The Contagiousness of Conflict

On a hot afternoon in August, 1943, in the Harlem section of New York City, a Negro soldier and a white policeman got into a fight in the lobby of a hotel. News of the fight spread rapidly throughout the area. In a few minutes angry crowds gathered in front of the hotel, at the police station, and at the hospital to which the injured policeman was taken. Before order could be restored, about four hundred people were injured and millions of dollars' worth of property was destroyed.

This was not a race riot. Most of the shops looted and the property destroyed by the Negro mob belonged to Negroes. As a matter of fact neither the white policeman nor the Negro soldier had anything to do with the riot they had set off; they did not participate in it, did not control it, and knew nothing about it.

Fortunately for the survival of American civilization conflict rarely erupts as violently as it did in the 1943 Harlem riot, but all conflict has about it some elements that go into the making of a riot. Nothing attracts a crowd so quickly as a fight. Nothing is so contagious. Parliamentary debates, jury trials, town meetings, political campaigns, strikes, hearings, all have about them some of the exciting qualities of a fight; all produce dramatic spectacles that are almost irresistibly
fascinating to people. At the root of all politics is the universal language of conflict.

The central political fact in a free society is the tremendous contagiousness of conflict.

Every fight consists of two parts: (1) the few individuals who are actively engaged at the center and (2) the audience that is irresistibly attracted to the scene. The spectators are as much a part of the over-all situation as are the overt combatants. The spectators are an integral part of the situation, for, as likely as not, the audience determines the outcome of the fight. The crowd is loaded with portentousness because it is apt to be a hundred times as large as the fighting minority, and the relations of the audience and the combatants are highly unstable. Like all other chain reactions, a fight is difficult to contain. To understand any conflict it is necessary therefore to keep constantly in mind the relations between the combatants and the audience because the audience is likely to do the kinds of things that determine the outcome of the fight. This is true because the audience is overwhelming; it is never really neutral; the excitement of the conflict communicates itself to the crowd. This is the basic pattern of all politics.

The first proposition is that the outcome of every conflict is determined by the extent to which the audience becomes involved in it. That is, the outcome of all conflict is determined by the scope of its contagion. The number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens; every change in the number of participants, every increase or reduction in the number of participants, affects the result. Simply stated, the first proposition is that the intervention of Cole into a conflict between Able and Bart inevitably changes the nature of the conflict. Cole may join Able and tip the balance of forces in his favor, or he may support Bart and turn the balance the other way, or he may disrupt the conflict or attempt to impose his own resolution on both Able and Bart. No matter what he does, however, Cole will alter the conflict by transforming a one-to-one contest into a two-to-one conflict or a triangular conflict. Thereafter every new intervention, by Donald, Ellen, Frank, James, Emily, will alter the equation merely by enlarging the scope of conflict because each addition changes the balance of the forces involved. Conversely, every abandonment of the conflict by any of the participants changes the ratio.

The moral of this is: If a fight starts, watch the crowd, because the crowd plays the decisive role.

At the nub of politics are, first, the way in which the public participates in the spread of the conflict and, second, the processes by which the unstable relation of the public to the conflict is controlled.

The second proposition is a consequence of the first. The most important strategy of politics is concerned with the scope of conflict.

So great is the change in the nature of any conflict likely to be as a consequence of the widening involvement of people in it that the original participants are apt to lose control of the conflict altogether. Thus, Able and Bart may find, as the Harlem policeman and soldier found, that the fight they started has got out of hand and has been taken over by the audience. Therefore the contagiousness of conflict, the elasticity of its scope and the fluidity of the involvement of people are the X factors in politics.

Implicit in the foregoing propositions is another: It is extremely unlikely that both sides will be reinforced equally as the scope of the conflict is doubled or quadrupled or multiplied by a hundred or a thousand. That is, the balance of the forces recruited will almost certainly not remain constant. This is true because it is improbable that the participants in the original conflict constitute a representative sample of
the larger community; nor is it likely that the successive increments are representative. Imagine what might happen if there were a hundred times as many spectators on the fringes of the conflict who sympathized with Able rather than Bart. Able would have a strong motive for trying to spread the conflict while Bart would have an overwhelming interest in keeping it private. It follows that conflicts are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight or in excluding it, as the case may be.

Other propositions follow. It is one of the qualities of extremely small conflicts that the relative strengths of the contestants are likely to be known in advance. In this case the stronger side may impose its will on the weaker without an overt test of strength because people are apt not to fight if they are sure to lose. This is extremely important because the scope of conflict can be most easily restricted at the very beginning. On the other hand, the weaker side may have a great potential strength provided only that it can be aroused. The stronger contestant may hesitate to use his strength because he does not know whether or not he is going to be able to isolate his antagonist. Thus, the bystanders are a part of the calculus of all conflicts. And any attempt to forecast the outcome of a fight by estimating the strength of the original contestants is likely to be fatuous.

Every change in the scope of conflict has a bias; it is partisan in its nature. That is, it must be assumed that every change in the number of participants is about something, that the newcomers have sympathies or antipathies that make it possible to involve them. By definition, the intervening bystanders are not neutral. Thus, in political conflict every change in scope changes the equation.

The logical consequence of the foregoing analysis of conflict is that the balance of forces in any conflict is not a fixed equation until everyone is involved. If one tenth of 1 percent of the public is involved in conflict, the latent force of the audience is 999 times as great as the active force, and the outcome of the conflict depends overwhelmingly on what the 99.9 percent do. Characteristically, the potentially involved are more numerous than those actually involved. This analysis has a bearing on the relations between the “interested” and the “uninterested” segments of the community and sheds light on interest theories of politics. It is hazardous to assume that the spectators are uninterested because a free society maximizes the contagion of conflict; it invites intervention and gives a high priority to the participation of the public in conflict.

The foregoing statement is wholly theoretical and analytical. Is there any connection between the theory outlined here and what actually happens in politics? Since theoretically control of the scope of conflict is absolutely crucial, is there any evidence that politicians, publicists, and men of affairs are actually aware of this factor? Do politicians in the real world try to reallocate power by managing the scope of conflict? These questions are important because they may shed light on the dynamics of politics, on what actually happens in the political process, and on what can or cannot be accomplished in the political system. In other words, the role of the scope of conflict in politics is so great that it makes necessary a new interpretation of the political system.

