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INTENSITY, VISIBILITY, DIRECTION AND SCOPE*

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I want to sketch a line of reasoning about politics, a way of looking at politics. Every point of view must stand on its own legs; it is not something that can be proved. An analysis is a way of looking at something, a way of seeing something we could not see before we made it. We adopt a point of view because it is suggestive and persuasive in its own inner logic.

More specifically, I want to examine politics as a strategic concept. The concept of political strategy is itself a point of view loaded with implications for the study of politics.

Strategy is the heart of politics, as it is of war.

What are the implications of the concept? Any strategy of politics assumes that there is something that we can do about politics, that we have choices, and that what we think and do and want makes a difference. It assumes that we have something to talk about and that what we think and say and do is likely to have consequences. Without these conditions there can be no political strategy.

Strategy is predicated on the notion that politics is important, important to *us*, for people do not take the pains to produce a strategy about anything unless they are involved in it. Somewhere along the line that extends from the trivial to the overwhelming is a point at which we become involved. We cannot help being concerned about anything provided only that it is big enough, and near enough, and moving toward us rapidly enough. If the stakes of politics are the survival of civilization, what is going to be our attitude? At the root of the idea of political strategy is the suggestion that the world is a dangerous place in which to live. Politics, seen from this standpoint, is more than drift and more than the sum of things happening to us. It begins when we begin to fight back. This is also the point at which strategy has its origins. From

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the strategic point of view the meaning of politics is that it means something to *us*.

In a world in which we are not perfectly free, the concept of strategy implies that we are willing to attempt to discover what kind of freedom we have. Our options, it seems to me, inhere in the nature of the raw materials themselves, as demonstrated by the very inconsistency of the explanations of politics. Political strategy consists of the search for a middle ground between two inconsistent pessimistic theories about the fluidity of opinion. At one extreme, government itself is treated as if it were a figment of propaganda. At the other extreme it is assumed that attitudes are so fixed by interest and the social structure that intelligence has no function in public affairs. The realm of politics lies somewhere between these extremes.

Strategy consists of the application of intelligence to the achievement of great ends. The strategy of politics is related to the meaning of politics, for if we can do nothing about politics, politics becomes a meaningless vibration. We are bound to look for the meaning of politics in the efforts of people to accomplish things because the effort to accomplish things is the essence of politics.

The word "strategy" is borrowed from the language of war; it has something to do with conflict. The exploitation of conflict in the deliberate pursuit of power places a renewed emphasis on the use of the historic democratic devices for winning power and making decisions: majority rule, elections, agitation, organization, and the formation of alternatives. I assume that it will continue to be necessary in the future to bring great decisions to a head. If I may tamper with a sentence attributed to General MacArthur, "In politics there is no substitute for victory in a national election."

In dealing with the problem of strategy it might be said, perhaps, that we have a navigator's freedom. Perhaps we can justify the opinion of Gibbon that the winds and tides are always on the side of the ablest navigators. On the other hand, we are not relieved of the necessity of doing something about our future because people are sometimes stupid, for when all has been said that can be said, we can't help being prejudiced in favor of the human race.

The very fact that there is a multiplicity of interpretations of politics suggests that we may have some freedom. At least we have a choice of dogmas. This is an area in which political scientists have something to do. We need a theory of politics or a theory of political action and organization. Surely this is a legitimate academic interest. Political scientists cannot do the work of politicians, but they can provide politicians with the rationalizations involved in power and the use and

functions of power, rationalizations without which politicians cannot work well.

As political scientists we are committed to the quest for meaning in politics; to commit ourselves to meaninglessness is to abandon the obligations of scholarship. Let no man boast that he has discovered chaos because chaos is the easiest thing in the world to find! It takes intelligence to make sense of politics, but it takes intelligence to make sense of anything. Political science, like Genesis, begins with chaos but it does not end there.

The foregoing statement about political strategy rests on the proposition that the system is dynamic, for there is little point in discussing strategy in a static system. What makes the political system dynamic? The dynamics of politics has its origin in strife. Political strategy deals therefore with the exploitation, use, and suppression of conflict. Conflict is so powerful an instrument of government that all regimes are of necessity concerned with its management. We are concerned here with the use of conflict to govern, the use of conflict as an instrument of change, growth, and unity. The grand strategy of politics deals with public policy concerning conflict. This is the policy of policies, the sovereign policy—what to do about conflict.

All politics begins with billions of conflicts. There are billions of potential conflicts in any modern society, but only a few become significant. A democratic society is able to survive because it manages conflict, usually at the point of origin; it imposes a kind of birth control on conflict. (I have heard it said that the male alligators eat 999 of every 1000 eggs laid by the females. If this were not true there would be more alligators in the world than we could use.)

