

II

ZDENĚK STRMIŠKA

ON SOME ASPECTS OF A GENERAL SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY OF CHANGE (A THEORETICAL CONCEPT)

The Sociological Institute of the
Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences

1. The Conception of Change in the Present Sociological Theory

The questions of social change have constantly represented one of the crucial axes of sociological problems. Contemporary sociology has also brought forth many very valuable results in this respect. However, on its most general level the sociological theory of change has encountered a rather queer fate.

In the older, and to a large degree also in the newer, functionalist conceptions, the change has not been assigned an identical status in social reality nor in sociological theory as the inertia of social processes. Parson's conception of the social system of the fifties is very typical of such an approach. The change is for Parsons an essentially negative fact in the sense of a deviation of empirical reality from general theoretical propositions; accordingly, the concept of change has the character and status of a residual category. It stands to reason that such a conception of change has serious consequences for both the total character of the sociological theory and the nature of its effects on social practice.

Thus no theory of change exists for Parsons in the form of a theoretical or empirical-theoretical system. However, it does not exist for him even on the level of an analytical theory, i. e. on the level of description, analysis and classification, of mechanisms which bring it about. This characteristic is partly valid for later Parson's¹ writings, too, though problems of social change and development get into the focus of his attention and he arrives at some valuable results therein. His new evolutionist orientation develops on a much less general level. There are still discontinuities between the two phases and levels of his work or — to say it downright — a still unmastered gap between the level of his "general theory of action" and that of the "evolutionary perspectives of society". To my

¹ T. Parsons, and E. A. Shils: *Toward a General Theory of Action*, 1951, p. 232.

mind this gap cannot be bridged over without an explicit revision and reinterpretation of some general starting-points of his theory which — though in agreement with his conception of “social system” — do not correspond to his “evolutionary perspectives”.

An opposite extreme is represented by conceptions for which change is the only and exclusive reality or, at least, a usual, “normal” state of affairs which can be disturbed by exceptional circumstances only. Thus for Dahrendorf² change is omnipresent and natural so that its very existence requires no theoretical explanation. It is evident that his conception does not solve the problem of change, but tends to declare it to be nonexistent, at least on the general theoretical level.

The contemporary structuralism, chiefly French structuralism, also arrives at a negation of both the general and specific sociological theory of change, although its starting-points and goals differ considerably from the two preceding “negations”. L. Sébag³ limits the sociological theory to the structural method investigating structural patterns of the spheres of social life, the process of historical change is assigned to the historiographic description and analysis which takes them as concrete and unique. In essence the structuralists do not admit general regularities, the less so general structural patterns, of the historical process. We think to express the fundamental meaning of Bláha's sociological approach, and of ours as well, when we say that the change and inertia of the social process are inseparable sides of social reality, that they are both real, that they are both component parts of a variety expressing the fundamental alternatives of the behaviours of social systems, that both are manifestations of identical mechanisms in social systems; in brief: they are entitled to occupy identical statuses in the sociological theory.

2. Sources of change

1. Internal and External Sources of Change

In a part of sociological theory the tendency has prevailed to explain social change primarily or exclusively as the effect of the environment. The latter includes nature as its part; newer theories usually lay stress on other components of the milieu of the social system as sources of social change; according to them, the surrounding environment of the social system is composed, beside natural factors, of other “systems of action” or other component parts of the totality of the human world, especially of human personality and culture which, in a certain sense, can be considered as external to the social system.

In spite of this onesided emphasis and absolutization of nature as source of social change in the past, in principle it is not incorrect to seek the clue of social-cultural changes in the changes of natural surroundings. The process of anthropogenesis or of neolithic revolution and the origin of the first great civilizations could not be explained without taking into account the changes of natural surroundings. Changes in personality (e. g. of motivation, orientation) and in

² R. Dahrendorf: *Essays in the Theory of Society*, p. 127.

³ L. Sébag: *Marxisme et Structuralisme*, 1964, esp. pp. 87–128.

culture as well are undoubtedly of great importance as to the explanation of evolutionary processes, although they cannot be taken to be independent of the functioning and development of the social system to such a degree as in the case of changes in nature. For the changes in the system of personality or culture are as rule effected or conditioned by an interaction between them and the social system and, accordingly, they can be both external and internal to the social system.

Although both the natural and cultural environments have important roles in the genesis of social change we cannot abstract from general nor specific traits of the social system when explaining the process of interaction between them, and the change issuing therefrom, because the social system determines the resulting change. The less are we entitled to consider every social change as external, although we do not overlook that the social system is an open system the functioning of which is unthinkable without a mutual exchange of elements and without various forms of interaction between it and the environment. Let us say directly that the conception of social change as exclusively external to the social system points to helplessness as to the explanation of it and often has the character of a logical circle: The explanation of the source of change is pushed aside and transposed into systems which are not subjects of analysis as systems.