If it is true that the result of political contests is determined by the scope of public involvement in conflicts, much that has been written about politics becomes nonsense, and we are in for a revolution in our thinking about politics. The scope factor overthrows the familiar simplistic calculus based on the model of a tug of war of measurable forces. One is reminded of the ancient observation that the battle is
not necessarily won by the strong nor the race by the swift. The scope factor opens up vistas of a new kind of political universe.

In view of the highly strategic character of politics we ought not to be surprised that the instruments of strategy are likely to be important in inverse proportion to the amount of public attention given to them.\(^1\)

Madison understood something about the relation of scope to the outcome of conflict. His famous essay No. 10 in the *Federalist Papers* should be reread in the context of this discussion.

The smaller the society, the fewer probably will be the distinct parties and interests composing it, the more frequently will a majority be found of the same party; and the smaller number of individuals composing a majority, and the smaller the compass within which they are placed, the more easily they will concert and execute their plans of oppression. Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens.

While Madison saw some of the elements of the situation, no one has followed up his lead to develop a general theory. The question of the scope of conflict is approached obliquely in the literature of political warfare. The debate is apt to deal with *procedural questions* which have an unavowed bearing on the question. The very fact that the subject is handled so gingerly is evidence of its explosive potential.

While there is no explicit formulation in the literature of American politics of the principle that the scope of a conflict determines its outcome, there is a vast amount of controversy that can be understood only in the light of this proposition. That is, throughout American history tremendous efforts have been made to control the scope of conflict, but the rationalizations of the efforts are interesting chiefly because they have been remarkably confusing. Is it possible to reinterpret American politics by exposing the unavowed factor in these discussions?

A look at political literature shows that there has indeed been a *long-standing struggle between the conflicting tendencies toward the privatization and socialization of conflict*. On the one hand, it is easy to identify a whole battery of ideas calculated to restrict the scope of conflict or even to keep it entirely out of the public domain. A long list of ideas concerning individualism, free private enterprise, localism, privacy, and economy in government seems to be designed to privatize conflict or to restrict its scope or to limit the use of public authority to enlarge the scope of conflict. A tremendous amount of conflict is controlled by keeping it so private that it is almost completely invisible. Reference to this strategy abounds in the literature of politics, but the rationalizations of the strategy make no allusion to the relation of these ideas to the scope of conflict. The justifications are nearly always on other grounds.

On the other hand, it is equally easy to identify another battery of ideas contributing to the socialization of conflict. Universal ideas in the culture, ideas concerning equality, consistency, equal protection of the laws, justice, liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and association, and civil rights tend to socialize conflict. These concepts tend to make conflict contagious; they invite outside intervention in conflict and form the basis of appeals to public authority for redress of private grievances. Here again the rationalizations are made on grounds which do not avow any specific interest in an expansion of the scope of conflict though the relation becomes evident as soon as we begin to think about it. Scope is the unlisted guest of honor at all of these occasions.
It may be said, therefore, that men of affairs do in fact make an effort to control the scope of conflict though they usually explain what they do on some other grounds. The way the question is handled suggests that the real issue may be too hot to handle otherwise. We are bound to suppose therefore that control of the scale of conflict has always been a prime instrument of political strategy, whatever the language of politics may have been.

A better understanding of circuitous references to the strategic role of the scope factor may be gained if we examine some of the procedural issues which have been most widely debated in American politics. Do these issues have a bearing on the practical meaning of the scope conflict?

The role of conflict in the political system depends, first, on the morale, self-confidence, and security of the individuals and groups who must challenge the dominant groups in the community in order to raise an opposition.

People are not likely to start a fight if they are certain that they are going to be severely penalized for their efforts. In this situation, repression may assume the guise of a false unanimity. A classic historical instance is the isolation of the Negro in some southern communities. Dollard says of the southern caste system that “it is a way of limiting conflict between the races. . . . Middle class Negroes are especially sensitive to their isolation and feel the lack of a forum in Southern towns where problems of the two races could be discussed.” The controversy about civil rights in connection with race relations refers not merely to the rights of southern Negroes to protest but also to the rights of “outsiders” to intervene.

The civil rights of severely repressed minorities and all measures for public or private intervention in disputes about the status of these minorities become meaningful when we relate them to the attempt to make conflict visible. Scope is the stake in these discussions.

Attempts to impose unanimity are made in one-party areas in the North as well as in the South. Vidich and Bensman describe the process by which the school board in a small town in upstate New York undertakes to control a political situation by limiting conflict. Commenting on the procedures of the board, the authors say that it attempts to deal with critics by making “greater efforts at concealment.” These efforts “result in more strict adherence to the principle of unanimity of decision.”

In a similar situation, in a Michigan village, “the practice of holding secret meetings was defended Monday night by Chester McGonigal, president of the Board of Education at James Couzen’s Agricultural School. Mr. McGonigal said that the Bath school board would continue to hold discussion meetings closed to the public and that only decisions reached would be announced.”

Perhaps the whole political strategy of American local government should be re-examined in the light of this discussion. The emphasis in municipal reform movements on nonpartisanship in local government may be producing an unforeseen loss of public interest in local government. There is a profound internal inconsistency in the idea of nonpartisan local self-government.

In modern times a major struggle over the socialization of conflict has taken place in the field of labor relations. When President Theodore Roosevelt intervened in the coal strike in 1902, his action was regarded by many conservative newspaper editors as an “outrageous interference” in a private dispute. On the other hand, the very words “union,” “collective bargaining,” “union recognition,” “strike,” “industrial unionism,” and “industrywide bargaining” imply a tremendous socialization of a conflict which was once re-
garded as a purely private matter concerning only the employer and the individual workman.

The scope of the labor conflict is close to the essence of the controversy about collective bargaining: industrial and craft unionism, industrywide bargaining, sympathy strikes, union recognition and security, the closed shop, picketing, disclosure of information, political activity of unions, labor legislation, etc. All affect the scale of labor conflict. At every point the intervention of "outsiders," union organizers, federal and state agencies, courts, and police, has been disputed. The controversy has been to a very large degree about who can get into the fight and who is excluded.