Americans hold more elections than all the rest of the world put together; but there must be millions of issues on which we cannot vote, or we cannot vote on them when we want to vote on them or how we want to vote on them. One of the most conclusive ways of checking the rise of conflict is simply to provide no arena for it or to create no public agency with power to do anything about it. There are an incredible number of devices for checking the development of conflict within our system. It is difficult to make an issue of the Supreme Court of the United States because it is difficult to bring the conflict to a head. It is difficult to translate the frustrations of urban life in metropolitan areas into effective governmental action because the institutions for action do not exist. Sectionalism has been an effective device for submerging some kinds of conflicts. All legislative procedure is loaded with devices for controlling the flow of explosive materials into the governmental apparatus. All forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of

some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias.

Perhaps it would not be inaccurate to say that there are Republican and Democratic concepts of political organization. It seems to me that the Democratic party tends to be the pro-party party, while the Republican party tends to be the anti-party party. Much of the controversy about the future of the party system stems from the prevalence of partisan differences of opinion about the nature and objectives of political organization. This is not evidence of the meaninglessness of party politics but of its importance, for people do not invent competing theories of organization and antagonistic concepts of strategy about unimportant things. All I want to say is that the quarrel in politics is as apt to be about the means as about the ends of politics. Why should this surprise us? Theories of political organization are identified with the things people want to accomplish.

The government itself, the government above all else, is never fully neutral in political struggle. One major party tends to be pro-government while the other tends to be anti-government. One prominent partisan political philosopher said to me recently, "I hate government!" Do I need to tell you what his party allegiance is? We have assumed the neutrality of our institutions too easily, without regard for our history.

The very fact that politics deals largely with procedure rather than substance (with power, institutions, concepts of organization, rights, and government itself, none of which are ends in themselves) demonstrates its strategic character. We get confused about the meaning of politics because we underestimate the importance of political strategy.

One difficulty scholars have experienced in interpreting American politics has always been that the grand strategy of politics has concerned itself first of all with the structure of institutions. The function of institutions is to channelize conflict, but they do not treat all forms of conflict equally, just as the football rules discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence. This is the bias of institutions which are never neutral about all kinds of conflict.

Nobody knows what American politics would be like if we had the institutions to facilitate the development of a wider span of political competition. No matter what we do about the problem, however, it is unlikely that we shall ever become hospitable to all conflict, for the function of institutions is to discriminate among conflicts.

If politics is the management of conflict, it is necessary first to get rid of some simplistic concepts of conflict. Political conflict is not primarily or usually a matter of head-on collisions or tests of strength, for a good

reason: intelligent people prefer to avoid tests of strength, about matters more serious than sports, unless they are sure to win.

Nor is political conflict like an intercollegiate debate in which the opponents agree in advance on a definition of the issues. The definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power; the antagonists can rarely agree on what the issues are because power is involved in the definition. He who determines what politics is about runs the country because the definition of the alternatives is the choice of conflicts, and the choice of conflicts allocates power.

Nor does political conflict express a one-to-one relation with economic interest or grass roots opinion. Politics is a highly strategic activity which takes account of interest and opinion but is not the same thing.

Is it possible to formulate a theory of the dynamics of politics based on more comprehensive concepts of conflict than the foregoing? I would like to substitute a new image of conflict for the more familiar picture. The proposition I would like to examine is that American politics is in a dynamic condition (*i.e.*, it is a proper subject of strategy) because it is sensitive to changes in the dimension and nature of conflict. More specifically, the proposition is that relatively slight changes in the intensity, visibility, direction, and scope of conflict are likely to produce great consequences. Nearly all of politics can be subsumed under these four headings: intensity, visibility, direction and scope.

I. INTENSITY

At the risk of seeming to imitate the schoolboy who wrote that the processes common to all living things are nutrition, digestion, exhaustion, and discretion, I want to say something about the intensity, visibility, direction, and scope of conflict and the relation of these factors to the dynamics and strategy of politics.

Political scientists have traditionally shown a strong predisposition to underestimate the future. This may be due to an historical illusion, the illusion that everything is at a standstill in the present. This is an illusion about time, but our view of the future may be affected also by the fact that we do not know what change looks like. What makes the system dynamic? What do we look for? Simplistic concepts of conflict make the political system look stagnant because they conceal change.

There is some evidence that there has been an increase in the intensity of public involvement in politics in the past generation. Not only is the government larger and more expensive than it was a generation ago, but there has been a change in the agenda of the government and assumptions about the stability and survival of the social system can no longer be made as confidently as they were made fifty years ago.

Considering the extent to which the historic patterns of the political organization of the United States have been based on assumptions about public indifference, a very slight change in the temperature of the mass may have important consequences, at a time when the whole involvement of modern man in politics seems to be undergoing a general revision.

