

A THEORY OF FUTURE SOCIAL CHANGE

A Thesis

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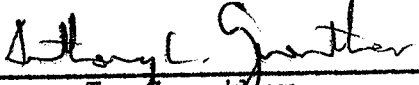
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DEDICATION

This initial academic production is dedicated lovingly to my grandparents, Paul and Lena Sica, whose ascent from wretched poverty to relative security has made possible my luxurious intellectual existence. Had it been for me, we would still be in Italy, for their kind of determination is of a variety that is unknown among those of my generation.

And to my wife, Anne.

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PREFACE

What follows is not typical of modern American sociology. References to standard authorities in the field of social change will be scarce; primary and secondary data will originate in historical, political, popular and intuitionistic sources by design. This scheme makes possible a synthesis of the disparate contributions to social change and "futurology" of, inter alia, Richard T. LaPiere, Marion Vanfossen, Alvin Toffler and myself. Departing from the accepted thesis format is necessary to the task, that is, to predict where post-modern culture is headed by using common and, whenever useful, uncommon sociological indicators and theorists.

Probably a shocking and discomfoting aspect of the enterprise, for readers of "journal sociology", is the lack of attention paid to many discipline champions. For example, Michael Harrington's newest book, Socialism, is genuinely fascinating to read and study, particularly his "reinterpretation" of the "real" Marx. It is written with the appropriate liberating sentiment and intellectual sophistication one would expect from a professional American "revolutionary" and social scientist. However, the book is involved in an academic game for which there

is no time in the course of this thesis: it is in the lay sense "scholarly", i.e. totally, inexorably out of touch with social reality. Harrington is carrying on in the noble radical tradition, trying to effect social change by writing a normatively powerful tract. That there is little empirical evidence to support his main contention - a revolutionary potential about to erupt within the American labor organization - does not actually impune the quality of the book. Reading it is like reading The City of God: it has to do with relatively little in the real world, but as literature, human thought and normative suggestion, it is quite good.

This distinction, then, between scholarly game-playing and accurate, empirically "sensible" analysis will remain central throughout the following. While several especially useful books will be given intensive treatment, the point of the thesis will not be to display scholastic fireworks, although writing in that style is great fun and sometimes even of sociological use. Put in simplest terms, although it would be personally satisfying to write something along the lines of "The Epistemological Roots of Wissenssoziologie" or "The Revolutionary Content of Marx", the following work is a more pedestrian, Veblen-Mills style scholarship, aimed at speaking simply and directly about the readily perceivable, the sociologically accurate, about the "real world" and of nothing extraneous to it.

However, there is inherent in this a central paradox which may seem to contradict the above. What the following does not promise is simplistic solutions to the question of social change. In each part of the world, a different type of change will probably obtain, and at different rates, with different actors. Even within the limits of any given sector, there will exist easily perceived diversity. This thesis will study and prognosticate about change of major and thoroughgoing proportions within, essentially, the United States and like areas of the modern world. What will be described is the genesis of a new definition of "self", of the social actor, along with concomitant, logically necessary adjustments of the socio-political world both as cause and effect of these revised self-views. To step slightly ahead, a theory which hopes to avoid inadequate linear projection must concern itself with an appropriate range and diversity of personality types, especially those most likely to instigate or adopt alterations in social processes, structures, and/or values. Therefore, economic and political realities will be to some degree deemphasized (as opposed to their usual primary position in studies of change) in favor of social-psychological, valuational factors. This is not however a fabricated, academic position of preference so much as a reflection of necessities in the study of change as I think it will occur in the future.

ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken in the belief that current theories of social change, especially those espoused and utilized by sociologists, are inadequate as explanatory tools regarding certain types of social change in the future.

One unorthodox theory of change, that of Richard T. LaPiere, was found to be of more use than others. This theory was radically modified to better facilitate the analysis of the latest manifestations of social change.

A survey of social change in Western history from the middle ages to the present day was performed in order to illustrate the efficacy of LaPiere's theory plus the attendant modifications proposed by the author.