Each side has had an adverse interest in the efforts of the other to extend the scale of its organization. Says Max Forrester, "Lately, American employers have been showing a renewed interest in industrywide negotiations as a means of restoring a modicum of industry's 'lost power' at the bargaining table." 68

The attempt to control the scope of conflict has a bearing on federal-state-local relations, for one way to restrict the scope of conflict is to localize it, while one way to expand it is to nationalize it. One of the most remarkable developments in recent American politics is the extent to which the federal, state, and local governments have become involved in doing the same kinds of things in large areas of public policy, so that it is possible for contestants to move freely from one level of government to another in an attempt to find the level at which they might try most advantageously to get what they want. This development has opened up vast new areas for the politics of scope. It follows that debates about federalism, local self-government, centralization, and decentralization are actually controversies about the scale of conflict.

In the case of a village of 1,000 within a state having a population of 3,500,000, a controversy lifted from the local to the state or the national level multiplies its scope by 3,500 or 180,000 times. Inevitably the outcome of a contest is controlled by the level at which the decision is made. What happens when the scope of conflict is multiplied by 180,000? (1) There is a great probability that the original contestants will lose control of the matter. (2) A host of new considerations and complications are introduced, and a multitude of new resources for a resolution of conflict becomes available; solutions inconceivable at a lower level may be worked out at a higher level.

The nationalization of politics inevitably breaks up old local power monopolies and old sectional power complexes; as a matter of fact, the new dimension produces so great a change in the scale of organization and the locus of power that it may take on a semirevolutionary character. The change of direction of party cleavages produced by the shift from sectional to national alignments has opened up a new political universe, a new order of possibilities and impossibilities.

Since 1920 the Negro population of the United States has increased by nearly five million, but nearly all of the increase has been in the northern states. There are now six northern states with a Negro population larger than the Negro population of Arkansas. These migrations have nationalized race relations and produced a new ratio of forces in the conflict over segregation and discrimination. The appeal for help in the conflict is from the 13 percent in the South to the 87 percent outside the South.

Everywhere the trends toward the privatization and socialization of conflict have been disguised as tendencies toward the centralization or decentralization, localization or nationalization of politics.
The question of scope is intrinsic in all concepts of political organization. The controversy about the nature and role of political parties and pressure groups, the relative merits of sectional and national party alignments, national party discipline, the locus of power in party organizations, the competitiveness of the party system, the way in which parties develop issues, and all attempts to democratize the internal processes of the parties are related to the scope of the political system.

The attack on politics, politicians, and political parties and the praise of nonpartisanship are significant in terms of the control of the scale of conflict. One-party systems, as an aspect of sharply sectional party alignments, have been notoriously useful instruments for the limitation of conflict and depression of political participation. This tends to be equally true of measures designed to set up nonpartisan government or measures designed to take important public business out of politics altogether.

The system of free private business enterprise is not merely a system of private ownership of property; it depends even more for its survival on the privacy of information about business transactions. It is probably true that the business system could not survive a full public disclosure of its internal transactions, because publicity would lead to the discovery and development of so many conflicts that large-scale public intervention would be inescapable.

To a great extent, the whole discussion of the role of government in modern society is at root a question of the scale conflict. Democratic government is the greatest single instrument for the socialization of conflict in the American community. The controversy about democracy might be interpreted in these terms also. Government in a democracy is a great engine for expanding the scale of conflict. Government is never far away when conflict breaks out. On the other hand, if the government lacks power or resources, vast numbers of potential conflicts cannot be developed because the community is unable to do anything about them. Therefore, government thrives on conflict. The work of the government has been aided and abetted by a host of public and private agencies and organizations designed to exploit every rift in the private world. Competitiveness is intensified by the legitimation of outside interference in private conflicts. It is necessary only to mention political parties, pressure groups, the courts, congressional investigations, governmental regulatory agencies, freedom of speech and press, among others, to show the range and variety of instruments available to the government for breaking open private conflicts. How does it happen that the government is the largest publisher in the country? Why is everything about public affairs vastly more newsworthy than business affairs are?

The scope of political conflict in the United States has been affected by the world crisis, which has fostered the development of a powerful national government operating on a global scale. Industrialization, urbanization, and nationalization have all but destroyed the meaning of the word "local" and have opened up great new areas of public interest and produced a new order of conflicts and alignments on an unprecedented scale. The visibility of conflict has been affected by the annihilation of space which has brought into view a new world. Universal suffrage, the most ambitious attempt to socialize conflict in American history, takes on a new meaning with the nationalization of politics and the development of a national electorate.

The development of American political institutions reflects the scale of their participation in conflict. The history of the United States Senate illustrates the way in which a public institution is affected by its widening involvement in
national politics. In a series of decisions, the Senate first established the principle that individual senators are not bound by the instructions of state legislatures. Next, the direct popular election of senators has assimilated the Senate into the democratic system. It is noteworthy that the direct election of senators was followed shortly by the abolition of "executive" sessions. Today the Senate is a national institution; its survival as a major political institution has depended on its capacity to keep pace with the expanding political universe.

The history of the Presidency illustrates the same tendency. The rise of political parties and the extension of the suffrage produced the plebiscitary Presidency. The growth of presidential party leadership and the development of the Presidency as the political instrument of a national constituency have magnified the office tremendously. The Presidency has in turn become the principal instrument for the nationalization of politics.

The universalization of the franchise, the creation of a national electorate, and the development of the plebiscitary Presidency elected by a national constituency have facilitated the socialization of conflict. Thus, modern government has become the principal molder of the conflict system.

On the other hand, even in the public domain, extraordinary measures are taken occasionally to protect the internal processes of public agencies from publicity. Note the way in which the internal processes of the Supreme Court are handled, or the way diplomatic correspondence is shielded against public scrutiny, or the manner in which meetings of the President's cabinet are sealed off from the press, or the way in which the appearance of unanimity is used to check public intervention in the internal processes of the government at many critical points. Or note how Congress suppresses public information about its own internal expendi-

tures. Everywhere privacy and publicity are potent implements of government.

The best point at which to manage conflict is before it starts. Once a conflict starts it is not easy to control because it is difficult to be exclusive about a fight. If one side is too hard-pressed, the impulse to redress the balance by inviting in outsiders is almost irresistible. Thus, the exclusion of the Negro from southern politics could be brought about only at the price of establishing a one-party system.