II. VISIBILITY

How do we see conflict?

Changes in intensity bear none of the familiar earmarks of conflict conceived of as head-on collisions or tests of strength.

The dynamics of American politics is affected by the tendency of the system to move by indirection. The process of legislation and administration is largely the discovery of focal points at which remote controls may be applied. A few people, druggists, bankers, common carriers, public utilities magnates, importers, government contractors, manufacturers of military supplies, farmers, food processors, financiers, and corporation lawyers are likely to be acutely conscious of the government because the government uses them to implement its policies. Most of the rest of us see the government at a distance most of the time.

Generally speaking, indirection might be expected to produce a low-grade political infection. The political consequences of public policies are likely to be highly unequal, therefore, depending on their visibility.

The place of indirection in political strategy is illustrated by the efforts of interests opposed to public housing to get local referenda on housing projects, an attempt to manipulate the visibility of the policy, or the attempt to reduce public expenditures by making taxes visible. Perhaps the government could not finance itself today if everybody who now pays taxes knew what he was doing when he paid them. The strategy of painless taxation is based on low visibility; so is private tax collection. It is by no means certain what the ultimate effects of the attempt to make the government more visible may be.

A substantial segment of the literature of political science dealing with governmental reorganization, lines of command and responsibility, simplification of procedures and structures, publicity and reporting, has a bearing on the general strategy of visibility.

In spite of growing complexities the ultimate responsibility of the government to the people remains a reality, for the visibility of public policy depends to a great extent on what the public is looking for, on its concept of responsibility. All I mean to say here is that it seems to me that a slight change in the visibility of government or in the public habit

of seeing the government is likely to have a great impact on the outcome of conflict.

Changes in intensity and visibility have very little to do with the tug-of-war concept of politics.

III. DIRECTION

The most powerful instrument for the control of conflict is conflict itself. A generation ago Professor E. A. Ross wrote:

Every species of social conflict interferes with every other species in society . . . save only when lines of cleavage coincide; in which case they reinforce one another. . . . A society, therefore, which is ridden by a dozen oppositions along lines running in every direction may actually be in less danger of being torn with violence or falling to pieces than one split just along one line.

This is an extremely important statement and I think you recognize the implications it has had in political theory. Let us examine it. The unstated assumption made by Professor Ross is that there is a kind of equality of conflicts. If this were really true the rise of a multitude of inconsistent conflicts would tend to weaken all of the antagonisms generated in the political system, producing a system of low-grade tensions. Is this a reasonable assumption?

Is it not much more reasonable to suppose that conflicts are of unequal intensity? What are the logical consequences of the inequality of conflicts? It seems to me that the inequality of conflicts determines the nature of the political system. If we assume that conflicts are unequal in intensity, it follows logically that the more intense conflicts are likely to displace the less intense conflicts. What follows from the inequality of conflicts is a system of domination and subordination of conflicts. No conflict can become important unless inconsistent conflicts are subordinated. This is an essential condition of all conflict. Since this is true, every great conflict overwhelms a multitude of lesser ones. The greatest hazard in the development of any conflict is not a frontal attack by the opposition but a flank attack by bigger collateral, inconsistent and irrelevant competitors for the attention and loyalty of the public. If there are degrees of intensity, the more intense conflicts will subordinate the less intense. What is the result? The result is a reduction in the number of conflicts that can become important.

If I may refer once more to the ubiquitous schoolboy who described chemistry as "the study of how a thing that is busted gets together and how them that's together gets separated," his definition has the virtue of emphasizing combinations as well as divisions. The generalization

applies equally to politics. The process is not to divide and divide and divide to infinity but to divide and unify at the same time and as a part of the same process. Unification and division are parallel processes, for no conflict can develop without a tremendous consolidation of forces on both sides of the cleavage.

This process limits the multiplication of conflicts. For this reason it may be said that there are great numbers of potential conflicts in the community which cannot be developed because they are subordinated to stronger systems of antagonism. This line of reasoning has something to do with the scale and scope of conflict.

In the struggle among conflicts there is nothing sacred about our preference for big or little conflicts. All depends on what we want most. The outcome is not determined merely by what people want but by their priorities. What they want more becomes the enemy of what they want less. Politics is therefore something like choosing a wife, rather than shopping in a five-and-ten-cent store.

I conclude that the inequality of conflicts is the decisive factor in this situation because it gives shape and form to the political system.

It now becomes proper to ask, what is the regnant form of pluralism in the modern world? Perhaps it is nationalism, the greatest divisive force in the world today. Nationalism has produced the most powerful organizations the human race has ever known. Says Professor Hans Kohn, Nationalism can claim today to be a worldwide force, the first worldwide force in history to which the peoples of all continents pay homage and loyalty.

