

American Behavioral Scientist

<http://abs.sagepub.com>

An Organizational Conflict Theory of Revolution

William H. Overholt

American Behavioral Scientist 1977; 20; 493

DOI: 10.1177/000276427702000404

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://abs.sagepub.com>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *American Behavioral Scientist* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://abs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://abs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/20/4/493>

An Organizational Conflict Theory of Revolution

WILLIAM H. OVERHOLT
Hudson Institute

A **revolution occurs** when a domestic insurgent group or groups displace the government of a society by means which are illegitimate according to the values of the existing regime, and when fundamental political institutions are destroyed or transformed and fundamental values of the system are dramatically changed. An abortive revolution occurs when a domestic group attempts to carry out a revolution without a complete success. Fundamental political institutions are those without which a regime would be illegitimate in terms of its own values. For instance, competitive elections are fundamental political institutions in the United States because they implement the value of political equality. Fundamental values are those which serve as basic legitimating principles for political systems. The reference to illegitimacy of means in the eyes of the old regime eliminates the logical possibility that the changes in groups, values, and

Author's Note: *The author is grateful for the support of Columbia University's Research Institute on International Change, without whose assistance this article could not have been completed. This paper represents the views of its author. No opinions, statements of fact, or conclusions contained in this paper can properly be attributed to the Hudson Institute, its staff, or its contracting agencies, or to Columbia.*

AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST, Vol. 20 No. 4, March/April 1977
© 1977 Sage Publications, Inc.

institutions would result from the normal and legitimate processes of the system, such as from elections in a democracy; such a situation does not conform to most intuitive conceptions of revolution.

This definition includes as revolutions the French, Russian, Nazi, Meiji, Chinese (1911-1949), Cuban, and Mexican revolutions, as well as successful revitalization movements, and the transformation which occurred in China from the disintegration of the later Han dynasty to the stabilization of the T'ang dynasty. It excludes simple coups, imperial conquest, wars of independence, civil wars which are mere struggles for power, transformations of the international system, political changes which do not overthrow the central government, and non-political changes (though the transformations of institutions and values during a revolution virtually always coincide with major socioeconomic transformations).

REVOLUTION AS CONFLICT AMONG ORGANIZATIONS

THE NATURE OF REVOLUTION

Revolutions are, above all, unlimited struggles between political organizations. An insurgent organization battles with the government organization and with other insurgent organizations for control of the society. Organization has been neglected until recently by theorists in favor of the analyses of sources of discontent, economic trends, ideology, military strategy, and general disharmony (for a survey, see Overholt, 1977). All of these are important, but the creation, maintenance, and destruction of political organizations is the central theme of revolution and the central preoccupation of revolutionaries. Discontent without organization is a mere school of guppies in an Establishment sea, and brilliant military strategy not backed by a disciplined organization is just so many squirts of strategic ink.

An *organizational conflict perspective* on revolution integrates a variety of previous, partially contradictory perspectives. A revolutionary (or governmental) conflict organization in a large and complex society will have a Great Man at the top, surrounded by a Conspiratorial Elite, drawing resources from discontented Masses, and integrated by Ideas and by a division of labor designed to maximize Harmony. A logic of intense organizational struggle determines the participants, causes, precipitants, strategies, sequences, and many of the consequences of revolution. Each side in the struggle must acquire organizational resources, use them appropriately to build an organization, then acquire strategic resources, and use those to subdue opponents (see Figure 1).

THE PARTICIPANTS IN REVOLUTION

A revolutionary party in a large and complex society must eventually face organized, relatively skillful opposition with substantial conflict resources. It must therefore be able to cope with heavy decision loads and high need for coordination. It needs an "ability to adapt itself immediately to the most diverse and rapidly changing conditions of struggle" (Lenin, 1943: 162). These requirements imply emphasis on a small central organization with extremely concentrated organizational resources. Such an organization also maximizes its ability to remain secret and its ability to manipulate other organizations (Lenin, 1943: 116-117). The successful revolutionary organization requires extremely high internal cohesion, access to manipulable mass organizations, and good strategic resources and leadership.



Figure 1: The Basic Paradigm of Political Organization

The organizational requirements of revolution imply heavy emphasis on acquisition of those resources necessary to organization: *visible and salient goals* (hereafter "motivational resources"), *available time, communications, organizational skills, and autonomy* (Overholt, 1974; 1972: ch. 2). Ideological unity is imperative. Purging, or splitting away from, dissident factions becomes preferable to acceptance of weakened discipline. Discussion of varied viewpoints remains acceptable only up to a point, and any sign of *organized* factions within the larger party becomes intolerable. Training of leadership, construction of communications networks, and institutionalization of sources of income to ensure the continuous availability of members become tasks of the highest priority. Discipline is stressed by emphasizing subordination of the individual to the organization, by involving as many aspects of the member's life in the organization as possible, by compromising the members so that they lose their autonomy with respect to nonparty activities, and by emphasizing the viciousness of the enemy. Revolutionary groups which cannot or will not amass sufficient organizational resources and employ appropriate organizational strategies are doomed to failure against all but the most helpless insurgent or government opponent.

Some social groups are disqualified from playing sustained roles in revolutions because of their lack of resources. A lumpenproletariat typically lacks organizational skills, leadership, communications, and common purpose. Peasants who live in thinly populated areas with poor communications, and who lack traditions of cooperative organization, are also often disqualified. But other peasants, such as Chinese rice growers, may be packed into dense villages, aware of common problems, with intricate communications nets and a complex network of formal organizations which train leaders and followers in organizational skills (Overholt, 1973). Revolutionary elite nuclei frequently move from one social group to another, seeking appropriate organizational resources, particularly where they face a strong government. Thus, the Chinese Communists

initially tried urban workers, then various combinations of rural groups, until they got the proper resources. The competitive struggle for organizational resources mobilizes all sectors of society (Huntington, 1968: ch. 5).