The expansion of the conflict may have consequences that are extremely distasteful to the original participants. The tremendous growth of the Democratic Party after 1932 gave rise to a conflict between the old regular organizations and the newcomers. Why, for example, do the regular organizations prefer to take care of the new party workers in ad hoc organizations such as the Volunteers for Stevenson?

Other tensions within the Democratic party resulted from the increased political activity of labor unions, tensions between the old regular Democratic party organizations and the new political arm of the labor movement. On the other side, a factor in the lack of success of the Republican party in recent years seems to have been the reluctance of the old regular Republican party organizations to assimilate new party workers. At a time when tens of millions of Americans have developed a new interest in politics, the assimilation of newcomers into the old organizations has become a major problem, made difficult by the fact that every expansion of an association tends to reallocate power. Thus the very success of movements creates difficulties.

Is this not true of the labor movement also? Is it not likely that undemocratic procedures in labor unions are related to the attempt of old cadres to maintain control in the face of a great expansion of the membership? The growth of organizations is never an unmixed blessing to the individuals who
first occupied the field. This seems to be true of all growing communities, rapidly expanding suburban communities for another example.

The dynamics of the expansion of the scope of conflict are something like this:

1. Competitiveness is the mechanism for the expansion of the scope of conflict. It is the loser who calls in outside help. (Jefferson, defeated within the Washington administration, went to the country for support.) The expansion of the electorate resulted from party competition for votes. As soon as it becomes likely that a new social group will get the vote, both parties favor the extension. This is the expanding universe of politics. On the other hand, any attempt to monopolize politics is almost by definition an attempt to limit the scope of conflict.

2. Visibility is a factor in the expanding of the scope of conflict. A democratic government lives by publicity. This proposition can be tested by examining the control of publicity in undemocratic regimes. Says Michael Lindsay about Communist China:

It is probably hard for the ordinary citizen of a democratic country to envisage the problem of obtaining reliable information about a totalitarian country. In democratic countries, especially in the United States, policy formation takes place with a good deal of publicity. When one turns to a totalitarian country, such as the Chinese People's Republic, the situation is completely different. All publications are controlled by the government and are avowedly propagandist. Criticism and discussion only appear when the government has decided to allow them. The process of policy formation is almost completely secret.

3. The effectiveness of democratic government as an instrument for the socialization of conflict depends on the amplitude of its powers and resources. A powerful and re-

sourceful government is able to respond to conflict situations by providing an arena for them, publicizing them, protecting the contestants against retaliation, and taking steps to rectify the situations complained of; it may create new agencies to hear new categories of complaints and take special action about them.

Every social institution is affected by the way in which its internal processes are publicized. For example, the survival of the family as a social institution depends to a great extent on its privacy. It is almost impossible to imagine what forces in society might be released if all conflict in the private domain were thrown open for public exploitation. Procedures for the control of the expansive power of conflict determine the shape of the political system.

There is nothing intrinsically good or bad about any given scope of conflict. Whether a large conflict is better than a small conflict depends on what the conflict is about and what people want to accomplish. A change of scope makes possible a new pattern of competition, a new balance of forces, and a new result, but it also makes impossible a lot of other things.

While the language of politics is often oblique and sometimes devious, it is not difficult to show that the opposing tendencies toward the privatization and socialization of conflict underlie all strategy.

The study of politics calls for a sense of proportion; in the present case it requires a sense of the relative proportions of the belligerents and the spectators. At the outset of every political conflict the relations of the belligerents and the audience are so unstable that it is impossible to calculate the strength of the antagonists because all quantities in the equation are indeterminate until all of the bystanders have been committed.
Political conflict is not like a football game, played on a measured field by a fixed number of players in the presence of an audience scrupulously excluded from the playing field. Politics is much more like the original primitive game of football in which everybody was free to join, a game in which the whole population of one town might play the entire population of another town, moving freely back and forth across the countryside.

Many conflicts are narrowly confined by a variety of devices, but the distinctive quality of political conflicts is that the relations between the players and the audience have not been well defined and there is usually nothing to keep the audience from getting into the game.

Notes
1. "The indirect approach is as fundamental to the realm of politics as to that of sex." Liddell Hart, quoted by Al Newman in The Reporter, October 13, 1958, p. 45.
2. John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town, 3d ed., Doubleday and Company, Garden City, 1957, p. 72. See also pp. 208-211 for a discussion of bipartisan arrangements in the South to depress conflict. Dollard discusses the impact of the one-party system on voting participation. Often the argument is made that the Negro would be contented if left alone by outsiders.
3. Vidich and Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society, Princeton, 1958. Members of the board resort to "inchoately arrived-at unanimous decisions in which no vote, or only a perfunctory one, is taken." They "attempt to minimize or avoid crises, and this leads to further demands for unanimity and concealment." pp. 172-173.
4. "There is always the danger that, should an issue come into the open, conflicting parties will appeal to outside individuals or groups or to more important figures in the machine. Public sentiment could easily be mobilized around the issues." p. 127.
5. "In the ordinary conduct of business in this manner, issues and conflict never become visible at the public level. Undisciplined appeals to outside groups which would threaten the monopoly of power of the controlling group do not occur." p. 128. See also p. 133.
7. A classical case is described by John F. Fairbank ("Formosa through China's Eyes," New Republic, October 13, 1958), in terms of Chinese military and diplomatic history. "Contenders for power in traditional China commonly found it essential to utilize the Barbarians, for the latter were powerful fighters though often naïve in politics and easily swayed by their feelings of pride and fear. There is a great body of lore and precedent on this subject in Chinese historical annals. Sometimes the Chinese were out-manipulated by the Barbarians. The Sung Emperors, for example, made a mistake in getting Mongol help against the Jurchen invaders from Manchuria; the Mongols eventually conquered China. Similarly the Manchus stayed to conquer and rule the country."
The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System

The scope of conflict is an aspect of the scale of political organization and the extent of political competition. The size of the constituencies being mobilized, the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the conflicts people expect to develop have a bearing on all theories about how politics is or should be organized. In other words, nearly all theories about politics have something to do with the question of who can get into the fight and who is to be excluded.

