties are strong political forces, because they are most likely to be willing to provide such institutional support and sanctions generously.

This rational solution to the dilemma, however, turns out to contain a dilemma in itself. The problem that emerges at *stage four* of our model is this: once relative independence of the organization from its members'

"willingness to act" is achieved and internal guarantees are substituted by external ones, the organization *no longer has any capacity to resist attempts to withdraw external support* and the externally provided legal and institutional status. In other words, the organization itself becomes incapable of *guaranteeing the guarantees*.<sup>17</sup> Since it would be naive to assume that such externalized supports would become eternal and irreversible once they were established, the problem arises as to how their continuity could be enforced, since now the organization is immediately exposed to a political "business cycle" that affects its status and thereby its chances for survival. This problem could be treated as negligible only if all forces which could possibly be interested in reverting what we have called external supports had been neutralized in the process through which such supports had been built up. This would have meant, of course, nothing less than a substantial reduction of the economic and political powers of private capital which must be constantly interested in exploiting conjunctural possibilities to subvert the legitimacy and legal recognition of the unions' status. Failing such neutralization of the structural power position of private capital, the organization is most likely to experience a *reversal* of the process of institutionalization that has taken place at stage three as soon as political and/or economic conditions are favorable enough to attempt an attack on those supportive institutional arrangements. This can result either in the outright withdrawal of institutional supports or, more likely, in a course of events in which the maintenance of the institutional supports becomes conditional upon the cooperative, responsible, etc., behavior of the organization. Once again, the contradiction between "survival" and "success" asserts itself; survival continues to be guaranteed only if success, i.e., certain categories of demands, is sacrificed. At this point the long-term costs of opportunism become manifest, in response to which a new phase of mobilization and activation of members becomes necessary in order to defend both the survival and the chances of success of the organization. *Stage five is reached*. This return to a type of collective action in which the members' "willingness to act" is of predominant importance is generally equivalent to stage one of our cyclical model, but differs in two respects: first, because it is likely to be based upon a faction or division within an already existing organization, and second because it tends to focus on a much broader range of political, legal, and institutional arrangements, which have played such an important and deceptive role in the prior stages.<sup>18</sup>

Although we believe that the usefulness of this model could be demonstrated by interpreting the history of various European unions as a cyclical sequence of these five stages, we cannot extensively delve into the history of labor movements here. We rather want to return to the more limited question of a sociological theory of opportunism.

The view of opportunism that is implicit in the above model differs from

the way in which opportunism has traditionally been used, and continues to be used in the labor movement, in three respects. First, whereas in the political discourse on working class organizations the term *opportunism* is regularly used in the pejorative and descriptive sense, we have used it in the analytical sense and have distinguished between three of its empirically connected dimensions. Second, while *opportunism* is normally exclusively used by its self-proclaimed opponents, we have argued that it can well be defended as the only rational and realistic solution to those tensions, dilemmas, and internal contradictions that become manifest as a consequence of stage two. If an organization wants to protect both its existence *and* its potential accomplishments, then there simply seems to be no other way than the partial sacrifice of an autonomy that has become a burden rather than an asset. We thus conceive of opportunism, not as an attitude or a structure, but as a rational *strategy* to which there is no alternative given the internal and contextual conditions we have indicated. Third, although it is perfectly legitimate from the point of view of the organization and the interest it tries to serve to adopt opportunist strategies in response to the otherwise unsolvable dilemmas, it is also a self-defeating solution and thus limited in its rationality—rather than a self-regenerating structure that is as much abhorred by the leftist critics of opportunism as it is hoped for by neo-corporatist ideologues. For as the sequence of our model goes on, opportunist practices cease to be justifiable by standards of either survival or goal attainment. The organizational security provided by the achievement of corporatist status and the corresponding independence vis-à-vis members turns out to be a contradictory accomplishment as soon as it is fully established. At this point, survival and power of the organization are threatened by the very arrangements that opportunist practices had relied upon *in order to save* the organization's survival and power.

If this is so, both the leftist criticism of and the liberal euphoria about trade union opportunism are mistaken. The former, because it refuses to appreciate the seriousness of those problems that result from the precarious coexistence of the two logics of collective action within working class organizations and therefore fails to understand the *transitory rationality of opportunism*. The latter, because it ignores the built-in reversal of the unions' opportunist practice of corporatist cooperation, and because it prematurely believes, under the impression of growing opportunist practices, in the unions' eternal approximation to the liberal model of "the interest group."