Failure to utilize adequate strategies of organization may also render groups impotent in revolution. Anarchists, and many contemporary student groups, whose ideology is antiorganizational, can contribute to social disorder but can never defeat an organized government or insurgent competitor. "Since the acquisition of power requires the development of hierarchy and discipline at some point, an egalitarian movement starts out at an initial disadvantage in relation to its competitors. Sooner or later, if it is to be effective, it must compromise with its initial principles" (Moore, 1965: 14). The Philippine Huks failed for lack of revolutionary organizational strategy as well as for lack of resources; by emphasizing size rather than discipline, and social harmony rather than struggle, they enfeebled themselves (Overholt, 1973). Democratic parties, which usually are loosely organized, are difficult to discipline and usually fall by the wayside in revolutionary struggle.

The importance of organization in revolution does not imply that all revolutions display highly disciplined organizations. Spontaneous disintegration of the government and weakness of potential opponents can provide an opportunity for an insurgent group that is only moderately organized. The Mexican revolution saw the rise of disciplined organizations only in its later phases, and the Cuban revolution was more noteworthy for the organizational weakness of the government and other potential insurgents than for the organizational genius of Castro's group. Indeed, "western" revolutions (Huntington, 1968) are characterized primarily by the weakness of the government rather than by the initial strength of the insurgents. In addition, organizational strategies improve over time, and organizational resources multiply with economic development, so modern revolutions display greater perfection of organization than most earlier revolutions. Nonetheless, the more highly

organized party has an advantage which is usually decisive, and there are broad strategies and structures of organization which change only gradually: the conflict parties of medieval cities reminded Weber (1946: 88) of the Bolsheviks.

Superficially contradicting the need for a small, highly coordinated revolutionary elite is the obvious need of both government and insurgency for control over broader population groups. Control over such groups is both the goal of, and a crucial means for, revolution. The contradiction is only apparent, although coordination of additional people requires expenditure of resources. By serving as a reservoir of personnel and funds, mass groups supply organizational resources necessary to the maintenance of the elite (Lenin, 1943: 116). By providing intelligence and (limited) action in response to manipulation by the elite, they supply crucial strategic resources. Coordination of large groups requires precisely the disciplined, powerful elite that is also necessary for strategic reasons. Expenditure of resources is usually minimized because the cooperation of entire groups can often be obtained merely by capturing or coopting their leadership.

Not just any masses will do. Great leverage over a group can be obtained by capturing the leadership of a mass group only if the mass group is itself organized (Selznick, 1952: 81). The insurgent and the government must therefore seek organized hierarchical groups and also seek to increase their organization and degree of hierarchy.

Manipulation of a mass group requires access to that group; put another way, it requires motivational resources (visibility and salience of issues) as well as technical resources. The combination of elite and mass groups can be viewed as a single group whose ability to organize can be evaluated. Where leaders of the mass group perceive a common identity or common goals, there are no difficulties so long as the mass group members feel no strong antipathy to the revolutionary elite or remain unaware of the manipulation. Where members of the revolutionary elite are also members of the mass group, and

where they possess a minimal level of legitimacy, they can often seize the leadership of the mass group simply by being the most active and highly organized faction within the group. Where the leadership positions cannot be directly captured, the mass group can often be covertly manipulated into active cooperation or friendly passivity through logrolling or (sometimes specious) promises of future support. "Friendly passivity may sometimes decide the outcome of the battle" (Lenin, 1943: 121). Any organized group which cannot be manipulated into active support or friendly passivity constitutes a potentially dangerous resource for an opponent; frequently such groups can be hobbled by depriving them of one or more organizational resources through disrupted communications, assassinated leadership, liquidated financial bases, and induced factionalism.

IDEOLOGY AND ORGANIZATION

"Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement" (Lenin, 1943: 28). Every large organization requires some definition of its basic purposes and activities (Schurmann, 1966: 18-19n.).

The more esoteric the activities of the organization, the less it can rely on the general education provided by the community, the greater the need for internal "orientation." Bolshevism's radical split from the community, and the need to ensure an extraordinary degree of reliability, greatly increase its dependence on an official doctrine. [Selznick, 1952: 36]

Ideology is a crucial source of organizational resources and strategies, and of conflict resources and strategies, and is thus a crucial determinant of the likelihood and outcome of revolutionary struggle.

Ideology provides a potentially revolutionary group with organizational resources. An appropriate ideology makes putative sources of discontent more visible and salient. By explaining the social or political sources of discontent, ideology

transforms individual problems into group problems; an aggregate whose problems have common social or political roots is provided with bases of identity and solidarity (Apter, 1967: 46). To the extent that an ideology displaces earlier beliefs, it may increase the autonomy of an aggregate by disintegrating old bases of identity and solidarity and obligation. It also increases autonomy by providing assurance that the revolution cannot fail, because God or history assures success (Johnson, 1966: 84-85; Hoffer, 1963: ch. 1; Toch, 1965: 11). Ideology provides an aggregate with common categories of thought and a common language (Schurmann, 1966: 58ff.) and thereby increases the aggregate's communications capabilities. It increases coordination skills by providing principles with which decisions and behavior must be consistent. The need to understand ideology justifies constant education. This education in turn promotes frequent assembling of the membership, institutionalized lines of communication, and standardized interaction skills; it tends to preempt the availability of members and thus to isolate them from potentially competing activities.