The influences of the milieu (natural, psychological or social-cultural) can be different in character. In some cases the social change is the effect or result of the change of the milieu. In other cases specific traits of the milieu, e. g. natural, enter among the independent variables which explain the change, but as mere limitative conditions. Thus, for instance, a constant influence of an unchanging milieu can represent a certain stream of information the content of which does not change, which is, however, processed and utilized on various levels in different manners. The very time of this influence is one of the variables on which the way of processing and synthesizing the information and the corresponding practical activities depend. The influence of the external milieu is a condition, or one of the conditions, of change here, although it remains relatively unchanged itself. When explaining broad classes of changes we can abstract from the influence of nature, we can take it as just existent and irrelevant for the explanation of the investigated changes if this influence has a "usual character" and does not exceed the given limits.

From the above consideration follows that the interaction between the system and the milieu, which is always a condition of its functioning, contradicts in no way the conceptual distinction between the internal and external sources of change; the reduction of one type of change to the other type is thus entirely illegitimate. The relation of both types of changes can differ for different types of social systems and subsystems and their stages of development. The problem of predominance of one or the other type of sources of change cannot be solved on the level of general sociological theory. The thesis of the internal sources of changes as primary in importance for the development of the social system is justified and correct on a specific level in some social systems or subsystems functioning in certain conditions; on a general level it is justified only with respect to the totality of the human world, of social-cultural reality.

2. *Directedness of Action and Social Change*

By the directedness of actions we understand selective relations of actors to a series of alternative changes which can be effected by their actions. The directedness of a certain specific action is determined mainly by its relation to the goal state at which the action aims or which it attains. The concepts of need, interest, aspiration express the directedness of the action as to sources of action; the concepts of goals, values etc. express the anticipated states at which the action aims. The concept of function characterizes the directedness of action especially with respect to objective effects of the action, although it implies tendencies of processes to attain such effects. Some important variants of the above concepts can imply, in a certain relation, a combination of elements which are related with various dimensions of directedness. In some concepts is rather manifest the aspect of the state of the subject, in others the aspect of the state of the object as the point of reference of a certain directedness.

The directedness of action is undoubtedly a complex "many-factorial" reality the resulting shape of which is determined by a complex of influences of many "deterministic" systems. Of decisive importance for the explanation of the directedness of action is the regulation of social activities; from the point of view of a social system it represents a certain synthesis and more or less unified expression of various needs, interests, evaluations and of other functional concerns. Social regulation can explain the concrete form of any action in part only, because the latter is also determined by the conditions of the situation and by a series of personality influences. In the present connection we propose to concentrate on the problem of institutionalized regulations controlling the directedness of action.

Our first problem is the character of the effects of "institutionalized patterns" which implies some indispensable degree of maintaining such patterns for the functioning of the social system, if we express these effects alternatively in terms of the maintenance of the existing state and in terms of the social change. Firstly, we shall present a phenomenological analysis of the action orientation in which the influence of regulative norms controlling the directedness of actions is manifested very directly. Already a superficial analysis shows that various types of regulations control the action orientation as far as their different effects with respect to the inertness or change of processes are concerned. Some regulations orient the actor very urgently towards keeping up the existing state. Others directly encourage the attainment of social change. A great part of social regulations require either the preservation of the existing state or its change in dependence on certain conditions. The inertia or change are alternative answers justified in various contexts. The changes called forth in social reality may bring about changes of regulations themselves; such changes occur on various levels in various forms and are of different importance for the functioning of the social system and its development. Even this process of transformation of regulations can be investigated on the level of the action orientation.

Some complexes of regulations tend to a maximal preservation of the existing state; social activity in the sense of these regulations means the preservation or reproduction of what exists. A concrete type of such action is traditional action in which tradition is the source, the mechanism of the handing over of certain culturally determined forms of behaviour from one generation to the other as

well as the criterion of the rightness of the behaviour. It relies in a system of regulations which define precisely the process and the aim of the action. Traditional action is known to be one of the central categories of Max Weber,⁴ one of his ideal types of social action. For Max Weber traditional behaviour is determined predominantly by its habitualized character, i. e. by the mental mechanism which mediates it. But although there exist some connections between traditional behaviour and psychological mechanisms which mediate it, it is not exhausted by them. Traditional action is a type of functioning of the social system and actually means a negation of social change or, at least, its minimization.

In other words the "keeping up of patterns" is realized here on the level of a homeostatic system the functioning of which brings about the renewal and preservation of certain states of the system, as a well as a full preservation of the given system of norms which guide the functioning of the system.