Finally, the societal problems which may well evolve along with the new form of change were examined. Some minor suggestions for mitigating the impact of these problems were made.

A THEORY OF FUTURE SOCIAL CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

The following is an attempt at what has come to be termed "grand theory". Although Mills years ago attacked entrenched theorists by using the term pejoratively, some of his admirers have recently been theorizing on the macroscopic level, it might seem, in spite of his admonishment. However, the motive behind their writing has not been, as in the case of the writers Mills examined, to aid in the legitimation of a social order under the slogan "value-free" social science. Rather, men like I. L. Horowitz, N. Birnbaum, the quasi-Marxists of Britain, and an amorphous Continental contingent who combine critical philosophy with sociology (including the Frankfurt school), work at producing large-scale critiques of the traditional systems in which they operate. Gouldner's Coming Crisis in Western Sociology, although demonstrably shoddy in other respects, puts succinctly the problem of a social science enamored more of a safe, antiseptic "predictive" role than that of partisan. It should be obvious then that this thesis has been crafted in the increasingly accepted belief that sociology, diluted in its normative character, becomes dangerously neutral academic chatter. The sociology of knowledge has

conclusively demonstrated that social scientists, perhaps more than other scholars, are by definition, from the first moment of their research, inextricably embroiled in evaluative concerns.

As a prelude to this project, and in the hope of resolving major methodological questions, I made a study of the relatively new "sociology of sociology". The small but potent literature in this blossoming subfield has become radical in both methodological and substantive suggestion. (1) ("Radical" in this sense connotes an attitude of persistent critical intensity, aimed at investigating, and, if warranted, debunking standard ideologies offered by those who seek to maintain unnecessarily inegalitarian social organization and structure.) It was felt that a study of social change ought first to be informed of prevalent sociological "domain assumptions" (2) and consequent blind spots common to the discipline itself. While this may seem of excessively peripheral interest, the brief study nevertheless provided a generalized legitimation for the historically maligned radical position, and thus served in supporting and corroborating the suspicion, harbored by younger practitioners, that sociology has been hiding from the more flammable, less funded areas of research. The reasons for this avoidance behavior on the part of most researchers is easily documented by common-sense evaluations (professional aspirations, fund procurement, etc.), and by more sophisticated ideological analyses.

(3) What is amazing is not that this has been the case (given the history of the discipline and its battle to estrange itself from the ignominious near-homonym, socialism), but that given the current sentiment and interest in social policy, such behavior still persists (especially in the most statistically oriented universities and research settings).

In subscribing to this radical position, the younger researchers concern themselves less with quantifiable precision than with the overall legitimacy and meaning of any given project, and moreover, with content (process and values) and not so much with the historical subterfuge of conservatives, form (structure). It has been pointed out since antiquity that dichotomous descriptions of reality, these included, are usually highly interdependent in the "real" world, so that in fact we cannot deal with only process, only values or only content, no more than exclusively with structure, form or "patterned variables". Among the many reasons for this, the most cogent is that these terms are not mutually exclusive: they are complementary analytic/descriptive tools. However, as the post-Mills generation is quick to point out, in the past those sociologists concerned for the most part with structure and form have arrived (and/or begun) at conservative theoretical positions and promulgated upon their sociological audience a great many suggestions for research to support their reactionary contentions. By

eschewing "abstracted empiricism", the modern theorist risks being labeled "polemicist", "pamphleteer" and "popularizer" by his computerized colleagues. However, he may well produce, with sufficient attention to qualitative and historical methodology, hard-hitting, sociologically sensible work, as evidenced by many of Mills' followers and others of his ilk who wrote before him.