Every regime is a testing ground for theories of this sort. More than any other system American politics provides the raw materials for testing the organizational assumptions of two contrasting kinds of politics, pressure politics and party politics. The concepts that underlie these forms of politics constitute the raw stuff of a general theory of political action. The basic issue between the two patterns of organization is one of size and scope of conflict; pressure groups are small-scale organizations while political parties are very large-scale organizations. One need not be surprised, therefore, that the partisans of large-scale and small-scale organizations differ passionately, because the outcome of the political game depends on the scale on which it is played.

To understand the controversy about the scale of political organization it is necessary first to take a look at some theories about interest-group politics. Pressure groups have played a remarkable role in American politics, but they have played an even more remarkable role in American political theory. Considering the political condition of the country in the first third of the twentieth century, it was probably inevitable that the discussion of special-interest pressure groups should lead to development of "group" theories of politics in which an attempt is made to explain everything in terms of group activity, i.e., an attempt to formulate a universal group theory. Since one of the best ways to test an idea is to ride it into the ground, political theory has unquestionably been improved by the heroic attempt to create a political universe revolving about the group. Now that we have a number of drastic statements of the group theory of politics pushed to a great extreme, we ought to be able to see what the limitations of the idea are.

Political conditions in the first third of the present century were extremely hospitable to the idea. The role of business in the strongly sectional Republican system from 1896 to 1932 made the dictatorship of business seem to be a part of the eternal order of things. Moreover, the regime as a whole seemed to be so stable that questions about the survival of the American community did not arise. The general interests of the community were easily overlooked under these circumstances.

Nevertheless, in spite of the excellent and provocative scholarly work done by Beard, Latham, Truman, Leiserson, Dahl, Lindblom, Laski, and others, the group theory of politics is beset with difficulties. The difficulties are theoretical, growing in part out of sheer overstatedness of the idea and in part out of some confusion about the nature of modern government.

One difficulty running through the literature of the subject results from the attempt to explain everything in terms
of the group theory. On general grounds it would be remarkable indeed if a single hypothesis explained everything about so complex a subject as American politics. Other difficulties have grown out of the fact that group concepts have been stated in terms so universal that the subject seems to have no shape or form.

The question is: Are pressure groups the universal basic ingredient of all political situations, and do they explain everything? To answer this question it is necessary to review a bit of rudimentary political theory.

Two modest reservations might be made merely to test the group dogma. We might clarify our ideas if (1) we explore more fully the possibility of making a distinction between public-interest groups and special-interest groups and (2) if we distinguished between organized and unorganized groups. These reservations do not disturb the main body of group theory, but they may be useful when we attempt to define general propositions more precisely. If both of these distinctions can be validated, we may get hold of something that has scope and limits and is capable of being defined. The awkwardness of a discussion of political phenomena in terms of universals is that the subject has no beginning or end; it is impossible to distinguish one subject from another or to detect the bias of the forces involved because scope and bias are aspects of limitations of the subject. It cannot really be said that we have seen a subject until we have seen its outer limits and thus are able to draw a line between one subject and another.

We might begin to break the problem into its component parts by exploring the distinction between public and private interests. If we can validate this distinction, we shall have established one of the boundaries of the subject.

As a matter of fact, the distinction between public and private interests is a thoroughly respectable one; it is one of the oldest known to political theory. In the literature of the subject, the public interest refers to general or common interests shared by all or by substantially all members of the community. Presumably no community exists unless there is some kind of community of interests, just as there is no nation without some notion of national interests. If it is really impossible to distinguish between private and public interests, the group theorists have produced a revolution in political thought so great that it is impossible to foresee its consequences. For this reason the distinction ought to be explored with great care.

At a time when nationalism is described as one of the most dynamic forces in the world, it should not be difficult to understand that national interests actually do exist. It is necessary only to consider the proportion of the American budget devoted to national defense to realize that the common interest in national survival is a great one. Measured in dollars this interest is one of the biggest things in the world. Moreover, it is difficult to describe this interest as special. The diet on which the American leviathan feeds is something more than a jungle of disparate special interests. In the literature of democratic theory the body of common agreement found in the community is known as the “consensus,” without which it is believed that no democratic system can survive.

The reality of the common interest is suggested by demonstrated capacity of the community to survive. There must be something that holds people together.

In contrast with the common interests are the special interests. The implication of this term is that these are interests shared by only a few people or a fraction of the community; they exclude others and may be adverse to them. A special interest is exclusive in about the same way as private property is exclusive. In a complex society it is not surpris-
ing that there are some interests that are shared by all or substantially all members of the community and some interests that are not shared so widely. The distinction is useful precisely because conflicting claims are made by people about the nature of their interests in controversial matters.

Perfect agreement within the community is not always possible, but an interest may be said to have become public when it is shared so widely as to be substantially universal. Thus, the difference between 99 percent agreement and perfect agreement is not so great that it becomes necessary to argue that all interests are special, that the interests of the 99 percent are as special as the interests of the 1 percent. For example, the law is probably doing an adequate job of defining the public interest in domestic tranquility despite the fact that there is nearly always one dissenter at every hanging. That is, the law defines the public interest in spite of the fact that there may be some outlaws.

Since one function of theory is to explain reality, it is reasonable to add that it is a good deal easier to explain what is going on in politics by making a distinction between public and private interests than it is to attempt to explain every-thing in terms of special interests. The attempt to prove that all interests are special forces us into circumlocutions such as those involved in the argument that people have special interests in the common good. The argument can be made, but it seems a long way around to avoid a useful distinction.

What is to be said about the argument that the distinction between public and special interests is “subjective” and is therefore “unscientific”?

All discussion of interests, special as well as general, refers to the motives, desires, and intentions of people. In this sense the whole discussion of interests is subjective. We have made progress in the study of politics because people have observed some kind of relation between the political behavior of people and certain wholly impersonal data concerning their ownership of property, income, economic status, professions, and the like. All that we know about interests, private as well as public, is based on inferences of this sort. Whether the distinction in any given case is valid depends on the evidence and on the kinds of inferences drawn from the evidence.