Other systems of regulations express explicitly or implicitly general principles which are applied in specific ways to the regulation of behaviour. Thus such regulations do not define all aspects of behaviour, but only general goals and tendencies of actions and principles for the choice of means. These general principles cannot be fully materialized in practice in all their aspects, they only make possible different levels of approach each of which can be transcended and overcome anew. Generalized regulative norms allow an "open" control of social actions which creates a rather large space for social change. To make the control of action definite and effective, the contents of these general regulations are placed into a system of specific norms which can and must be changed if, in changed conditions, another norm expresses the superordinated general principle in a better way. The generalized open control of social actions places the general directedness of action into concrete goals of practical activity which is, however, the sphere of competence of the initiative of individual persons who act in the frame and on the basis of valid social norms. The generalized open control of social activities can refer to (1) the choice of means or (2) the manner of setting the aims of social actions.

*

In the functioning of a social system we encounter a constant tension between the goals and means of action. It is most apparent when the choice of means is determined by a more precise and distinct and, because of that, reliable criterion of the choice of means. Such a criterion allows a rational choice between various or alternative means and ways of attaining a certain goal as to their degrees of suitability or advantage. As an example may serve the respective "costs of production". To compare them is much easier than the comparison of alternative institutional solutions of any problem of social organization as to suitability. The criteria of progress and innovation can be ascertained more easily, while in other spheres they are estimated according to their mediated effects, very often economic, although even non-economic spheres of social life have specific criteria of their own to be used when their phenomena and changes are evaluated. And also "economic" regularities of social action as treated by elementary economics

⁴ M. Weber: *Social and Economic Organization*, 1964, p. 116.

have a general importance for action as such and can be generalized for all social spheres as is done by praxeology. On the other hand, the application of economic criteria have their limits too, as shown by cultural anthropology and its studies of "primitive" people.

The relation of goals and means presents one of the main axes of the process of rationalization and is, accordingly, one of permanent sources of social change. Its solution is a specific case of the solution of a functional conflict as will be seen later on. On the other hand, the solution of this conflict goes side by side with a tendency to functional optimization, as requested by the "economy" of action.

*

An open or directional control of social action refers to the manner of setting goals too. Though its elements can be found in all types of societies, it is characteristic of modern dynamic societies.

Their dynamics is determined by various causes and circumstances. Of cardinal importance is that modern societies have created institutional mechanisms of regulation and organization of human energies with view of attaining their goals. Simultaneously their dynamics supposes and involves an increase of needs and a chain setting of new goals of action. The genesis of new "productive forces" in the broadest sense of the word and the genesis of new forms of directedness presuppose each other and are products of mutual influence. Without discussing the "primary" or "secondary" role of either we can say that each level of development is a product of an interaction of both on the preceding level. The value orientation is a mediated synthetic expression of the directedness of men. It refers to a wide display of needs of individual persons, groups and social wholes, it generalizes their needs, organizes, stratifies and expresses them in a system form. Simultaneously, it expresses — though sometimes in different ways — fundamental human needs, the importance of which is testified by a long historical experience, and developmental tendencies and needs of the development of society. The value orientation manifests some new needs or tendencies the importance of which can prove problematic in the future development of social life. The value orientation can transcend existing realities and anticipate changes. But it cannot sum up nor express all these realities without more or less strong subjective elements as to both personality and culture of which it is a part.

The value orientations of modern societies are of a very generalized character and imply a directive setting of goals which can be translated in a string of successive tasks. Such goals are not exhausted by the implementation of any of these partial tasks, but transcend them and preserve a relatively permanent validity with respect to the transitoriness of these tasks. Such a value is e. g. "the control of nature" or "the control of social processes", "liberty" or "wealth" or "power". The specific character of the value orientation of modern societies is manifest in the specific way of their institutionalization which fact is often neglected by sociological theory. Some value orientations are institutionalized in the social system in the sense that they are materialized and incorporated in it; others are anchored in it as expectations to be brought into effect in further action, and the satisfaction of such expectations means a change of the existing realities. In other words, such value orientations open space for social change, represent an orientation to change and a challenge to bring it into effect, and on the level

of social regulation represent directly an instrument of change. Value orientations of a certain type can be parts of sources of change which, however, depends in its realization on further sources and conditions.

To sum up: Social regulation can be in various relations to social change. Institutionalized regulations controlling the directedness of action imply culturally determined actional depth tendencies as well as their reflected manifestations which express them and mediate their influence and operation. Some types of social regulation prevent change, others bring it forth. The source of change can be found in social regulation itself, or to be more exact: in some of its types. The meaning of our analysis was to show that the existence and influence of a system of social regulation does not mean that the functioning of a social system is limited to the level of homeostatic processes, but on the contrary, that the influence of a system of regulation of a certain type is one of the sources of the development of the social system.