Ideology provides organizational strategies and structural arrangements, as exemplified by Lenin's polemics on the need for professional revolutionaries and the organizing role of a newspaper (Lenin, 1943: ch. 5). It typically contains rules for allocating authority within the organization, designates legitimate interpreters of the ideology, and delimits membership in the group. The need for interpretation of the ideology justifies a leadership role for a charismatic leader and for an intellectual elite which is otherwise alien to the discontented masses (Bittner, 1963: 937). Different facets of ideology provide organizational leaders with tools for mobilizing and manipulating support from several crucial groups. In Schurmann's (1966: 73) terms, pure ideology, which states values, can be used to mobilize mass support; practical ideology, which states norms of behavior, can be used to mobilize support from "the line component of the middle tier of organization"; and nonideolog-

ical professional values can be used to mobilize professional staff. Ideology provides rules for conflict and debate within the organization; for instance, Leninism prescribes self-criticism and mutual criticism but proscribes attacks on the party, and encourages policy discussions but prohibits organized factionalism. The need for doctrinal purity (a need derived from the training of the intellectuals and the characteristic anomie of sections of the masses) makes ideology into a (two-edged) tool which leaders can use against potential or actual opponents by accusing them of heresy (Bittner, 1963).

Ideology provides conflict resources. By providing a framework for the analysis of strategic situations, it serves as a multiplier of strategic intelligence. In this capacity, as in others, it can of course deceive as well as enlighten, but an ideology need not be scientifically accurate in order to provide useful analyses. Marxism, despite its severe analytic defects, has frequently proved to be a powerful tool in the hands of communist revolutionaries, and Maoism has provided the Chinese with both a useful sociomilitary perspective and a modern outlook that provides advantages against more traditional opponents. Ideology coordinates strategic decisions by providing strategic principles with which those decisions must be consistent. It increases the range of the strategic options by interpreting the member's actions as the working of fate and thereby relieving him of personal responsibility (Bittner, 1963: 938).

Ideology provides conflict strategies, such as the work of Mao on guerrilla warfare or Sorel on the general strike, and it provides heuristic devices for invention of such strategies, such as the concepts of contradictions or class struggle or yin and yang. It identifies probable enemies and friends and, by tracing multiple forms of discontent to a single source, identifies the key targets of revolutionary action. It justifies ties between mass groups (e.g., workers and peasants) and ties between elites and mass groups (e.g., workers or peasants and intellectuals), and it identifies the government as the source, or an ally of the

source, of mass discontent. Frequently it defines a class of precipitants, such as severe economic crises, which are to serve as signals for intensification of revolutionary conflict.

THE CAUSES OF REVOLUTION

The causes of revolution are any events or processes which cast up an insurgent group or coalition which is stronger than the government or which weaken the government until it is weaker than some insurgent group or coalition. The decisive strengthening or weakening can come in the form of improved or worsened organizational resources, organizational strategies, conflict strategies, or some combination of these.

In the theoretical literature on revolution, there is a strong emphasis on the strength of the insurgents or the disintegration of the society. But at least equal emphasis should be placed on the organizational disintegration of the government. The decline of the central government is the central feature of the French, Cuban, Mexican, Later Han, 1911 Chinese, and many lesser revolutions (for instance, see Gillis, 1970). The decline of the center may result from a decline in organizational resources. The population may grow discontented and provide fewer taxes, fewer leaders, less obedience, and a weaker communications network than previously. Prerevolutionary regimes frequently experience fiscal crises and partial desertion of their intellectual leadership. A decline in subsidization by a foreign power may produce organizational disintegration in a dependent regime like Batista's Cuba.

Inadequate organizational strategies can also fatally weaken the government. The French and 1911 Chinese revolutions were immediately preceded by disruptive reforms which paralyzed some governmental operations. Prerevolutionary governments have been seriously weakened by gradual devolution of power to a landed gentry (e.g., China), by giving key positions to incompetents, and by alienation of the intelligentsia.

Fatal weakness can also result from deterioration in conflict

resources or from poor conflict strategies. The most important military-strategic resources are military power, strategic geographic position, and intelligence (Leites and Wolf, 1970: 147). Relative military power in the sense of deployable firepower is sensitive to the economic position of the government, which is in turn affected by the extent to which the population supports the government, and to foreign supplies. Intelligence, while partially susceptible to outside influence, is primarily a function of the extent to which the government can use the population as a communications net. Given excellent intelligence, a government can destroy a domestic insurgency before it becomes a serious threat. But a government whose population will not supply information because of discontent or fear, or whose officials lost or failed to seek access to popular knowledge of potential or actual opponents, has lost a crucial battle. Finally, the government which employs inadequate strategies may lose even if its forces are superior in firepower. Chiang Kai-shek's enormous armies constantly humiliated by Mao's tiny forces and Diem pitifully preparing conventional armies to fight the Vietcong guerrillas are the archetypes of this form of defeat.