The only meaningful way we can speak of the interests of an association like the National Association of Manufacturers is to draw inferences from the fact that the membership is a select group to which only manufacturers may belong and to try to relate that datum to what the association does. The implications, logic, and deductions are persuasive only if they furnish reasonable explanations of the facts. That is all that any theory about interests can do. It has seemed persuasive to students of politics to suppose that manufacturers do not join an association to which only manufacturers may belong merely to promote philanthropic or cultural or religious interests, for example. The basis of selection of the membership creates an inference about the organization’s concerns. The conclusions drawn from this datum seem to fit what we know about the policies promoted by the association; i.e., the policies seem to reflect the exclusive interests of manufacturers. The method is not foolproof, but it works better than many other kinds of analysis and is useful precisely because special-interest groups often tend to rationalize their special interests as public interests.

Is it possible to distinguish between the “interests” of the members of the National Association of Manufacturers and the members of the American League to Abolish Capital Punishment? The facts in the two cases are not identical. First, the members of the A.L.A.C.P. obviously do not expect to be hanged. The membership of the A.L.A.C.P. is not re-
stricted to persons under indictment for murder or in jeopardy of the extreme penalty. *Anybody* can join A.L.A.C.P. Its members oppose capital punishment, although they are not personally likely to benefit by the policy they advocate. The inference is therefore that the interest of the A.L.A.C.P. is not adverse, exclusive, or special. It is not like the interest of the Petroleum Institute in depletion allowances.

Take some other cases. The members of the National Child Labor Committee are not children in need of legislative protection against exploitation by employers. The members of the World Peace Foundation apparently want peace, but in the nature of things they must want peace for everyone because no group can be at peace while the rest of the community is at war. Similarly, even if the members of the National Defense League wanted defense only for themselves, they would necessarily have to work for defense for the whole country because national security is indivisible. Only a naive person is likely to imagine that the political involvements of the members of the American Bankers Association and members of the Foreign Policy Association are identical. In other words, we may draw inferences from the exclusive or the nonexclusive nature of benefits sought by organizations as well as we can from the composition of groups. The positions of these groups can be distinguished not on the basis of some subjective process, but by making reasonable inferences from verifiable facts.

On the other hand, because some special-interest groups attempt to identify themselves with the public interest it does not follow that the whole idea of the public interest is a fraud. Mr. Wilson's famous remark that what is good for General Motors is good for the country assumes that people generally do in fact desire the common good. Presumably, Mr. Wilson attempted to explain the special interest of Gen-

eral Motors in terms of the common interest because that was the only way he could talk to people who do not belong to the General Motors organization. *Within* the General Motors organization, discussions might be carried on in terms of naked self-interest, but a *public discussion must be carried on in public terms.*

All public discussion is addressed to the general community. To describe the conflict of special-interest groups as a form of politics means that the conflict has become generalized, has become a matter involving the broader public. In the nature of things a political conflict among special interests is never restricted to the group most immediately interested. Instead, it is an appeal (initiated by relatively small numbers of people) for the support of vast numbers of people who are sufficiently remote to have a somewhat different perspective on the controversy. It follows that Mr. Wilson's comment, far from demonstrating that the public interest is a fraud, proves that he thinks that the public interest is so important that even a great private corporation must make obeisance to it.

The distinction between public and special interests is an indispensable tool for the study of politics. To abolish the distinction is to make a shambles of political science by treating things that are different as if they were alike. The kind of distinction made here is a commonplace of all literature dealing with human society, but *if we accept it, we have established one of the outer limits of the subject; we have split the world of interests in half and have taken one step toward defining the scope of this kind of political conflict.*

We can now examine the second distinction, the distinction between organized and unorganized groups. The question here is not whether the distinction can be made but whether or not it is worth making. Organization has been
described as "merely a stage or degree of interaction" in the development of a group.8

The proposition is a good one, but what conclusions do we draw from it? We do not dispose of the matter by calling the distinction between organized and unorganized groups a "mere" difference of degree because some of the greatest differences in the world are differences of degree. As far as special-interest politics is concerned the implication to be avoided is that a few workmen who habitually stop at a corner saloon for a glass of beer are essentially the same as the United States Army because the difference between them is merely one of degree. At this point we have distinction that makes a difference. The distinction between organized and unorganized groups is worth making because it ought to alert us against an analysis which begins as a general group theory of politics but ends with a defense of pressure politics as inherent, universal, permanent, and inevitable. This kind of confusion comes from the loosening of categories involved in the universalization of group concepts.

Since the beginning of intellectual history, scholars have sought to make progress in their work by distinguishing between things that are unlike and by dividing their subject matter into categories to examine them more intelligently. It is something of a novelty, therefore, when group theorists reverse this process by discussing their subject in terms so universal that they wipe out all categories, because this is the dimension in which it is least possible to understand anything.

If we are able, therefore, to distinguish between public and private interests and between organized and unorganized groups we have marked out the major boundaries of the subject; we have given the subject shape and scope. We are now in a position to attempt to define the area we want to explore. Having cut the pie into four pieces, we can now appropriate the piece we want and leave the rest to someone else. For a multitude of reasons the most likely field of study is that of the organized, special-interest groups. The advantage of concentrating on organized groups is that they are known, identifiable, and recognizable. The advantage of concentrating on special-interest groups is that they have one important characteristic in common; they are all exclusive. This piece of the pie [the organized special-interest groups] we shall call the pressure system. The pressure system has boundaries we can define; we can fix its scope and make an attempt to estimate its bias.

It may be assumed at the outset that all organized special-interest groups have some kind of impact on politics. A sample survey of organizations made by the Trade Associations Division of the United States Department of Commerce in 1942 concluded that "From 70 to 100 percent (of these associations) are planning activities in the field of government relations, trade promotion, trade practices, public relations, annual conventions, cooperation with other organizations, and information services."

The subject of our analysis can be reduced to manageable proportions and brought under control if we restrict ourselves to the groups whose interests in politics are sufficient to have led them to unite in formal organizations having memberships, bylaws, and officers. A further advantage of this kind of definition is, we may assume, that the organized special-interest groups are the most self-conscious, best developed, most intense and active groups. Whatever claims can be made for a group theory of politics ought to be sustained by the evidence concerning these groups, if the claims have any validity at all.