#### FOOTNOTES

\* The argument that is sketched out in this paper has greatly benefited from the extensive discussions one of the authors (Offe) has had with a group of colleagues that included Albert

Hirschman, Alessandro Pizzorno, Herb Gintis, Quentin Skinner, and Charles Sabel. Most of them, however, would not wish to be associated with some of the theoretical propositions developed here, and the "exclusive responsibility for errors" clause does therefore apply with particular strength. Another problem about which the American reader should be warned in advance is that much of the bibliographical references and empirical illustrations are dropped from this discussion, because most of them come from German contexts and are therefore linguistically and physically most likely to be inaccessible to the American reader. Among the works the authors have learned most from are the studies done by the research group on unions at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (J. Bergmann, W. Müller-Jentsch and others) and the mostly unpublished work by Wolfgang Streeck, who works at the International Institute of Management at Berlin.

1. For a similar argument, see G. Therborn (1976: Chapter 3).
2. For a recent Marxist treatment of this issue, see Braverman (1974); also the book by Kadritzke (1975) on Germany, Kocka (1979) on Germany and the United States, and the review article by Ross (1978) on France.
3. For a brilliant and influential recent discussion of this problem, see S. Marglin (1974/75); some of the structural differences between labor markets and other markets are explored in Offe and Hinrichs (1977).
4. Here, as well as in the title of this essay, we refer, of course, to the famous work by Mancur Olson, Jr. (1965). We also refer, however, to a proposition that we consider a central element of historical materialism, namely the proposition that two antagonistic logics underlie the development of capitalism—the "logic of profit" and the logic of the increasingly "social" character of the forces of production (including human labor power). For recent elaborations of this historical materialist "two logics" argument, refer to L. Basso (1975:33, 145), H. Gintis (1978), and, above all, the work of J. Habermas; see also Gorz (1967). A brief outline of the organizational patterns of collective action, which follow from these two logics and in which we are particularly interested in this essay, is to be found in Preuss (1969).
5. See, for example, Leckebusch (1966:17). Incidentally, some of these collective interests can be defined and agreed upon comparatively easily and do not require much effort of formal organization. In this sense, too, Engels has argued, that "capitalists are always organized. They need in most cases no formal union, no rules, officers, etc. Their small number, as compared with that of the workman, the fact of their forming a separate class, their constant social and commercial intercourse stand them in lieu of that. . . ." Thus, *informal association*, the importance of which tends to be very much overrated by various "elitist" approaches as they are applied to advanced capitalist societies, is a third element of the associational practices of the capitalist class, in addition to the very nature of industrial capital to *organize "dead" labor*, which plays a major role from the beginning and finds its most powerful expression in the modern corporation, and the *formal organization* of capitalist business organizations, which comes much later and only after organizing efforts of the working class have occurred. Engels continues: ". . . on the other hand, the workpeople from the very beginning can not do without a strong organization, well-defined by rules and delegating its authority to officers and committees. . . . The formerly helpless mass, divided against itself, was no longer so. To the strength given by union and common action, soon was added the force of a well filled exchequer—'resistance money' as our French brethren expressively call it." (Engels, 1936:16, 17).
6. The following argument is derived from the discussion in Luhmann (1975). 7. This argument is developed by Pizzorno (1979).
8. This is the essence of an insight that Marx first formulated in his third thesis on Feuerbach—the dialectical relationship between the two components of a revolutionary

