CHRONOPOLITICS: THE IMPACT OF TIME PERSPECTIVES ON THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper indicates how certain views toward time and toward the nature of change lead to a form of "chronopolitics," a term descriptive of the relation of time-perspectives to political decision-making. The present as a "time of transition" can be seen as a time during which epoch-making decisions which will lead a society to one of several alternate futures can be made. If the crucial power in transition periods is the power to decide which of the alternate futures to seek, the crucial skill in coping with social trends will be social engineering. But if the significant decisions have already been made, as suggested by the term social trend, the problems of politics and the skills demanded will be quite different.

Perspectives on the future are articulated with current belief systems concerning the nature of society and of social change. Since the struggle of intrasocietal groups to change and to resist change comprises much of the history of any society, a knowledge of prevailing conceptualizations of change and of ideologies concerning it is an important part of the study of social change itself. More specifically, beliefs concerning the future and roads to it will have significant influence upon current political behavior.

One significant aspect of beliefs is related to the manner in which certain views and attitudes toward time and toward the nature of change leads to a form of chronopolitics. The term chronopolitics is used here to emphasize the relationship between the political behavior of individuals and groups and their time-perspectives.

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CHRONOPOLITICS

TIME AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The systematic analysis of the meaning of time in social organization has a long history, although recent developments and revivified interest might almost be called a rediscovery. Durkheim's (Goody, 1968) discussion, essentially an argument that time be considered as a social construct, laid a basis for modern social scientific treatments of time. A number of modern writers have developed a body of work in this area. Some of these writers are Max Heirich (1964), Ernest Gellner (1964), Wilbert Moore (1963), Georges Gurvitch (1964), F. L. Polak (1961), R. M. MacIver (1965), Toulmin and Goodfield (1965), Charles Hudson (1966), and F. R. Kluckhohn (1961).

Heirich (1964) identified four ways in which time has been conceptualized in the study of social change. Of these, this paper will focus upon just one: time as a social factor. As such, it may be divided into two aspects: as a resource and as a meaning—a social construct. Attitudes toward time, as a social construct, are significant. Moore (1963) observed that social organization can be seen as a machine for increasing time and for defeating the problem of its scarcity. Social organization reflects the attempt by groups to persist through time. Hudson (1966:65-66) noted that while society can be described as a temporal structure, it is also something that exists outside of time as a belief system whose parts are describable in logical terms—e.g., as a social structure and as a set of ideas.

As a set of ideas, society is related to other ideas, such as the ideas held concerning time, and it is affected by them. As a structure, it is at least partly reflective of the ideas held about it. The various belief systems can be seen as affecting each other and, in turn, as articulated with systems of action. These belief systems, which motivate and interpret action, mesh not only with present society but also with the society as it existed in the past (as it is remembered) and as it will be in the presumed future. “The history of culture is the history of its images of the future” (Polak, 1961:115-116).

TIME-PERSPECTIVES AND ATTITUDES TOWARD PROGRESS

Toulmin and Goodfield (1965) connect the “discovery of time” with the developing awareness in the fifteenth century of historical development and suggest that this “discovery” provided one of the important sources for the concept of progress. A developing consciousness of a relationship between time and social change led to a view of politics as a form of applied social physics, to a hope that the basic themes of society were discoverable. This view, developed in Vico’s Scienza Nuova, increased the sense of control of human destiny that had been obscured, if not lost, by the emphasis placed by the “scholastics” on the Platonic “eternal verities.” Vico suggested that there are no fixed laws of society to be understood and that society is not the product of a conscious endeavor, as rationalists had assumed. His view that societies were human creations and not the mere epiphenomena of a set of static “ideals” suggested that the principles of this human phenomenon could be found within the modifications of the human mind and its capacity to understand its own creations. If societies could continually rebuild themselves, recreating laws within the context of their own cultures and timely needs, as Vico perceived, then a basis existed for men to feel conscious of their power to control their own futures. Vico’s version of “humanity creating itself” was a significant product of a changed view toward change which developed out of a shift in the perception of the relationship between society and past and future time.

TIME-PERSPECTIVES AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

This sense of control, of holding the initiative in social change, can be stifled by philosophical systems of explanation which, tending toward absolutism, also tend to foreclose the possibilities of further inquiry. Hofstadter (1959:47-48) shows how this may have disastrous results for political action. He described an effect of social Darwinism upon a fervent advocate of progress who, when asked for specific suggestions on what ought to be done, could only reply: “Nothing! You and I can do nothing at all. It’s all a matter of evolution. . . . Perhaps in four or five thousand
years, evolution may have carried men beyond this state of things."