The process of building a strong and successful revolutionary organization is almost a mirror image of the process of weakening a governmental organization. New conflict resources (such as external military aid) may tip the balance between a government and a highly organized committed insurgency. A new conflict strategy (such as heavier reliance on guerrilla warfare) may change the balance of forces. Practitioners of revolution know how important strategy and strategic resources are, but theorists of the disharmony, idealist, and mass uprising variety typically neglect them. Such neglect appears to result in part from the fact that most of the famous and well-studied revolutions began with organizational collapse of the government prior to powerful military challenge from insurgents. The Chinese revolution was a partial exception to this tendency of great revolutions to begin with governmental collapse, and

increasing professionalization of revolutionaries—together with revolutionaries' access to massive external aid—may provide more examples in the future of revolutions against governments which are not organizationally helpless. The outcomes of such revolutions will depend to a greater extent on strategic factors, and analysis of them will require strategic analysis just as analysis of the 1949 Chinese revolution requires study of Mao's guerrilla strategy.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which greater stress on the building of an insurgent organization than on strategic factors is justified. Strategic factors have greatly reduced significance so long as there are gross disparities in the organizational capabilities of the opponents; guns are worthless, or even worse than worthless, in the absence of a highly organized army to wield them, but a powerful organization can be formidable even in the absence of the military varieties of strategic resources. It can seek to deny organizational and conflict resources to the government as well as penetrate and sabotage governmental organization. We therefore focus on the conditions which may lead to creation of a powerful insurgent organization.

Given a discontented group which has accepted a revolutionary ideology and which possesses an adequate strategy of organization, the creation of a powerful revolutionary organization may be a consequence of access to additional organizational resources. Economic growth is an obvious source of such additional resources, for economic growth brings with it new communications and autonomy, increased propinquity as a result of urbanization and population growth, increased availability for many groups as a consequence of rising income, and so forth. In addition to the absolute rise in resources, individuals with rising incomes may, without changing their political attitudes, be willing to provide a higher proportion of their personal resources to political groups (Leites and Wolf, 1970: 147). These augmented technical resources become available to a variety of groups in the society, usually including the government, and their use by one group does not necessarily

deny their use by another group. However, some established governments may be unable to utilize or even recognize increments of resources as effectively as newly organizing groups. For instance, a traditional monarchy cannot tap the resources of the peasants, because it would be overthrown by the aristocracy before it could utilize those resources. For this reason, among others, revolutions frequently, but not invariably, occur in modernizing societies experiencing long-term economic growth (Brinton, 1965; Davies, 1962; Taylor, 1954; AlRoy, 1967).

Revolution due to acquisition of new resources can also result from processes other than economic or social modernization. An outstanding example is the acquisition by the Chinese Communists of greatly increased autonomy when the Japanese pushed Chiang Kai-shek's troops out of Northern China, thus preventing him from destroying Communist organizations and making village elders more alarmed by Japanese terror than by Communist organizing (Schurmann, 1966: xli).

In addition to augmenting the technical resources for organization, social and economic modernization frequently augment the visibility and salience of potential sources of discontent. Modernization produces expectations that cannot always be satisfied (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1968, 1970), produces disorienting mobility both upward and downward (Lewis, 1963; Hollingshead et al., 1954), mobilizes people out of old beliefs and norms before it provides them with new ones (Olson, 1963; Deutsch, 1968), and produces groups of people who cannot tolerate their own identities and seek new identities through violence (Marx, n.d.: 708-709; Hoffer, 1963: 13, 42, 62; Kornhauser, 1959: 108-109; Arendt, 1968: 172-175; Fromm, 1967: 45). Revolutionaries often come from areas or groups whose conditions are improving (Tocqueville, 1955: 175-177; Pye, 1956: 130ff.; AlRoy, 1967: 419) and at least sometimes tend to be people who assume that they can do better in life than their parents (Pye, 1956). Discontent may also spread among groups subjected to crime or guerrillas because of the response of other groups to social change.

Construction of a powerful revolutionary organization may be caused by a revolutionary group's acquisition of a new organizational strategy which more efficiently employs existing organizational resources. Modernization frequently provides new organizational forms for emulation by discontented groups, and ideologies like Leninism provide strategies of mobilization that are especially tailored for revolutionary purposes. Of course, the erroneous emulation of an inapplicable imported strategy can also destroy a revolutionary movement, as was partly the case with the Philippine Hukbalahaps' emulation of Maoist strategy (Overholt, 1973).

**STRATEGIES OF REVOLUTION 1:
THE ADOPTION OF REVOLUTIONARY GOALS**

Up to this point we have assumed the revolutionary character of the organization. Revolutionary organizations are not homogeneous, and, thus, the reasons for accepting revolutionary goals are not homogeneous. Adoption of revolutionary goals must be analyzed as an organizational phenomenon in which leaders choose or reject revolutionary goals, and in which various groups of followers demand, or reject, or passively acquiesce in such goals. Studies of the conditions under which group leaders incline to revolution fall into two broad categories, those which emphasize rational choice and those which emphasize the personalities of the leaders themselves.

Leaders may choose revolutionary goals when they have exhausted the alternatives, when they become convinced that existing institutions are completely ineffective or inconsistent with prevailing values, when the government is dangerous or hostile or allied to a dangerous enemy, or when revolution has become a viable choice because of governmental weakness or disintegration. One cannot maintain that revolutionary goals are chosen *only* when all alternatives have been exhausted, because history contains numerous examples of groups and group leaders which have adopted revolutionary goals long before the

alternatives have been exhausted. Nevertheless, most revolutions do display a gradual groping around among nonrevolutionary alternatives and a gradual expansion of support for groups which pursue revolutionary goals as nonrevolutionary methods fail to alleviate dissatisfaction. So long as these latter rational-choice hypotheses are not stated too strongly, they do identify processes that occur in almost every revolution.