3. Action as an Objective Process. The Structure of Processes of Action as the Source of Social Change.

The study of action orientations is very relevant for the analysis of social change because it shows aspects of institutionalized mechanisms effecting change. However, in itself it is not sufficient for the study of social change. A phenomenological study of the action orientation cannot explain the forms of its dependence on other conditions of social reality. Besides, (1) an action orientation expresses merely a part of the regulation of action and (2) social change is the resultant of an objective process of action and is produced by its functional effects on the system as a totality. As a rule, these effects imply, but simultaneously transcend, the aspects contained in the action orientation. In systems of actions new qualities and new variables of an emergent character originate. The patterns of the functioning of the system cannot be fully derived from the type of action orientation which they imply neither need the direction of influence of such systems of action be identical with the direction determined by the action orientation.

Thus social action is not only "a system of action orientations", it is an objective process deciding on whether or not the intended change will be brought about. The source of change should be predominantly sought for in the structure of action itself, conceived of as a process of change of the subjective into the objective, as practice, as "objective", i. e. toward objective world oriented "human sense activity" in Marx's sense. Every action is essentially an interference with the objective reality and a change of some of its aspects. Some types of action can mainly have the character of a reversible process which is continually repeated in action when the effects of action, or its objectively bound products, in their nature and scope correspond to those components of action structure which have been worn out in the action process, and replace them. Traditional behaviour represents to a large degree such a type of action. Such an action is not a process of change in the sense of the rise of something qualitatively new, i. e. in the sense of an evolutionary change. The evolutionary change (change in the real sense) supposes such action results or products which transcend the "consumption" of the action process itself while these products can enter the structure of further actions and change, to a degree, their course and results. In its essence is change

cumulative in both quantitative and qualitative sense, it produces products which are preserved, multiplied in the process of action and which represent elements through the fusion, connection and combination of which new realities and changes arise on a higher qualitative level than in the case of "surplus-products" of particular, unconnected actions. If simple economic reproduction is the model of an inert process, then the "enlarged reproduction" is the model of change, of course when we keep in mind that change can have both progressive and regressive character, that it can be determined by the production of „surplus-products" and of lower "value", than is the value of the components, consumed in the process of action. Besides, in the process of social change not only objectified products form a relevant component of action structure, but any results or effects do it including the effects of actions of men themselves.

Thus the process of social change is determined and, to a large degree, shaped, by the framing of mechanisms of attaining goals which give the activity new potentialities for its creative effort. If economy has its mechanism of enlarged reproduction and other mechanisms, other spheres of social life have too their institutionalized means which organize activities on higher levels of "productivity". Very important mechanisms guiding social change are those of regulating and controlling nature which allow to "test", compare and evaluate processes of inertia and processes of innovation in their mutual relations.

Social regulation in traditional societies seems to limit the space for social changes because such societies have at their disposal no satisfactory means of distinguishing between a progressive change from a change which could mean regression or disorganization. Whilst modern societies dispose of such more or less perfect mechanisms. One of them is a large generalization of values in various spheres of social life; these generalized values become standards and criteria of a large display of values and allow the circulation of values in various subsystems and, in a sense, in the social system as a totality. Such a generalized value and standard of values is money in the economic sphere or the citizens' support of political programmes in elections in the political sphere. Both mechanisms serve as a means of testing certain forms of behaviour, especially of some innovations. Some work predominantly automatically (i. e. market mechanisms); others can be organized by a more or less intentional social activity and work up information which is intentionally "passed round" to make the working of these mechanisms possible. In all cases the working of these mechanism depends on a general programme which is "put in" and which can differ in its character and bring about different results. Under certain conditions a new systematic deviation can arise between the direction of their action and the expected or assumed function. Thus market mechanisms can test results of production from the standpoint of demand instead of from the standpoint of the needs of society.

Consequently society faces the task of improving such controlling mechanisms and the task to control them in order to prevent shortcomings they might cause. Which does not mean that they would be unnecessary. On the contrary, there is evidence that social regression would ensue as a result of their abolition, unless they were replaced by better mechanisms of control.

In this chapter we intended to show that one of the sources of social change is the very structure of activity as an objective process, its potentiality to attain "surplus-products", its liability to create complex action systems which multiply the possibilities of men to attain their goals and to set new goals on this basis.

4. *Functional Contradiction, Tension and Change*

When treating social activity as an objective process the problem of function arises which expresses the direction of the process to a certain effect and the attainment of such an effect. The above potentialities of activities are from this point of view a matter of the possibility of an activity to attain a functional effect of a certain nature and to organize these effects in a way raising the productivity of action. For the general theory is of importance (1) that an activity is functionally determined and (2) that every functional process has, as a rule; both functional and disfunctional effects to a certain degree. Beside the regulations controlling the goal directedness of the system and beside objective potentialities of activities, a systematic production of effects of this twofold type and their cumulative character represent the third fundamental source of social change.