The present work is not a "review of the literature", a "replication study", or a test of the validity of a former theory: it is an attempt at an "original" theory of future social change. Obviously, however, there has been incurred a heavy intellectual debt to earlier thinkers who pointed in the direction taken here. This is certainly not ab nihilo theorizing. These precursors are considered by many to be extremely gifted sociologists, and to extend their insights somewhat is an "advocate's" role rather than that of the "innovator". This thesis will utilize predominantly sociological and historical sources in describing and analyzing with broad strokes the history of social change (of a certain specifiable type) in the modern world. Building on that analysis, I will propose a theory of rationalized, consciously perpetrated change which claims for itself strong predictive power regarding the future of particular areas of the world. (This is done with high regard for the critical legacy of Mills, and the spirit he proposed for the social sciences, as clearly explained by Horowitz in his introduction to The New Sociology (4)).

At the same time and by way of qualification, much of this presentation, especially those sections dealing with social movements, political revolutions and the general theory of social change as borrowed from noted thinkers, is nothing but "journeyman sociology". As is typical of research at this level of the academic hierarchy, most of the useable input is derivative, not original, for example, in the use of such standards as Arnold W. Green's introductory text. The first lesson in the study of social change of whatever type is that real, purposive, singularly conceived innovation is, for a variety of sociological reasons (beyond personal limitations), a most difficult enterprise. That this axiom applies to academic theorizing should be emphasized, for the educational-scholarly milieu very often demands near-conformity, thereby excluding and denigrating innovational approaches to the subject matter.

Horowitz has given us a poignant reminder that this was so, even as recently as the mid-1950's:

...we are all too ready to pay homage to the dead. Mills received no awards which sociologists make annually for books deserving and otherwise - while now an annual award is to be made in his name. After Power Elite he was turned down for every request for a grant from the great institutions of the 'philanthropoids' with but a single honorable exception - while now sponsorship for work on Mills is available.(5)

The "newness", the contestable part of the thesis, begins very late in the work. Modern sociologists and political scientists might readily reach consensus regarding the nature of political revolutions and the etiology of

social movements. These standard analyses serve adequately when examining social change (of one important type) between, roughly, the French Revolution and the Second World War, but as aids in considering change within the last quarter century or so, the traditional concepts (and prejudices) become increasingly less useful. The reason for this is really quite simple. Like everything else in a changing world, the nature of change has been rapidly changing.

Integral to the theory attempted here is the inclusion of a revised understanding of personality. Terms such as "movement" and "revolution" denote of the participants collective interpretation and action regarding political reality. Such terms were formulated and accepted by the social science community with the implication that an "appropriate" personality cynosure of modern man was self-evident. The usefulness of collective terms it seems - in the jargon of Mannheim - has seen its finest historical moment. The post-democratic revolutionary era has until recently been dominated by easily perceived group (collective) performances. The present theory suggests that not only do these larger descriptions of change now falter, but likewise that the traditionally unquestioned cynosure can be faulted, even in its loosest understanding, as "ideal type". This insertion is left somewhat vague intentionally, but with the assurance of elaboration towards clarity in the closing sections of the thesis. (The ramifications of a revised personality theory, from

the perspectives of socialization processes, the significance of "individualism" and "private property", etc., are complex and of considerable import, and represent the most speculative element of what follows.)

It becomes then the point of the thesis to show why time-honored conceptual definitions of social change no longer prove satisfactory, and further, to advance a theory which is better capable of "explaining a larger proportion of the variance" concerning change in recent history, and more importantly, in the future.*

*The exposition of (1) theories of social change and (2) the history of social change may of course be criticized from the standard academic posture: accuracy of fact, soundness of logic, interpretation, clarity of prose, etc. But the final prognostications included herein fall more within the realm of "educated hunches" and the new theory, due to its mildly innovational character, must stand without the usual protection afforded by the "literature" of past research, and other familiar tools of defensive scholarship. Of the many hazards unique to this non-normal mode of inquiry, perhaps the most precarious is the near certainty that theorists of the "old style" will suddenly become very precise in their conceptions of the boundaries of "scientific" work: they move with haste from the spirit of science to that of scientism. One of the "greats" in this field, Karl Popper, has been providing ammunition for conservatives since 1943 (6), apparently in the naive belief that he is defending the pristine Scientific Method against those who care more for theoretical accuracy and awareness of change, than methodological tradition. Against this type mind there is no unequivocal defense, for his premises are finally psychologistic and ad hominem, though carefully camouflaged with belabored "logic". It is hoped that this presentation may be received in the same spirit with which it has been constructed: with sociological sophistication, theoretical rigor and a belief in the necessity for innovation in this crucial area of the discipline, thereby avoiding tedious and unproductive quasi-arguments, so typical of Popper and his admirers.