This early identification of "evolution" with "progress" suggested that the deliberate, conscious efforts of men to change their society were not only futile but even antithetical to progress.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1945:3-17), like the social Darwinist cited above, also viewed history as, in the long run, democratically inclined. For this reason, he urged that the recognition of this democratic trend be accepted as the basis of state policy. However, it is very clear that not all men accept de Tocqueville's description of the trend toward equality as a " Providential fact."

A significant source of modern political extremism is found in the development of beliefs that a trend is neither desirable nor inevitable. A relationship between history seen as an "unfriendly conspiracy" and extreme political views can be illustrated by another reference to the work of Hofstadter. Hofstadter (1965:29-30) has indicated that political paranoids typically see history as a product of a gigantic conspiracy. In fact, history may be regarded by them as a conspiracy, rather than as a conjuncture of millions of individual decisions and unplanned changes. Such a "history" must be defeated by all-out, ruthless crusades. Thus, the paranoid: "... is always manning the barricades of civilization. He constantly lives at a turning point; it is now or never in organizing resistance to conspiracy. Time is forever just running out" (emphasis mine).

**SOCIAL TRENDS AS IDEOLOGIES**

A number of disturbing issues are suggested in a comparison of these authors' comments, although a concern with time-perspectives is a common dimension of interest. Toulmin and Goodfield (1965:43-44) have indicated that there is a tendency for certain types of answers to inhibit the raising of radical questions since the answers to basic problems tend to be assumed. From the Platonic orientation, the statesman's task was to reflect on the principles of political health and not to examine and tabulate social afflictions. This assumption that there is a body of basic and universal absolutes distinguishes such rationalist approaches from more contemporary empirically and relativistically oriented studies. Hofstadter (1959) showed how Spencerian thought tended to inhibit social action. Even de Tocqueville, while emphasizing the extension of democracy, indirectly suggested complacency and a somewhat fatalistic acceptance of this trend. This way of thinking easily leads to simplistic, presumptive dogmas for politicians, would-be reformers, educators, and others who might be concerned with developmental problems of society.

Aside from an objection based upon a belief that such modes of thought represent intellectual laziness, there are other reasons to question this tendency to use perceived trends as ideologies or bases for policies. For one thing, such prostration before any presumed trend or set of absolutes, whatever their direction, extent, antiquity, or quality, is to relinquish freedom of judgment. If moral judgments are to be effective, as William James suggested, there must be some minimum of uncertainty in the universe. It is for this reason that evolutionism as an ideology, even in the guise of "irreversible" trends, should be questioned. It is doubtlessly true that many problems that have remained unaffected for generations by merely humanitarian appeals have to some extent succumbed to the march of bureaucracy, urbanization, increase in GNP, technological developments, and other forces of change. Nevertheless, history is essentially neutral, and trends are often what is made of them. Many useful programs of social welfare have probably been accepted partly because of their apparent "inevitability" and a consequent reduction in resistance to them. But some major injustices have been committed and justified in the name of the inevitable. Aron (1967:5) remarked that "One can have faith in a certain conception of human destiny. This faith is not devoid of hope, but I mistrust those hopes which can give murderers a clear conscience." So should we all.

The use of "manifest destiny" as an ideology was graphically portrayed in Hofstadter's (1965:179) description of Theodore Roosevelt's "reluctance" to become involved in imperialistic adventures. Roosevelt, explaining himself to a friend, remarked in 1898: "I cannot shut my eyes to the march of events—a
march which seems to be beyond human control."

Roosevelt's words should be compared to those of de Tocqueville (1945:17) that the discovery of the progressive development of social equality would confer upon democracy a "sacred aspect," and thus, "to attempt to check democracy would be . . . to resist the will of God."

However, de Tocqueville's suggestion that those who oppose the trend toward democracy make the best of the social lot "awarded to them by Providence" might be misdirected. It is the acceptance of the reality of such a trend that is more likely to lead one to make the best of it. After all, what else is there to do after such a definition of the situation?

**DILEMMAS OF DECISION-MAKING**

There is a danger that a willingness to submit to predetermined diagnoses of the present and prognoses of the future may lead to an avoidance of basic decisions at both intellectual and political levels. How the present is viewed is of considerable importance in determining the questions we ask and the actions we take. "If the path of progress is fixed and immutable, conformity becomes the supreme virtue" (Titmuss, 1964:14).