We are convinced that this connection of functional and disfunctional relations in the social system is of a key importance for the theory of change, even to such a degree that it is impossible to understand it, unless the relation of functional and disfunctional aspects in the functioning of the social system is taken into account. A onesided absolutization of either functional or disfunctional aspects is characteristic for both functional and conflictual conceptions. Conflictual conceptions overlook the fact that the contradiction of processes can arise only when there are functioning systems with goal states to which men direct their actions. From this point of view we wish to designate our approach to the problem of the theory of change as structural-functional. At the same time — and therein will our approach substantially differ from functional conceptions — we cannot overlook the fact that man through his action enters a series of various systems the goal states of which agree or disagree in different degrees and that he solves simultaneously the problem of the relation of these systems through his action. Sociological theory cannot solve the question of complex relations between systems and subsystems of activities in a general way and of the social system specifically, if it proceeds from a theoretical supposition of their full integration and explains empirical reality as a deviation from this theoretical proposition. Sociological theory should be interested in the differential aspect which is substantial here. We have in mind various types of relations between the so-called unsatisfactorily integrated systems or subsystems, because they substantially differ in dependence on the total type of social system and on various phases of its development. Functional relations between systems and subsystems cannot be explained only per analogiam with functional relations in the organic world.

The goal states of a subsystem are not unequivocally submitted in all their aspects to the goal states of the whole; they are relatively autonomous and not reducible. In some aspects they are a specification and concretization of goal states of the whole, in other aspects they are independent and free goals in themselves. If these goal states of the subsystem are in conflict with those of the system, it does not always mean that such a deviancy represents an “anomaly” which should be set right by the subsystem’s submitting adaptation to the system. The dependence between the system and subsystem in the social reality is more complex and is mutual. If on a given level subsystems are bound in their functioning by their functional dependence on the whole, the system is in

its development dependent on the changing character of its parts and its development manifests a tendency to create a new unity which would express the changed character of the parts and their relations in a more adequate way. In other words, interactions of the system and subsystem include an active influence of the change of another subsystem and its own adaptation — on both sides. That is the reason why in social reality it is not possible to explain functional relations according to a biological model. If functional contradictions between the subsystem and the system in an organism mean an anomaly or disease, such contradictions in social life are — or at least some of them are — not only “normal” and “natural”, but they are also a progressive fact which allows a movement of the society in which the social system constantly adapts itself to the subsystems. Functionalism forgets this complexity of relations between subsystems and the many-dimensionality of functional relations issuing therefrom.

A functional contradiction can arise inside any system or in the relation of systems in interaction; it arises when the goal-directed behaviour calls forth together with the process of aiming at the goal, a direct or indirect distancing of the system from another of its goals, which implies a deterioration of conditions for this other goal state. Such a contradiction originates functional interference of the process in relation to various goal states of the system or of others connected with it. The contradiction can be solved either through a functional adaptation of goals which is possible or expedient in some cases only. Usually it is solved by a more or less wide and penetrating reorganization of behaviour or by a direct structural change in the system which gives the possibility of doing away with the structural interference of processes and of attaining goals which are substantial for the functioning systems.

A specific example of such a functional contradiction, or at least of its possibility, is the so-called distributive problem. It arises on the level of interaction which has the character of the exchange of an activity or of its products, as well as on that of the allocation of products produced in human cooperation. It is evident that the exchange of activities can go on according to various rules institutionalized in the given system. Such rules can require a more or less equal or unequal exchange as to the comparable value of exchanged activities and products. In some cases unequal exchange can have a certain functional justification which makes it legitimate; such is the case, for instance, when — in economic terms — the products of complex labour are exchanged for products of simple labour in quantities corresponding to the complexity of labour used. In other cases unequal distribution wants such a functional justification and, accordingly, has the character of a certain “exploitation” when the term is applied in a broader than economic sense so that it refers essentially to all spheres of social interaction.

The difficulties of distribution are more marked when the allocation of products of cooperative activities is concerned. The functional contradiction can arise here on two levels: (a) the manner of allocation contradicts normative rules of allocation either of the social whole or of some of its subgroups or of both; (b) the manner of allocation can be practically in accordance with these normative rules but, in spite of it, it does not satisfy the needs of the members of some groups whether the needs are biologically rooted or have developed historically. Then a series of objective disfunctional effects arise which are manifest in life conditions and behaviour of the members of such groups.