The organized groups listed in the various directories (such as National Associations of the United States, published at intervals by the United States Department of Com-
merce) and specialty yearbooks, registers, etc. and the Lobby Index, published by the United States House of Representatives, probably include the bulk of the organizations in the pressure system. All compilations are incomplete, but these are extensive enough to provide us with some basis for estimating the scope of the system.

By the time a group has developed the kind of interest that leads it to organize, it may be assumed that it has also developed some kind of political bias because organization is itself a mobilization of bias in preparation for action. Since these groups can be identified and since they have memberships (i.e., they include and exclude people), it is possible to think of the scope of the system.

When lists of these organizations are examined, the fact that strikes the student most forcibly is that the system is very small. The range of organized, identifiable, known groups is amazingly narrow; there is nothing remotely universal about it. There is a tendency on the part of the publishers of directories of associations to place an undue emphasis on business organizations, an emphasis that is almost inevitable because the business community is by a wide margin the most highly organized segment of society. Publishers doubtless tend also to reflect public demand for information. Nevertheless, the dominance of business groups in the pressure system is so marked that it probably cannot be explained away as an accident of the publishing industry.

The business character of the pressure system is shown by almost every list available. National Associations of the United States lists 1,860 business associations out of a total of 4,000 in the volume, though it refers without listing (p. VII) to 16,000 organizations of businessmen. One cannot be certain what the total content of the unknown association universe may be, but, taken with the evidence found in other compilations, it is obvious that business is remark-

ably well represented. Some evidence of the over-all scope of the system is to be seen in the estimate that 15,000 national trade associations have a gross membership of about one million business firms. The data are incomplete, but even if we do not have a detailed map this is the shore dimly seen.

Much more directly related to pressure politics is the Lobby Index, 1946–1949 (an index of organizations and individuals registering or filing quarterly reports under the Federal Lobbying Act), published as a report of the House Select Committee on Lobbying Activities. In this compilation, 825 out of a total of 1,247 entries (exclusive of individuals and Indian tribes) represented business. A selected list of the most important of the groups listed in the Index (the groups spending the largest sums of money on lobbying) published in the Congressional Quarterly Log shows 149 business organizations in a total of 265 listed.

The business or upper-class bias of the pressure system shows up everywhere. Businessmen are four or five times as likely to write to their congressmen as manual laborers are. College graduates are far more apt to write to their congressmen than people in the lowest educational category are.

The limited scope of the business pressure system is indicated by all available statistics. Among business organizations, the National Association of Manufacturers (with about 20,000 corporate members) and the Chamber of Commerce of the United States (about as large as the N.A.M.) are giants. Usually business associations are much smaller. Of 421 trade associations in the metal-products industry listed in National Associations of the United States, 153 have a membership of less than 20. The median membership was somewhere between 24 and 50. Approximately the same scale of memberships is to be found in the lumber, furniture, and paper
industries where 37.3 percent of the associations listed had a membership of less than 20 and the median membership was in the 25 to 50 range.\textsuperscript{14}

The statistics in these cases are representative of nearly all other classifications of industry.

Data drawn from other sources support this thesis. Broadly, the pressure system has an upper-class bias. There is overwhelming evidence that participation in voluntary organizations is related to upper social and economic status; the rate of participation is much higher in the upper strata than it is elsewhere. The general proposition is well stated by Lazarsfeld:

People on the lower SES levels are less likely to belong to any organizations than the people on high SES (Social and Economic Status) levels. (On an A and B level, we find 72 percent of these respondents who belong to one or more organizations. The proportion of respondents who are members of formal organizations decreases steadily as SES level descends until, on the D level only 35 percent of the respondents belong to any associations).\textsuperscript{15}

The bias of the system is shown by the fact that even non-business organizations reflect an upper-class tendency.

Lazarsfeld’s generalization seems to apply equally well to urban and rural populations. The obverse side of the coin is that large areas of the population appear to be wholly outside the system of private organization. A study made by Ira Reid of a Philadelphia area showed that in a sample of 963 persons, 85 percent belonged to no civic or charitable organization and 74 percent belonged to no occupational, business, or professional associations, while another Philadelphia study of 1,154 women showed that 55 percent belonged to no associations of any kind.\textsuperscript{16}

A Fortune farm poll taken some years ago found that 70.5 percent of farmers belonged to no agricultural organizations. A similar conclusion was reached by two Gallup polls showing that perhaps no more than one third of the farmers of the country belonged to farm organizations,\textsuperscript{17} while another Fortune poll showed that 86.8 percent of the low-income farmers belonged to no farm organizations.\textsuperscript{18} All available data support the generalization that the farmers who do not participate in rural organizations are largely the poorer ones.

A substantial amount of research done by other rural sociologists points to the same conclusion. Mangus and Cottam say, on the basis of a study of 556 heads of Ohio farm families and their wives:

The present study indicates that comparatively few of those who ranked low on the scale of living took any active part in community organizations as members, attendants, contributors, or leaders. On the other hand, those families that ranked high on the scale of living comprised the vast majority of the highly active participants in formal group activities. . . . Fully two-thirds of those in the lower class as defined in this study were non-participants as compared with only one-tenth of those in the upper class and one-fourth of those in the middle class. . . . When families were classified by the general level-of-living index, 16 times as large a proportion of those in the upper classes as of those in the lower class were active participants. . . .\textsuperscript{19}

Along the same line Richardson and Baunder observe, “Socio-economic status was directly related to participation.”\textsuperscript{20}

In still another study it was found that “a highly significant relationship existed between income and formal participation.”\textsuperscript{21} It was found that persons with more than four years of college education held twenty times as many memberships (per one hundred persons) as did those with less than a fourth-grade education and were forty times as likely to hold office in nonchurch organizations, while persons with
an income over $5,000 hold ninety-four times as many offices as persons with incomes less than $250.\textsuperscript{23}

D.E. Lindstrom found that 72 percent of farm laborers belonged to no organizations whatever.\textsuperscript{23}

There is a great wealth of data supporting the proposition that participation in private associations exhibits a class bias.\textsuperscript{24}

The class bias of associational activity gives meaning to the limited scope of the pressure system, because *scope and bias are aspects of the same tendency*. The data raise a serious question about the validity of the proposition that special-interest groups are a universal form of political organization reflecting *all* interests. As a matter of fact, *to suppose that everyone participates in pressure-group activity and that all interests get themselves organized in the pressure system is to destroy the meaning of this form of politics*. The pressure system makes sense only as the political instrument of a segment of the community. It gets results by being selective and biased; *if everybody got into the act, the unique advantages of this form of organization would be destroyed, for it is possible that if all interests could be mobilized the result would be a stalemate.*

Special-interest organizations are most easily formed when they deal with small numbers of individuals who are acutely aware of their exclusive interests. To describe the conditions of pressure-group organization in this way is, however, to say that it is primarily a business phenomenon. Aside from a few very large organizations (the churches, organized labor, farm organizations, and veterans’ organizations) the residue is a small segment of the population. *Pressure politics is essentially the politics of small groups.*

The vice of the groupist theory is that it conceals the most significant aspects of the system. The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong up-

per-class accent. Probably about 90 percent of the people cannot get into the pressure system.