The other rational choice hypotheses also represent processes that can be observed in most revolutionary upheavals. When the government directly attacks labor or peasant organizations or invades Buddhist temples, it converts some of the leaders of those groups to revolutionary goals. When the French or Chinese government proves unable to stem foreign invasion, or the Cuban (Batista) government loses crucial foreign support, then political opponents naturally come to see revolutionary overthrow of the government as a viable alternative. In short, all of the rational-choice explanations of political leaders' adoption of revolutionary ideology possess great explanatory power in particular situations but are false in their strongest and most exclusive forms.

Studies of the personalities of revolutionary leaders can provide instructive insights on particular points, but as explanations of organizations' adoption of revolutionary goals they have rather narrow inherent limits. The leadership of an organization may become revolutionary through organizational rejection of a nonrevolutionary leadership, or through conversion of previously nonrevolutionary leaders to revolutionary purposes, or through acquisition by previously revolutionary organizations of new membership or support. So even if studies of revolutionary personalities are incisive and compelling, the crucial variables are elsewhere.

As it happens, studies of top leaders' personalities provide few useful generalizations (Wolfenstein, 1965, 1967). First, these creative figures who have not worked out personally satisfactory norms for relationships with superiors seem rather unlike many of their highly disciplined bureaucratic followers,

and this confirms the intuition that different levels of revolutionary organizations may be responding to rather different motivations and stimuli. Second, and somewhat paradoxically, it may be reasonable to characterize these leaders' inner conflicts over authority as a particular kind of anomie focused on authority relations and, thereby, to relate such conflicts to the generalized anomie which several writers have seen as a primary characteristic of mass supporters of revolution. Third, periods of socially disruptive change may produce more sons who cannot work out satisfactory relationships with their fathers or (crucially) with other social authority figures, and periods of political disruption may provide more opportunities for the resulting discontent to focus upon politics. So the rate at which such leaders appear, and the opportunities they obtain to exercise their personalities and talents, may be determined in part by social and political conditions. Such generalizations explain little about political organizations' choice of revolutionary goals.

Exploration of the forms of mass discontent which lead to mass acceptance of revolutionary leaders and of revolutionary ideology has produced three basic overlapping hypotheses: *frustration, anomie, and intolerable personal identities*. Frustration results from failure to attain expectations, and such failure can result either from conditions which raise expectations without raising attainments or from conditions which reduce attainments without reducing expectations. Anomie refers to a variety of conditions: weakness of norms, conflict among norms, and ignorance of norms. The three basic hypotheses seem complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Such hypotheses link general social conditions with individual discontent and infuse with measurable content such metaphors as strain and incongruence between values and environment. But the key to many modern revolutions is the ability of an insurgency to offer concrete benefits superior to those of the old regime.

A crucial factor in the adoption of a revolutionary ideology is the accessibility of such an ideology. Revolutionaries worry a

great deal about mass "consciousness," and practical revolutionaries universally acknowledge that it does not arise spontaneously. Lenin (1943: 40) maintained that the labor movement could never work out an independent ideology for itself, and cites Kautsky's argument that socialism arises from bourgeois science rather than from class struggle. Mao (1954: 99) complained that "Wherever the Red Army goes, it finds the masses cold and reserved; only after propaganda and agitation do they slowly rouse themselves."

Not all idea systems which satisfy the psychological requirements are revolutionary ideologies. A quietist religious movement may provide a Sermon on the Mount with the requisite supreme principle and deduced norms, together with assurance of salvation and rebirth through repentance (violence turned inward against the self) and participation in a historic enterprise. Accessibility seems to determine whether the accepted idea systems will be revolutionary ideologies or religions or something else. Put bluntly, the adopted idea system may be the one which arrives on the scene first, provided that it meets certain minimum requirements. What are those requirements?

The most promising line of analysis notes that the legitimacy of a political elite and of a political system derive from a set of values and from the operation of institutions which are held to implement those values. Blatant infringement of those old values, or blatant misuse or bypassing or malfunctioning of those institutions, could channel discontent toward hatred of the regime and toward a revolutionary ideology if one is accessible. For those who are insufficiently discontented to organize actively against the regime, such infringement could cause withdrawal of support for the regime and thereby weaken the government. Poor operation of the existing institutions may also cast doubt upon the values and social myth which support the existing regime and render people susceptible to a new ideology. Revolt against infringement of old values occurs in many revolutions. Many groups revolt, not to establish a new utopian order, but to obtain what are thought to be old rights. In the French revolution, nobles sought to regain old rights and

were counterattacked by peasants who in turn thought their old rights were being threatened. The Chinese dynasties, whose legitimacy was based in part on the personal virtue of the emperor, often ended with revolt against a corrupt emperor.

Acceptance of revolutionary goals by an organization does not require revolutionary motivation from all members of the organization. As the organization gains strength it will attract expedient seekers of power. Asian communism attracts intellectuals because communism grants great power to intellectuals (Benda, 1966); all great ideologies require more intellectual interpreters than do routinized old regimes. Presumably the proportion of such supporters grows exponentially with the strength of the organization relative to its opponents, and by definition there is a great increase in the proportion of such supporters if institutionalization occurs after opponents have been defeated.

Support may also come from the terrorized or the passive. In a relatively unpoliticized state where the government does not penetrate far into the countryside, passive cooperation may provide enormous reservoirs of support to almost any political group which seems to tap them and has enough power to impress the villagers. In the Nazi revolution most bureaucrats perceived their role as entirely instrumental and were willing to work for whatever politicians gained power (Riezler, 1943). Such attitudes make the government an object to be captured rather than an active force defending itself. Neutrality is as worthy of study as commitment.