We are aware of the fact that the functional contradiction caused by a certain form of distribution of values in society regularly tends to be manifest on both the above levels in that way at least that the normative substructure of the group has usually a tendency to imply and express objective needs of its members; notwithstanding, from the analytical point of view, the two levels of contradiction are different. If the given form of the distribution of values of whatever character, i. e. of economic values, political power, prestige or social roles, causes disfunctional effects, a contradiction arises which — if of a cumulative character — requires a social solution. The distribution continues to be a problem, even if we point to the true fact that the amount of volume of distributed values in the given sphere is not constant,⁵ but can change and increase, so that the solution of the question of distribution has not — strictly speaking — always the form which could be expressed in the formulation that the surplus of the allocated value for one person is possible then and only then if the value allocated to another person diminishes in the identical volume. It is evident that such a relation is not valid, if we bear in mind absolute volumes of allocated values. The increment of volume of allocated values can only partly help the solution of the problem of distribution in social life, or to be more exact: make possible a partial solution of merely the second aspect of the functional conflict caused by the allocation (our item b). The increase in the volume of allocated values of itself cannot solve the problem of the conflict between the rules of allocation and the manner of allocation, and above all, it cannot solve the problem of the contestation of these rules by members of certain groups.

In other words: no form of the increase of welfare in a certain society needs of itself solve the problem of the necessity of the revision or total change of rules controlling the distribution of these values. Evidence shows that rather a contrary relation is valid. In a society the allocation problem, though most important, represents but one of a number of various sources in which originate conflicts and tensions which are so important for processes of changes of both types: of those of the system and of those in the system.

5. Disfunction, Equilibrium and Change.

However, disfunctional effects can be of different meanings for the course of change which they cause. Small disfunctional effects need not necessarily bring about any change in the system nor stimulate any specific answer to it. The system gets reconciled to them, puts up with them, assimilates them so far as these disfunctional effects do not transcend the limit when they would start to hinder the current functioning of the system. More often is the case when disfunctional effects are immediately taken notice of and the system has to react in order to prevent interference with current activities or, at least, to diminish such an interference. Such disfunctional effects are often described as a disturbance of balance which immediately calls forth processes which would bring about re-equilibration. Social systems are systems with very broad pos-

⁵ It is the question known as the "Zero-Sun-Problem".

sibilities of re-equilibration, but these possibilities are neither unlimited nor inexhaustible. Re-equilibrating processes can be of various characters. In some cases they solve the disfunction in its very roots or, at least, in some of its substantial aspects. Thus, for instance, an increased demand can be a disfunctional process and the corresponding increase in production represents in a sense a re-equilibrating process which solves the disfunction, i. e. removes it. On the other hand, other re-equilibrating processes rather have the character of processes of compensation and do not essentially remove the functional contradiction, but prevent an immediate negative influence of disfunctional processes upon other spheres of the social system. As an example let us quote the tightening up of power controls and sanctions against the members of a group who have been losing inner motivation for action in accordance with group norms. Thus the concept of re-equilibration includes two qualitatively different kinds of social processes. In the system of re-equilibrating processes a special role is played by social control mechanisms, but they are not the only means of re-equilibration.

The concept of equilibrium has been taken over from mechanics and its adaptation to social reality has its difficulties. In an elementary sense this concept expresses the state of rest which is effected by a number of forces which are in balance. In this sense equilibrium is a negation of change. On the level of a social system the equilibrium refers to the continuity of certain patterns by which the functioning of the social system is determined. If the equilibrium designates processes of inertia, it has a homeostatic character. If it expresses dependences of two changing magnitudes we speak of a moving equilibrium.⁶ Smelser defines equilibrium through its three components: variables, the relationship of variables and various categories of given facts which determine the validity of the relationship between the component variables. If the equilibrium were defined through the above three traits only, it would be identical with the concept of the deterministic system (when it includes the probability system). However, not only processes of equilibration, but also those of disequilibration have a deterministic character. The cumulation of unsalable stocks, for instance, or processes of panics are subjected to certain kinds of determinism, yet they could hardly be taken as examples of equilibrium or equilibration. It is a question of equilibrium when the manner of dependence between variables expresses such a relation between elements of activity which makes possible their reproduction and the reproduction of the whole process, i. e. the functioning of the system and the attainment of its goal states. An example of the equilibrium is a certain relation between inputs and outputs of subsystems of a given system which correspond to each other in the sense that they make possible reproduction of the given process whether on an identical, higher or lower, levels. Another example of an equilibrium or re-equilibration is the state or process in which certain disfunctional effects brought forth by the functioning of the system, are arranged or compensated for in a manner which allows the system its further functioning and further attainment of its goals.