CHAPTER I
LAPIERE'S THEORY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

In the broadest and perhaps only somewhat useful sense, it is possible to equate sociology with social change. The most adamant systems-analysts have in the recent past included provisions within their theories to deal with change, though usually at the interpersonal, social-psychological level in lieu of macro-analyses. At the other extreme, grand theorists ever since Vico have extracted from reality one or two "independent" variables, and hung the weight of all social change on those slim members, whether they be geography, race, weather, religion, economics or whatever. A convenient breakdown of these larger theories is offered by Richard Appelbaum in a recent text (7). Without claiming originality he suggests "Evolutionary", "Equilibrium", "Conflict" and "Rise and Fall" groupings for the many theories within the tradition. Far more interesting and polemical is Sorokin's Modern Historical and Social Philosophies (8) in which he characteristically dismembers about a dozen theorists of change with acerbic grace and insight. However, his own theory somehow emerges unscathed, therefore limiting somewhat the book's usefulness.

We have learned from these critics and the many others who have zeroed in on monocausal or cyclical thinkers, that whether it be Spengler, Toynbee, Kroeber, Marx or even Sorokin, social change is altogether too complex a phenomenon - or more precisely, a grouping of phenomena - to be explained even in small part by one or two overloaded causatives. A more fruitful approach, and one which avoids internecine, "schools" debate, is that offered by Richard T. LaPiere in his latest text production, Social Change (9).

Of the mysteries which have developed in league with American sociology, one of the more bizarre and unexplainable is the discipline's ignoring and maligning of LaPiere. He has been producing important texts since 1938 when he wrote one of the first of the second generation treatments, Collective Behavior. In the early 1950's he produced A Theory of Social Control, then somewhat later The Freudian Ethic. The book used here is his capstone achievement, incorporating elements of the others. LaPiere's concern with innovation and change was intimately related to his private and professional life: he was a creative and penetrating thinker who cared little about aligning himself with "schools". Therefore he came to understand through formalized learning as well as life experience the coercive, perverse powers of (in this case, professional) social control mechanisms. One looks in vain through any of the major overviews of the discipline written in the last 20 years for adequate or laudatory mention of LaPiere. Two

reasons come to mind. First, his areas of interest do not neatly coincide with the "mainstream" of the discipline, since the major spokesmen have carefully avoided the more explosive and difficult areas, such as social control. Second, his style of scholarship is anathema to the Mainstreamers. He simply reads and thinks, usually without the aid of computers, tables and other gimmickry unessential to his task. For this he has won permanent unpopularity with many practitioners, although it becomes obvious upon studying his work that his suggestions for research and further investigation are eminently operational, were anyone to take the trouble.

LaPiere, in terms of modern American sociology, is an innovator. A thinker with whom he shares many traits is C. Wright Mills. Their writing is always an informed hair away from polemics; their synthesizing minds tear through great hunks of literature with precision and an unbending "need" to exorcise inaccurate pretentiousness, if in the form of overly grand theory, computerized triviality, or otherwise. Mills gave the discipline its most popularly influential power study, and one of its finest theoretical/methodological statements. LaPiere, similarly working alone, provided the most exhaustive study of social control, which later grew into a study of how men overcome societal restraints in the interests of change. Both writers eschew mythmaking or intellectual gamesmanship, sticking as closely as possible to readily perceivable empirical reality, and