STRATEGIES OF REVOLUTION II: THE PRECIPITANTS OF REVOLUTION

One of the few points of consensus in the literature on revolution is the distinction between—on one hand—the underlying tension, struggle, strain, or source of discontent which constitutes the basic social or political conflict and—on the other hand—the unpredictable event which ignites active revolutionary conflict. It is generally believed that precipitants cannot

be analyzed (Eckstein, 1965: 140ff.), but such a view is erroneous. We know, for instance, that a queen's saying "Let them eat cake" can heighten revolutionary passions, but that a peasant saying "Pass the salt" will not. How do we know?

A precipitant provokes a decision by a group to pursue actively and explicitly the destruction of the government (Abel, 1941). Now the decisions which groups make are determined by the attitudes of the members and by the process by which the group aggregates individual attitudes into a single collective attitude. The decision process need not be formal. In one of Le Bon's crowds, only the attitudes of the single leader count; revolutionary violence will begin if he demands it. In a Leninist Party the decision may be made by a small Politburo, based on clearly defined expectations—for instance, of economic crisis. In a democratic group, the majority view becomes the decision. When two angry mobs face each other, a single rock thrown by any man may initiate revolutionary violence. In any concrete case we can identify the groups which have the ability and desire to initiate a revolution, and in principle we can discover the attitudes of the members and the process by which those attitudes are aggregated into a decision. Sometimes such knowledge may even make possible avoidance of precipitants till a crisis is past—as when political leaders strive to avoid creating martyrs.

STRATEGIES OF REVOLUTION III: THE CONDUCT OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE

Revolutionary struggle between government and insurgent or insurgents is conducted in accordance with some explicit or implicit conflict strategies. Governmental and insurgent strategies can most usefully be analyzed along lines suggested by the basic paradigm of political organization. The opponents attack one another's organizational resources, organizational strategy, conflict resources, conflict strategy, or some combination of these. The choice of a particular strategy is dictated by the strategic knowledge of the leaders of each side and by the

adequacy and vulnerability of opponents' resources and strategies.

The ultimate goal of the insurgent is to destroy or capture the organizational resources of the government. To the extent the insurgency fails to attain this goal, the revolution is abortive. The government's goals need not be so all-encompassing. To the extent that the government can protect its own organizational resources and organizational strategy, it wins, even if the insurgent organization remains intact and active.

Within the general category of strategies focused upon the opponents' organizational resources, one can classify strategies according to the particular organizational resource or set of resources under attack. Certain strategies attempt to create a general strain on all of the opponent's resources. For instance, an insurgency may stimulate massive civil disobedience in widely dispersed locations and may attempt to disrupt tax collection; such a strategy maximizes the government's need for resources while minimizing its inflow of resources. Likewise, a government may engage in continuous pursuit of guerrillas in order to impose maximum demands on guerrilla resources and to prevent institutionalization of the insurgent's lines of communication.

Other strategies focus on depriving government or insurgency of specific resources which may be particularly scarce or particularly vulnerable. To deprive a government of its motivational resources, an insurgency may employ propaganda and disruptive tactics to create a sense of demoralization; the demoralization could consist of weariness, or a sense of inevitable loss, or a sense of illegitimacy. The government may respond by attempting to deprive the insurgency of motivational resources through reforms.

Other strategies within the broad category of those focused on organizational resources attempt to deprive the opponent of key technical resources. In societies where political leadership is scarce; an insurgency may follow the example of the Viet Cong in attempting to disrupt government organization by systematic assassination of provincial leadership. The government may

follow the Philippine and Taiwan strategies of massive cooptation of potential insurgent leaders into government. Strategies oriented toward depriving an opponent of communications include technological blockage of radio communications, prohibitions on meetings of groups which might otherwise organize, and various techniques for overloading a group's communications channels. Strategies focused on depriving the opponent of availability include cutting off food, jailing potential opponents, massive movement of populations away from the insurgents (as was accomplished through urbanization in Vietnam), and even genocide. Finally, strategies focused on deprivation of autonomy include continuous surveillance and threats of reprisal against individuals or families or villages. Once again, the decision to focus on depriving the opponent of a particular resource is based on calculations of scarcity and vulnerability.

Strategies focused on the organizational structure of the opponent typically attempt to fragment the opponent's organization or to immobilize his decision-making or his implementation of decisions. The lines of fragmentation can be religious, political, economic, social, racial, or geographic. Immobilization can be accomplished by overloading the adversary's decision-making processes, by inducing factionalism or structural contradictions, or by involving the government in policy contradictions. The decision process can be overloaded either by making those processes themselves excessively complex and unwieldy (as is the case with some coalition governments) or by overloading the court system or the legislature with a burden of decisions. A government which succeeds in getting a revolutionary party to focus on winning democratic elections and thereby spreading itself too thin may hobble its adversary through structural contradictions. An insurgency which forces landlord-based government to appeal for peasant support may hobble a government through structural or policy contradictions.

Strategies focused on conflict resources emphasize obtaining funds, weapons, geographic position, intelligence, and political legitimacy, and denying the same resources to the adversary.

Both government and insurgent seek foreign sources of supply, improved tax based, self-manufacture of weaponry, diplomatic recognition, and various kinds of intelligence apparatus, and seek to prevent the opponent from obtaining these. Where the opponent cannot be denied access to needed resources it is often possible to hamper his use of them or to turn his access to resources against him. The opponent's currency may be inflated by counterfeiting, his supplies of weaponry polluted by booby-trapping, his information rendered useless by providing false information to confuse him. Strategies for denying conflict resources to the opponent range from the classic military tactic of cutting the adversary's lines of supply to the more sophisticated technique of destroying a political party so that the government will lack the intelligence provided by political lines of communication with peripheral villages.

