

SUMMARY

Theories of Conflict vs. Theories of Consensus: An Obstacle for Development?

By Erik Allardt

The author takes up the issue that has often been referred to in methodological and theoretical discussions of political science and sociology during this decade: the distinction between and contraposition of the theories of conflict and consensus. He indicates that this distinction does not refer to the negation of the existence of conflict by theorists of consensus, on the one hand, and of consensus by theorists of conflict, on the other. The antagonism centers around what is the most fruitful strategy of theory formation.

The basic assumptions of the theorists of conflict are usually: 1) Society consists of groups representing conflicting interests. 2) Society is tied together by power and force. Some groups make others work in their interest. 3) Society changes when the allocation of power changes.

The basic assumptions of the theorists of consensus are usually: 1) In every society there is institutional behaviour. 2) Societies exist because some norms, values and authority relationships are felt to be legitimate. 3) Some social institutions are universal.

The author remarks that generally the former has been considered radical and the latter conservative. He traces the historical development of these theories and finds the time now ripe for a synthesis.

Both conflict and consensus theory can bring valuable ideas to social science. Marx' idea about the structure of society as the main cause of conflicts and his position on consensus or the lack of consensus in capitalist society are such ideas. In the same way the fact that Durkheim stresses the importance of institutions in forming societies and also changing them, is worth noticing.

Conflict and consensus theorists often study the same problems. For example, both Marx on Tocqueville studied the interrelationship between power and equality in society. Their ultimate conclusions were naturally different.

Some of the disputes between conflict and consensus theorists are due to the fact that empirical questions have been mixed with methodological rules. For example, Dahrendorf argues that Parsons tries to explain changes in society with given or already existing structures. According to him there are no given structures. But Parsons operates with a given model, and all explanations that build on general theory are of this kind. Probably Dahrendorf means unique structural changes but these cannot be explained by a general theory, but only historically.

Conflict and consensus theories can also be complementary. For example, Mills defines power as a goal and Parsons defines it as a mean. But power is both a mean and a goal.

Lenski has argued for a synthesis between these theories: his »theory» is a system of sentences which collect the empirical findings as economically as possible. Dahrendorf does not think these theories can be connected; but his »theory» is a system of recommended concepts and dimension for the study of society. A synthesis seems possible if we think of theory in the Lenskian sense.

The Functional Problems of Social Science as a Scientific Community

By Veronica Stalte Heiskanen

During the last decades both sociologists and political scientists have increased their interest and participation in so-called *action research*, wherein elements of both applied and pure research become merged. Both *Merton* and *Parsons* have suggested some relatively unchanged institutional imperatives for science. This has become debatable; e.g. the value-free orientation of scientists has been condemned and there has been a demand for a more committed science. This illustrates the necessity and novelty of selfexamination in the social sciences. The author's approach is one step toward this self-examination of some of the implications of action research in social science. Parson's AGIL scheme is here used as a paradigm. All the functional problems can be divided into an internal and external dimension.

The internal integrative problems are those of tension within the disciplines, the external those of conflict of interests, or to whom a social scientist owes his primary obligations, is it science, society or the »client».

The internal adaptive problems of social science concern the adequacy of research tools and problems studied. The cognitive relation between policy makers and scientists, the financial problems of science are both external adaptive problems.

The internal goal attainment problems concern the contribution of research to the body of scientific knowledge. Here a distinction between applied and pure research confuses two dimensions. One is the origin of the problem: it may be »field induced» or come from »autonomous sources». The second dimension refers to the contribution made to science. The external problems of goal attainment concern the contributions of science to the actual solution or clarification of the problems or needs of the larger system.

The internal problem of latency focuses on the expansion of scientific knowledge and the training of a future generation of scientists. What is a healthy balance between applied and basic research and how shall we motivate young sociologists and for what? The external problem concerns the continuance of the acceptance and utilization of social science knowledge by society. This depends to a large extent on the credibility of the discipline.

This article has been aimed to at clarifying the problems that should be studied. Our empirical knowledge in this field is still very limited.