If we do not apply the concept of equilibrium to a theoretical problem, to an abstraction of a separated variable, but to an empirical system, the concept of

⁶ N. J. Smelser: *Essays in Sociological Explanation*, 1968, pp. 209 and 221.

equilibrium gets a more complex content. We have seen that the attainment of goals brings forth changes in the system, it brings forth disfunctional effects which prevent further attainments of goals. Some aspects of the system must be changed that the disfunctional effects may be removed or compensated for and the system may go on functioning. The change thus becomes a precondition of the attainment of equilibrium. Here the concept of equilibrium is no negation of the change any longer, but it expresses a certain manner of relationship between the elements of inertia (the attainment of goals, keeping up of fundamental patterns of the system) and those of change which include also changes of some patterns in the system, although this concerns patterns of a lower degree of importance. The change becomes a means of equilibration which is true of a change on the structural level too. From a certain point of view we could take the changes in a system as means of the equilibration of the system. The concept of equilibrium and equilibration in the empirical sense expresses, as a matter of fact, what the concept of a quantitative change expresses in Hegel's dialectic. Social systems differ in the degrees in which they can make use of change for their equilibrium. In some systems even a change on a smaller scale can disorganize the whole system and effect a total change of the system. Other systems can keep up their fundamental patterns, although they can entirely change their relations to the milieu and their internal states including regulations of lower hierarchical levels. The relation between the change and inertia in the maintenance and renewal of the equilibrium appears here as a criterion of differentiation between rigid and elastic systems.

The possibilities of re-equilibration depend on the character of dis-equilibration and on the way in which re-equilibration is attained. If the arising disfunctions in the system are deep and if the re-equilibration has a compensatory character only, any further re-equilibration becomes more and more difficult. From the standpoint of a possibility of re-equilibration we can distinguish a stable, an unstable and even precarious equilibrium. In an empirical system the equilibrium can be irretrievably disturbed and the functioning in accordance with the fundamental patterns of the system made impossible. Under such circumstances the change in the system changes to one of the system. The difference between the two types of change is relative; in some cases the two types of the change can interpenetrate each other, in other cases they may be separated from each other in time.

6. Social System and Sources of Change

In concluding this chapter we shall give a short total view of the place of the change, and especially of its source, in the social system. A social system is created by a system of activities performed by a certain number of people inter-related through their mutual interactions which are included in their activities. Social activities can be performed in three fundamental spheres in which men solve primarily their relation to nature, mutual relations among men and, finally, by their activities secure the development of the spiritual culture or social consciousness and frame relations to each other as to conscious beings. Accordingly, we take as fundamental spheres of social life the material, social and cultural spheres. Through their activities men secure the satisfaction of their

needs as organisms and personalities, and the satisfaction of group needs and of the needs of the global society. The directedness of a social whole can in very different ways synthesize and express the directedness of its subsystems, especially individual and group interests of members of social groups. This difference does not disappear, if we start from the proposition that the goals of the system as a whole and other its determinisms relating to the whole also determine the goals of the subsystem to a large degree. In their social activities men are not only determined by their identification with the social whole and with cultural values which are institutionalized in it, but also — and sometimes predominantly — by their group and personal interests which are formed in dependence on the social structure but express a specific directedness of men as component parts of the social system. Thus the assumption of the integration of the social system excludes in no way the problem of the relation of directedness of the social whole to group and individual interests. The integration of society is not only attained through an identification of men with the social whole and its goals, but simultaneously through an exchange of activities and the products thereof in which men satisfy their specific interests and which, of course, proceed in accordance with the rules institutionalized in the society. The mutual relation of these two sources of integration is determined by the specific character of the socio-cultural system, which is a conclusion issuing already from classical sociological conceptions, e. g. of Durkheim. The third substantial mechanism of integration is the power integration through a system of sanctions which secure the observation of social norms.

If we envisage the social system as a system of processes proceeding according to institutionalized patterns, this means in no way that it is predominantly or exclusively a homeostatic system only. (a) The goals institutionalized in the social system and system mechanisms controlling its directedness orient the members of the system to the attainment of change and induce it constantly. (b) Of fundamental importance for the attainment of change are mechanisms organizing objective potentialities of activities; these mechanisms make possible the creation of system of activities which increase and multiply capabilities of men to attain their goals. (c) The process of attaining the followed up goals in social life is, on the other hand, a process of the rise of tensions between functional and disfunctional effects of activities. This process of the rise of tensions and processes allowing its solution are, therefore, primary among the fundamental sources of social change. Systemic mechanisms which guide the processes of change are, accordingly, mechanisms regulating the directedness of the system, mechanisms regulating objective potentialities of activities and mechanisms regulating tensions of the system. In general terms, these two mechanisms make possible both “the persistence of the state” and social change. On its concrete character, on the relation of the system to its environment and on the state of the system depends whether the answer in the behaviour of the system will be inertia or change. In other words, every system works for both inertia and change. Substantial differences between them consist, however, in the fact that processes of both inertia and change are in different relations in it.