A final category of conflict strategies consists of those which attempt to render the opponent's conflict strategy and potential strategies harmless without necessarily denying him access to conflict or organizational resources or attempting to disrupt his organizational structure. The simplest kinds of such strategies simply attempt to render the opponent's strategy impotent or self-defeating through the use of *agents provocateurs* or through infiltrating agents who pervert the opponent's strategy by providing misleading advice or by directly making self-defeating strategic decisions. A second set of such strategies is typified by various applications of game theory and deterrent theory which seek to channel the use of the opponent's conflict resources in ways that sterilize them. Insurgent military forces may lure government forces far from the areas of most significant political activity. The government may permit an insurgent group to develop lucrative economic activities which are not threatened so long as the insurgent behaves within certain bounds. The use of this kind of strategy tends to be tactical when employed by insurgents because the insurgent must always keep in mind the eventual goal of destroying or capturing the government's organizational resources. However,

the domestication of an insurgent through this kind of strategy may sometimes serve well as an ultimate government strategy.

SEQUENCES OF REVOLUTION

Explanations of sequences of revolution have been ad hoc and largely unrelated to broader theoretical analysis of revolution and other phenomena. In fact, each possible sequence reflects the intersection at different points of two distinct sequences: the construction of a revolutionary organization and the decline of a governmental organization. Each of these two sequences displays some variation. But there are sufficient regularities to account for the observed historical sequences.

The building of a successful revolutionary organization involves the rise of individual discontent resulting from some social or political cause, recognition by the discontented that their discontent arises from common sources (visibility), organization of the discontented, alliance between elite and mass groups, politicization of the discontent, adoption of a revolutionary ideology, struggle with the government or other insurgents or both for control of resources, military conflict, and institutionalization of the revolution. Despite minor variations, the sequence has an overall integrity.

The disintegration of the government is typically preceded by social conflict, desertion of intellectual leadership, factionalism, incompetence, low morale, fiscal crisis, and eventual inability to employ military force effectively. The disintegration of the government can occur at any point in the sequence of revolutionary organization-building. Where it occurs in that sequence determines the overall sequence of the revolution.

When the governmental disintegration reaches an advanced stage prior to the rise of a powerful revolutionary organization, or prior to the ascendancy of one or two major revolutionary organizations over their rivals, the dispatch of the government by a relatively puny and undisciplined organization will be followed by a frantic free-for-all of organization-building and military conflict designed to eliminate opponents. Gradually the

weaker rivals will be eliminated and their mass bases absorbed or terrorized into inactivity until one centralized, ideological, disciplined organization becomes victorious. Typically the least radical insurgents reach for formal levers of power, while the most radical have sedulously cultivated their organizational roots in Jacobin clubs and Soviets and the like. Since the formal levers of power have been disconnected, the radicals obtain an organizational advantage which is augmented by their typically more comprehensive ideology and greater ruthlessness. This is the classic movement from moderates to radicals observed by historians of "western revolutions." In a relatively large society with a relatively low level of organizational resources, this process may take decades, as in Mexico and as in the aftermath of the disintegration of some of the Chinese dynasties. Dispersion of the organizational nuclei of potential opponents and a few well-publicized incidents of terror end the period of conflict among insurgents. The successful revolutionary organization then tries to remodel society along lines suggested by its ideology, but quickly discovers that this involves coordinating an extremely large and heterogeneous group of people with limited resources. Repeated attempts to create a utopia merely weaken the victorious organization by constricting its social base. Eventually, either some equilibrium is reached between revolutionary purpose and revolutionary resources or the new government falls (as in Hsin China) or policy oscillates between upheaval and consolidation (as in China under Mao).

Fundamentally different is the situation where the old regime remains strong at the center but, because of its premodern character, does not possess firm control over all of its territory. In such situations, revolutionary groups may take root in the areas of military and authority vacuum. Insurgents near the center are destroyed by the strong central government. Revolutionary organizations at the periphery struggle with one another until one gains ascendancy. Destruction of moderates by radicals occurs *before* the government falls. Thus, a relatively strong government faces off against a strong insurgent, as was the case in pre-1949 China. If the areas of authority vacuum are

low in organizational resources or strategically vulnerable, and if the government can protect its resource base, the insurgent will be decimated (repeatedly if necessary) before he becomes a serious threat, regardless of the level of discontent. Such was the fate of the Chinese Communists prior to the Japanese invasion. If, on the other hand, the areas of vacuum are strategically invulnerable and high in organizational resources (as was northeast China after the Japanese invasion), the revolutionary organization may become a formidable force prior to decisive confrontation with the government. In either case, the insurgents will attempt to institutionalize their own resource base and to reduce the organizational resources available to the government. In insurgent-controlled areas, therefore, the insurgents will terrorize nuclei of resistant out of existence, obtain the cooperation of the population through terror and rewards, and establish an institutionalized insurgent government. In areas controlled by the old government, the insurgents will seek to destroy the government's resource base through assassinating the leadership (elite terror), destroying lines of communication, propagandizing vulnerable sections of the government elite, and terrorizing much of the general populace. This latter (mass) terror seeks to prove that the government is incapable of protecting the population and therefore undeserving of popular support. If the insurgent is successful, the government's political and military organizations will gradually become weaker until they fail, even if they possess enormous superiority in numbers and weaponry. Such was the fate of Chiang Kai-shek.