Nationalism is the most drastic pattern of pluralism in the world. It follows that nationalism conditions profoundly the development of all other conflicts. If this statement is accurate it ought also to dispose of the notion that organizations are powerful and intense in inverse proportion to their size, because the national state is a large organization. Nationalism is a unifying as well as a divisive force. It is not true therefore that there is something about the political world that suggests that a modern community necessarily and inevitably breaks up into a great multitude of microscopic minorities. The scale of organization is related to what we want most and what kind of organization is appropriate to the dominant desires or fears of people.

In the conflict of conflicts, what the conflict is about is never independent of the organization of politics. But in the very nature of things, we have some kind of choice about the sorts of things we want to make dominant.

I would be very bold, indeed, if I pretended to be able to tell you what politics is about, but the task is not as difficult as it has sometimes

been made to seem. There is no more certain way to destroy the meaning of politics than to treat all issues as if they were free and equal. The inequality of issues simplifies the interpretation of politics.

The outcome of conflict is determined by changes in the direction of cleavages, and relatively slight changes of direction are likely to have great consequences. The displacement of conflicts is therefore a prime instrument of strategy.

IV. SCOPE

The fourth factor in the dynamics of American politics is the scope of conflict, because the scope of conflict is likely to have a decisive effect on its outcome. In its simplest terms, the proposition is that the intervention of Harry in a conflict between Tom and Dick will change the nature of the conflict no matter what Harry does. Thereafter every addition to the number of participants changes the conflict. Any conflict is likely to be influenced decisively by changes in its scope. Political strategy deals therefore with the inclusion and exclusion of contestants because it is never true that the balance remains the same if the number is changed.

A look at the literature of American politics reveals that there is an eternal struggle between the conflicting tendencies toward the privatization and socialization of conflict. On the one hand there is a battery of ideas calculated to restrict the scope of conflict or to keep it entirely out of the public domain. Ideas concerning individualism, free private enterprise, localism, privacy, and economy are designed to privatize conflict or to restrict its scope. The outcome of any conflict can be predetermined by confining it so narrowly that the balance of forces is known in advance. By far the most effective device is the effort to keep conflicts wholly outside of the public domain. This stratagem, if successful, makes it impossible to involve public authority in the resolution of the conflict. A tremendous fraction of all conflict is managed by this device.

On the other hand, there is another battery of ideas conducive to the socialization of conflict. Universal ideas in our civilization, ideas concerning equality, consistency, equal protection of the laws, justice, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and association tend to socialize conflict.

Governmental procedures which lend themselves to delay and structural complexities which postpone decisions tend to socialize conflict by providing occasions for the kind of agitation that is likely to increase the scope of conflict, contrary to the common opinion that the separation of powers, bicameralism and similar arrangements are antidemocratic.

The direction of political cleavages has a bearing on their scope. Sec-

tionalism tends to restrict the scope of conflict; it tends also to suppress intrasectional conflict. This is true of all procedures tending to localize conflict. On the other hand, horizontal, national cleavages inevitably extend the scope of politics. Thus the direction and scope of cleavages are related.

Pressure politics is an instrument for the socialization of conflict. Pressure tactics result when the losers in a private conflict find themselves in an intolerable situation and appeal to public authority for relief. The important point about pressure politics is not that it is a conflict of private interests, but the fact that private conflicts are taken into the public domain. Pressure politics is therefore a stage in the socialization of conflict; it represents the breakdown of the attempt to privatize conflict.

The socialization of conflicts shows how conflict can be used to expand the community.

Throughout this discussion it is evident that the greatest prerequisite for the development of conflict as an instrument of public policy is an amplitude of public power. It is for this reason that the drive for privatization of conflict takes the form of an attack on government, often seen as a movement for economy. The objective is a reduction of the governmental capacity to intervene in conflict and the capacity of the community to use conflict as an instrument of public policy.

The enormous importance of the nationalization of politics becomes evident as we look at these strategies. The nationalization of politics represents both a change in the direction of political cleavage and an expansion of the scope of these cleavages. It illustrates the proposition that the greatest of all civil rights is the right of freedom of movement which has played an incalculably great role in the development of the American nation. Freedom of migration has been the most effective single device in the development of a free American people. We see its significance today in the migrations of the American Negro which have nationalized the question of race relations. It is impossible to understand the role of conflict in American politics apart from the examination of the scope of conflict. Even a slight change in the direction and scope of conflict is likely to have great consequences.

The intensity, visibility, direction, and scope of conflict are instruments of political strategy. If we look at the political system from this point of view it appears that our resources are very great.