A social system is not only a system enabling a constancy of patterns, but is also a system which implies a certain programme of “learning” and, consequently, a programme of seeking choice and of creating new ways of attaining followed up goals; a social system is finally a system which can change its

goals, transform and frame new goals and formulate general principles for the creation of these goals.⁷

*

In the preceding brief considerations in which we placed change in its natural field, i. e. social system, we were aware again and again that the change and its course are one of the forms in which internal relations, ties and dependences between various parts of the social system assert themselves. The change has its specific source in one of the component parts of the social system and its course which expresses connecting links among these parts; models of ties between subsystems of systems in the sense used in cybernetics can express this very aspect of reality. However, secondary "effects" can be for the functioning of the system as important or, in a certain sense, even more important than their "primary" causes. Genetic connections of phenomena and their functional relations are known to express different and irreducible sides of reality. The change sets operating various forms of social regulation like systems of controls for the processing of information in the cybernetic sense and processes of power struggles which take place in accordance with rules institutionalized in society, but transcend them in some cases. Social regulation levels frame hierarchical systems differing in character and direction in dependence on the type of regulation. In its causes and effects the social change is connected with processes which have "informative" and "energetic" aspects. The tension between functional demands of regulations of both aspects of the processes is manifested in the organization of social life. "The change from below" and "the change from above" express different roles of hierarchical levels of the social structure in projecting, directing and carrying out change; the two forms of change presuppose different manners in structuring informative and energetic processes on various levels of the social structure. We have already stated that all social subsystems have certain levels of dependence which in their most developed form get the character of projected or transposed structures, structural agreements and functional convergencies. Simultaneously, every social subsystem has its levels of relative autonomy or rather originality and this originality and irreducibility is manifested in both its structural and functional aspects. Even this cursory view makes evident that relations between social subsystems in the social structure are multidimensional and cannot be expressed by one dimension of from one standpoint only. Any one-dimensional models of the social structure represent a certain simplification which can be justified so far as the standpoint they express is defined and such models are placed within the totality of the multidimensional social structure. I. A. Bláha seems to have had in mind exactly this view of the social system in his conception of federative functionalism. I should like to interpret Bláha's cautious conception of functional relations in the social system in a rather shifted meaning which does not deny the objective existence of hierarchical dimensions in the social structure and in functional relations of social processes and which, however, does not see the only tie

⁷ In the original paper by Z. Strniska this chapter, published here in a slightly abridged form, is followed by an as extensive chapter on the nature of social change. The limited extent of the present volume made us ask for the author's permission to omit this chapter. The following summing up may give some hints at least as to its contents. Editors' Note

of social processes, the only organizing principle of the social structure in any of the hierarchical dimensions. Anyway, Blaha is right in asserting that very substantial aspects among various social functions cannot be expressed through hierarchical relations which — to my mind — make themselves valid in some aspects. If we abstract from specific relations with which we are concerned, then the general unspecified hierarchization of spheres of social life or social functions is actually only the matter of ideological constructions and evaluations. In the foregoing sense, Blaha's conception of social reality is a challenge for us to a more systematic and deeper investigation of structural and functional dependences in the social system which manifest themselves in its functioning and development

This paper is a preliminary project. Herein I was occupied with some of the questions of social change conceived of as a structural element of the process of development, while the total process of the social development — as a system of changes — has not been the subject of our analysis. I have tried to integrate some aspects of different or even contradictory approaches which are applied in the present sociological theory, especially in the solution of problems of social change; I mean particularly present "functionalist", "systemologic", "structuralist" and "conflictual" conceptions. In my effort at an integrated approach to a general sociological theory of change I also proceeded from a series of stimuli of Blaha's work, especially in those parts where I undertook a critical reinterpretation of the structural-functional theory in its relation to problems of change. I am Blaha's pupil and am aware of his not yet fully appreciated contribution to the development of Czech sociology. If I may be personal I acknowledge with pleasure and gratitude that both in my work and in my personal life I owe much to Professor Blaha's scientific work, his exemplary teacher's work and to his personal influence of a great and pure personality.

K N E K T E R t M A S P E K T t J M O B E C N E S O C I O L O G I C K E
T E O R I E Z M E N Y

(T e o r e t i c k y p r o j e k t)

Po kritickem zhodnoceni teorie funkcionalisticke (T. Parsons), konfliktualisticke (R. Dahrendorf) a strukturalisticke (L. Sebag) autor podava vlastni teorii socialni zmeny. Stojl na stanovisku strukturalne funkcionalisticke, jez vsak se snazi doplnit zfetelem k dynamijnosti socialneho zivota. V torn to smeru vdefii za mnohe podnety i Blahovu dilu. Svou problematiku rozvadi ve dvou kapitolach: zdroje zmeny a povaha zmfiny, z nichz vsak kapitola o povaze zmSny musila byt vzhledem k rozsahu sborniku vypuslSna. V uvahach o zdrojich zmeny pfihlSl autor k vnfijslm a vnitraim zdrojum zmeny, k zamefenosti cinnosti, k cinnostem jako objektivnim procesilm, k [unkenfm rozporum a napfifm. k disfunkcim a rovnovaze a uzavu-A uvahou o socialnim systemu jako zdroji zmeny.