The present may be defined as a "time of transition" but the term may be given different meanings which will have objectively different consequences for behavior. Some perspectives treat social development as inevitable and as part of the natural order, while others show change and development as primarily a creation of the human will. The "true" meaning of the present is contingent upon which view is taken. A view of the present as a period of crucial decisions leads to a "politics of crisis." Conversely, a view of change as an inevitable developmental process tends to impose a perceived obligation to accept historically given directives gracefully and implement them competently or even creatively. "We've reached, or at least are well on our way to reaching 'the good society,' and ideology can only serve to hinder the progress we are making" (Waxman, 1968:5). Hofstadter's (1965) description of the "paranoid" type of political personality is not only prescient; it suggests that such a personality in some ways may possess a more dynamic point of view with regard to the nature of change, however distorted may be a particular version of its direction or quality. For such a one, at least, the issues are apparently still in doubt; radical questions can still be asked and there is still time for radical solutions. For him, the game isn't over until the last pitch, whereas for many an intellectual liberal, confident of the judgment of history, the real debate is over and all that is left to do is to train more technicians to implement the decisions. Modern liberalism is thus very often an ascribed attitude, and it is left for the modern conservative attitude to be the achiever.

There appears to be a relationship between the argument presented in this paper and the "end of ideology" position taken by such writers as Daniel Bell (1962), Edward Shils (1955), Raymond Aron (1967), and others. Some of the content of the rationale for the "end of ideology" suggests that at least some of this group, who seem to see the future as already decided in broad outline, might be regarded as the "technicians" of this era, technicians whose position is already under serious attack by "radicals" who still see a need for radical questions and crucial decisions. As Haber (1968) observed, the "end of ideology" may become ideology. However, there are a number of complex issues raised by the voluminous literature on this topic, and it is probably best at this time to regard it as unsettled and part of an ongoing debate (Waxman, 1968).

The danger of such "ascriptive liberalism" is the complacent acceptance of the view that the principles of the "proper" society have been established. The perceived needs will be those of acceptance and implementation, and there will be a lessened need to return to policy-determining problems. A quite different type of intellectual and social skill will be favored. Once the notion prevails that the "good society" has been effectively planned or established, the problems shift to matters of maintenance and repair, and these are often quite different from the kind of facts needed to support a case for radical change. As Titmuss (1964) remarked, questions of a fundamental kind will seem less relevant, and the technical
problems of adjustment will become more im-
portant.

On the other hand, a quite different political
situation ensues from a perception of the pres-
ent as a time for critical decision-making. This
was recently explored in an article by Peter
Drucker. Drucker (1966:27-28) predicted
that the coming generational shift would also
involve a major political shift in moods, values,
alignments, and issues. “Such a shift is bound
to be disorderly. It implies a time of transition
likely to be characterized by vocal dissent, by
partisanship, and by political passions.”

Irving Kristol (1966), in a somewhat similar
analysis, described a crisis of values in Ameri-
can life. He asserted that the worst way to
cope with this crisis would be through orga-
nized political and ideological action, but there
is no way to remove the issue from politics.
Because of the cruciality of the problem, people
will turn to politics and will insist upon politi-
cal answers. Consequently, as Kristol remarks,
the immediate future and the “game of polit-
ic” combine to make this a most dangerous
period and a most dangerous game.

It is a dangerous period because it is a
dangerous game. The game is more dangerous
because of the characteristics of the period.
It is a game which, being crucial, the players
on either side cannot afford to lose. It is there-
fore one which arouses political passions.

CHRONOPOLITICS

All of these factors—the cruciality of the
period, the evolving of alternative solutions,
the diversity of choices—accentuate the prob-
lems of political action. It is the nature of the
situation and the perception of it as a “now or
never” crisis which determines—more than any
presumed inherent intolerance or personality
defects of the players—that the game is played
for the highest stakes and that no replay is
allowed. The view of the present as a period
of crucial decisions leads to the politics of
crisis—a form of chronopolitics. Gellner
(1964) pointed out that the critical power
during transitional periods was the power to de-
cide which paths to take, to be the decision-
makers at the vital moments. But if some
critical moments occur only once in history,
there is no seasonal or generational repetition
which would allow the opposition to reverse
the mistakes of the past.

The implications of this statement for a
democratic system are disturbing. In stable
contexts, one can strive for marginal advan-
tages, knowing that defeat is but a temporary
and remediable setback. One can tolerate op-
position and it is not necessary to push every
advantage to its limits; there will be other
chances. But what if there is no stability?
What if there will be no other comparable op-
portunity? What if, since there is no turning
back in history, the current decisions are seen
as the most critical ones? The American sys-
tem has seemed to operate thus far on a vari-
ation of the cyclical pattern of history, a cycle
wherein the turn of the wheel every four years
gives losers another chance. But if things are
changing in such a manner that successive
generations are not interchangeable, if now is
the time for decision, then the temperature of
politics is going to rise. In this view of history,
tomorrow will not be just another day but, in
Gellner's apt phrase, an “other” day. The per-
ception of the present as a “time of transition”
in this sense suggests that those who have con-
trol at this critical time will mold that tomor-
row. Control now will become immeasurably
more important than the illusionary hope of
another turn at the wheel of power. So long
as the road to the future is straight, with no
obvious and important forks appearing, the
turnabout of drivers every four years offers
each political faction a sense of justice and op-
portunity. There is less feeling of felt harm
for there are no irreversible choices appearing.
But if critical forks are appearing in the road,
each leading to a significantly different alter-
ate future, then jockeying to be in the driver's
seat will begin to resemble a true conflict situ-
ation rather than the rotation of dummies at
a bridge table.