- process. Actors have to change themselves in the process in which they wish to change their objective conditions.
9. When exclusion of members occurs in unions, it is more often for the reason that their sweeping demands and radical politico-ideological positions allegedly endanger internal unity. Ironically, and indicative of the opposite pattern of membership roles, a business firm is not in danger of becoming excluded when taking an intransigent position against labor, but, if at all, when it acts in a too conciliatory way.
  10. Compare Streeck (1972:151). In West Germany only about 30 percent of the active eligible members are organized in unions, whereas employers organizations incorporate more than 90 percent of their eligible constituency.
  11. The distortion of interest awareness which stems from these kinds of sources and which contributes to an "eclipse of class consciousness" has been at the center of the theoretical attention and political struggles of the New Left of the sixties. For a concise statement of the continuing theoretical relevance of the argument, see Jacoby (1978).
  12. Note that neither so far nor in what follows do we make any claim to be able to provide a method by which a positive definition of "objective" or "true" interest could be arrived at. In our view, such a claim is unnecessary for our present argument. It also appears to be generally impossible to sustain methodologically and, incidentally, this claim is nothing that Marxist social theory would pretend to be able to satisfy. The two much more modest and less deterministic assumptions we have been working with are (1) that the only thing that is objective about interests is not their nature and content, but their fallibility as perceived by the actor whose interest it is, and (2) that there are class-specific differences in the probability of interest-distortion, which is the point to be elaborated subsequently.
  13. The only notion of "objective" interest that underlies our line of argument is a purely formal and negative one: the interest not to experience deception or self-deception about what one's interests are.
  14. For a sociological analysis of the components and dynamics of this legislation, compare Goldthorpe (1974).
  15. In order to be fully consistent with the overall objective of strengthening "cooperative" attitudes and modes of behavior, and also to bridge the controversy between conservatives and social democrats as to whether the "irresponsible" elements are likely to be found at the top or at the bottom of union hierarchies, such regulations have to be delicately biased in favor of conservative dissidents and against militant ones. German labor courts managed to perform the trick by developing a legal doctrine saying that conservative dissidents may not be expelled—even if they compete with union candidates on nonunion lists for works council elections—because that would endanger intraunion pluralism, whereas the union has a legitimate right to expel dissidents from the left because their position is inconsistent with the principles of unionism (cf., Erd, 1978:243-246).
  16. On the basis of a case study of the development of German trade unions, Streeck (1978b:3) argues convincingly that "labor unions in developed capitalist societies are as a rule caught in a systemic organizational crisis, which tends to make them dependent for their material subsistence upon assistance from the state." This crisis, according to Streeck, is a "crisis of success—a problem resulting, as in stage two of our model, from strength and external recognition rather than failure. The willingness of members to "act—and even the willingness of potential members to enter the organization—are undermined, which leads to an increasing lack of financial resources (Streeck and Treu, 1976). For the union, there remains no other option than to see to it that the state "becomes the main underwriter of the unions' material subsistence—that is, to opt for corporatist arrangements which make the organization relatively independent from

active membership participation and may even transform such participation into "a constant threat to the organization's effectiveness" (1976:45). As a consequence, "members in many ways no longer appear to belong to the organization at all but rather seem to have become part of its environment" (1976:47).

17. As soon as support is "externalized", i.e., derived from legal and political guarantees provided by the state, it can be *withdrawn* by outside forces. The likelihood that this happens is the greater the more participation of members has been discouraged and thus the potential of resistance has been weakened. The potential of resistance is weakened, among other things, if a union engages in "nonideological" forms of communication between members and leadership and thereby reduces the chances to mobilize members on the basis of some shared conception of collective identity. Under these conditions, "the danger is that if unions appeal too narrowly to the immediate and particularistic interests of their membership, . . . they will not provide a justification which is broad enough to attract and maintain the larger political consensus upon which their existence is predicated" (Piore, 1978:6). Discussing the problem of unions and politics in the American context, Piore arrives at conclusions which are well applicable beyond the situation of United States unionism. In order to preserve the power of unionism, "what is required is, at once, an ideology, a philosophy, and a kind of scientific understanding—a vision or a paradigm of action that serves at once to define and link together in a unique combination a particular set of means and ends and to express the felt needs of the various groups and individuals involved. . . . [Unions' behavior] is predicated upon a notion of group action which contradicts and appears to violate the central tenets of individualism. The basic task of a philosophy of organized labor is to overcome these contradictions and create "space" within the individualistic selfconception of Americans for such a group" (1978:18-19).
18. It is difficult to make any empirical generalizations as to the specific circumstances under which this repolitization—stage five—takes place and the dialogical pattern of collective action reasserts itself after having been displaced by opportunist strategies. Streeck (1978b) leaves the question open whether the transformation of unions into a liberal-corporatist "service organization" (that he documents for the German case) will eventually result in the emergence of "internal ideological opposition." Bruno Trentin, the secretary of the Italian CGIL, has argued in his remarkable book on workers' democracy (1977) that this question largely depends upon alliances between unions and political parties, overlapping membership between the two, and the possibility of nonantagonistic internal conflict within unions which might result in a willingness to forego economic gains for increases of political power. But the opposite may also be true in a different (i.e., North West-European) context, namely the growing estrangement between social democratic political parties on the one hand and unions on the other leading to the expectation that unions must compensate for failures and frustrations that workers have experienced with "their" traditional political parties.

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