Revolution in large, segmentally organized societies can only occur through the conquering of all segments by one of the segments, or through the circumstance of similar response to a common challenge by all of the segments. The sequence in the first case is simply a series of wars among segments, as in the case of the transition from feudalism to monarchy. The sequence in the second case ranges—depending upon the size of the segment, the speed of the change, and the level of organizational resources of the segment—from the sequences for

large societies above to the sequence for small societies below.

Revolutions in tiny, highly routinized societies, which possess rather high densities of organizational resources, tend to follow a single sequence because the high integration of such societies tends to synchronize the decline of the old leadership and the rise of the new. Wallace (1956) has labeled such revolutions "revitalization movements."

SUMMARY

An organizational conflict approach to theories of revolution can integrate existing perspectives on revolution and can explain the participants, causes, precipitants, strategies, and sequences of revolution to an extent not previously possible. Great Man, Conspiracy, Disharmony, Discontent, and Ideology theories are integrated into a single consistent image of conflicting organizations. The effects of social change (e.g., modernization) and of international events (e.g., the Japanese invasion of China) on the prospects for a revolution can best be analyzed by assessing their impact on competing organizations.

REFERENCES

- ABEL, T. F. (1941) "The element of decision in the pattern of war." *Amer. Soc. Rev.* 6 (December): 853-859.
- ALROY, G. C. (1967) "Revolutionary conditions in Latin America." *Rev. of Politics* 29 (July): 417-422.
- APTER, D. E. (1967) *Ideology and Discontent*. New York: Free Press.
- ARENDT, H. (1968) *Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- BENDA, H. J. (1966) "Reflections on Asian communism." *Yale Rev.* 56 (September): 1-16.
- BITTNER, E. (1963) "Radicalism and the organization of radical movements." *Amer. Soc. Rev.* 28 (December): 928-940.
- BRINTON, C. (1965) *The Anatomy of Revolution*. New York: Vintage.
- DAVIES, J. C. (1962) "Toward a theory of revolution." *Amer. Soc. Rev.* 27 (February): 5-19.

- DEUTSCH, K. W. (1968) "Social mobilization and political development," pp. 205-226 in J. L. Finkle and R. W. Gable (eds.) *Political Development and Social Change*. New York: John Wiley.
- ECKSTEIN, H. (1965) "On the etiology of internal wars." *History and Theory* 4: 133-163.
- FRIEDRICH, C. (1970) "The failure of a one party system: Hitler's Germany," in S. P. Huntington and C. H. Moore (eds.) *The Dynamics of Established One Party Systems*. New York: Basic Books.
- FROMM, E. (1967) *Escape From Freedom*. New York: Avon.
- GILLIS, J. R. (1970) "Political delay in the European revolutions." *World Politics* 22 (April): 344-370.
- GURR, T. R. (1970) *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.
- (1968) "Psychological factors in civil strife." *World Politics* 20 (January): 245-278.
- HOFFER, E. (1963) *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. New York: Time.
- HOLLINGSHEAD, A. B., R. ELLIS, and E. KIRBY (1954) "Social mobility and mental illness." *Amer. Soc. Rev.* 19 (October): 577-584.
- HUNTINGTON, S. P. (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press.
- JOHNSON, C. (1966) *Revolutionary Change*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- KORNHAUSER, W. (1959) *The Politics of Mass Society*. New York: Free Press.
- LEITES, N. and C. WOLF (1970) *Rebellion and Authority*. Chicago: Markham.
- LENIN, V. I. (1943) *What is to be Done?* New York: International Publishers.
- LEWIS, W. A. (1963) "Commonwealth address." Summarized in Lawrence L. Stone (1966) "Theories of revolution." *World Politics* 17 (January): 159-176.
- MAO TSE-TUNG (1954) "The struggle in the Chingking Mountains." *Selected Works*, Vol. 1. New York: International Publishers.
- MARX, K. (n.d.) *Capital*. New York: Modern Library.
- MOORE, B. (1965) *Political Power and Social Theory*. New York: Harper.
- OLSON, M., Jr. (1963) "Rapid growth as a destabilizing force." *J. of Economic History* 23 (December): 529-552.
- OVERHOLT, W. H. (1977) *Political Revolution*. Boulder, Co.: Westview.
- (1974) "A theory of the ability of social groups to organize for political purposes." Paper for the American Sociological Association Meeting, Montreal, August.
- (1973) "Martial law, revolution and democracy in the Philippines." *Southeast Asia Q.* 2 (Spring).
- (1972) "Organization, revolutions and democracy: toward a sociology of politics." Dissertation, Yale University.
- PYE, L. (1956) *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.
- RIEZLER, K. (1943) "On the psychology of the modern revolution." *Social Research* 10 (September): 320-336.
- SCHUMPETER, J. A. (1950) *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. New York: Harper.
- SCHURMANN, F. (1966) *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

- SELZNICK, P. (1952) *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- TAYLOR, A.J.P. (1954) *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1916*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- TOCH, H. (1965) *The Social Psychology of Social Movements*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- TOCQUEVILLE, A. de (1955) *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* [translated by S. Gilbert]. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor.
- WALLACE, A.F.C. (1956) "Revitalization movements." *Amer. Anthropologist* 58 (April): 264-281 [reprinted (1969) pp. 30-52 in B. McLaughlin (ed.) *Studies in Social Movements*. New York: Free Press.].
- WEBER, M. (1946) "Politics as a vocation," in H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds.) *Max Weber*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.
- WOLFENSTEIN, E. V. (1967) *The Revolutionary Personality: Lenin, Trotsky, Gandhi*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press.
- (1965) *Violence or Nonviolence: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Choice of Political Means in Social Change*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Center of International Studies.