The increasing perception of this relation-
ship is a major factor behind the escalation of
the stakes of politics and its development into
the “most dangerous game,” for it brings tradi-
tional politics close to a kind of total politics
in which nothing is barred; e.g., “Extremism in
defense of liberty is no vice! Moderation in
defense of freedom is no virtue!”

These are some of the reasons which help to
explain the growth of “illiberal” or “undemo-
ocratic" authoritarian politics in so-called transitional societies—such as ours. It is not suggested that the "authoritarian personality" is a myth or that other variables of personal and collective psychology are not relevant factors. However, a more sociologically oriented perspective on the structural aspects of time-perspectives and social trends might prove often more illuminating.

SUMMARY

A theory of social change attempts to explain such things as the formation and dissolution of institutions, social orders and their components, and shifts in social attitudes which maintain social interaction. The struggle of intrasocietal groups to change and to resist change of some aspect of culture or society comprises much of the history of a society. This paper has indicated how certain attitudes toward time and toward the nature of change lead to a form of "chronopolitics." Apparently strong relationships exist between "extremist" forms of political behavior and "temporocentrism," the judging of events from a limited time-perspective. Some perspectives treat social development as an inevitable part of the natural order while others view change as more accessible to human will. The present as a "time of transition" can be seen as a time during which epoch-making decisions can still be made which will lead a society to a certain type of future. "Transition" can also be understood as the intervening period between two stages of a predetermined sequence of events in which social trends provide the connecting links between sequential stages. The view of the present as a period of crucial decisions leads to a politics of crisis. A view of change as inevitable development with a perceived direction tends to impose a perceived task of acceptance and implementation. In one case, basic decisions are being made; in the other, basic decisions have been made and only fruition of their implications can be expected. If the crucial power in transition periods is the power to decide which of the alternate futures to seek, the crucial skill in coping with social trends will be social engineering. In the first case, the quest for power will be intensified as the need for control during the crucial period is recognized. Extremism can thus be seen as a product of situational factors rather than as a derivative of psychological tendencies. But if the significant decisions have been made, as implied in the concept "social trend," the problems of politics will be quite different. The facts needed to sustain a "trend" are of a different kind than those needed to support a case for radical change. In the first instance, the technicalities of adjustment will be stressed. In the second instance, questions of a fundamental nature will be relevant. The problem is significant at several levels of sociological theory and social practice—community development, origins of social movements, problems of emerging societies, and the social psychology of social trends.

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DIFFERENTIAL TRENDS TOWARD EQUALITY BETWEEN WHITES AND NONWHITES*

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ABSTRACT

The confusion as to whether nonwhites are moving toward equality with whites in various areas can be resolved by the use of an equality index which is a measure of the amount of overlap between two percentage distributions. The El is the complement of the index of dissimilarity but the El has the advantages of easier calculation and of positive directionality. Relative to comparisons of central tendency and most other indexes, the El has the advantages of applying to ordinal as well as interval data, of having less sensitivity to the influence of extreme cases and of reflecting general changes in the distributions. The El shows that nonwhites have made substantial progress toward equality in income, education, occupation, weeks worked, and quality of housing. Mortality shows little or no movement toward equality since 1960 and marital status has moved away from equality since 1950.

There has been considerable doubt as to whether nonwhites are actually moving toward equality with whites in the various sectors of our society. The Moynihan Report (1965) concluded that the Negro American world is moving toward "massive deterioration of the fabric of society and its institutions." President Johnson (1965) asserted that "For the great majority of Negro Americans—the poor, the unemployed, the uprooted and the dispossessed... the walls are rising and the gulf is widening." Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) state specifically "It is a stark reality that the black communities are becoming more and more economically depressed." Pettigrew (1964) concludes that the absolute gains of Negroes are "pale when contrasted with current white standards." Yet most of the available statistics show that Negroes are making substantial progress in most fields.

Part of the confusion is caused by the fact that no one has systematically applied a standard index of equality to all the various kinds of statistics available in order to measure trends in equality. There have been many studies which summarize the statistics on the status of Negroes at one point in time (U.S. Department of HEW, 1965; Broom and Glenn, 1967; Glenn and Bonjean, 1969; Price, 1968; Duncan and Duncan, 1969; U.S. Department of Labor, 1966; U.S. Office of Education, 1966; Fein, 1965; Siegel, 1965; Farley and Taeuber, 1968; Moynihan, 1965; Pettigrew, 1964) and some