The notion that the pressure system is automatically representative of the whole community is a myth fostered by the universalizing tendency of modern group theories. *Pressure politics is a selective process* ill designed to serve diffuse interests. The system is skewed, loaded, and unbalanced in favor of a fraction of a minority.

On the other hand, pressure tactics are not remarkably successful in mobilizing general interests. When pressure-group organizations attempt to represent the interests of large numbers of people, they are usually able to reach only a small segment of their constituencies. Only a chemical trace of the fifteen million Negroes in the United States belong to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Only one five hundredths of 1 percent of American women belong to the League of Women Voters, only one sixteen hundredths of 1 percent of the consumers belong to the National Consumers’ League, and only 6 percent of American automobile drivers belong to the American Automobile Association, while about 15 percent of the veterans belong to the American Legion.

The competing claims of pressure groups and political parties for the loyalty of the American public revolve about the difference between the results likely to be achieved by small-scale and large-scale political organization. Inevitably, the outcome of pressure politics and party politics will be vastly different.

*A Critique of Group Theories of Politics*

It is extremely unlikely that the vogue of group theories of politics would have attained its present status if its basic assumptions had not been first established by some concept
of economic determinism. The economic interpretation of politics has always appealed to those political philosophers who have sought a single prime mover, a sort of philosopher's stone of political science around which to organize their ideas. The search for a single, ultimate cause has something to do with the attempt to explain everything about politics in terms of group concepts. The logic of economic determinism is to identify the origins of conflict and to assume the conclusion. This kind of thought has some of the earmarks of an illusion. The somnambulatory quality of thinking in this field appears also in the tendency of research to deal only with successful pressure campaigns or the willingness of scholars to be satisfied with having placed pressure groups on the scene of the crime without following through to see if the effect can really be attributed to the cause. What makes this kind of thinking remarkable is the fact that in political contests there are as many failures as there are successes. Where in the literature of pressure politics are the failures?

Students of special-interest politics need a more sophisticated set of intellectual tools than they have developed thus far. The theoretical problem involved in the search for a single cause is that all power relations in a democracy are reciprocal. Trying to find the original cause is like trying to find the first wave of the ocean.

Can we really assume that we know all that is to be known about a conflict if we understand its origins? Everything we know about politics suggests that a conflict is likely to change profoundly as it becomes political. It is a rare individual who can confront his antagonists without changing his opinions to some degree. Everything changes once a conflict gets into the political arena—who is involved, what the conflict is about, the resources available, etc. It is extremely difficult to predict the outcome of a fight by watching its beginning because we do not even know who else is going to get into the conflict. The logical consequence of the exclusive emphasis on the determinism of the private origins of conflict is to assign zero value to the political process.

The very expression "pressure politics" invites us to misconceive the role of special-interest groups in politics. The word "pressure" implies the use of some kind of force, a form of intimidation, something other than reason and information, to induce public authorities to act against their own best judgment. In Latham's famous statement already quoted the legislature is described as a "referee" who "ratifies" and "records" the "balance of power" among the contending groups.35

It is hard to imagine a more effective way of saying that Congress has no mind or force of its own or that Congress is unable to invoke new forces that might alter the equation.

Actually the outcome of political conflict is not like the "resultant" of opposing forces in physics. To assume that the forces in a political situation could be diagramed as a physicist might diagram the resultant of opposing physical forces is to wipe the slate clean of all remote, general, and public considerations for the protection of which civil societies have been instituted.

Moreover, the notion of "pressure" distorts the image of the power relations involved. Private conflicts are taken into the public arena precisely because someone wants to make certain that the power ratio among the private interests most immediately involved shall not prevail. To treat a conflict as a mere test of the strength of the private interests is to leave out the most significant factors. This is so true that it might indeed be said that the only way to preserve private power ratios is to keep conflicts out of the public arena.
The assumption that it is only the "interested" who count ought to be re-examined in view of the foregoing discussion. The tendency of the literature of pressure politics has been to neglect the low-tension force of large numbers because it assumes that the equation of forces is fixed at the outset.

Given the assumptions made by the group theorists, the attack on the idea of the majority is completely logical. The assumption is that conflict is monopolized narrowly by the parties immediately concerned. There is no room for a majority when conflict is defined so narrowly. It is a great deficiency of the group theory that it has found no place in the political system for the majority. The force of the majority is of an entirely different order of magnitude, something not to be measured by pressure-group standards.

Instead of attempting to exterminate all political forms, organizations, and alignments that do not qualify as pressure groups, would it not be better to attempt to make a synthesis, covering the whole political system and finding a place for all kinds of political life?

One possible synthesis of pressure politics and party politics might be produced by describing politics as the socialization of conflict. That is to say, the political process is a sequence: conflicts are initiated by highly motivated, high-tension groups so directly and immediately involved that it is difficult for them to see the justice of competing claims. As long as the conflicts of these groups remain private (carried on in terms of economic competition, reciprocal denial of goods and services, private negotiations and bargaining, struggles for corporate control or competition for membership), no political process is initiated. Conflicts become political only when an attempt is made to involve the wider public. Pressure politics might be described as a stage in the socialization of conflict. This analysis makes pressure politics an integral part of all politics, including party politics.

One of the characteristic points of origin of pressure politics is a breakdown of the discipline of the business community. The flight to government is perpetual. Something like this is likely to happen wherever there is a point of contact between competing power systems. It is the losers in intra-business conflict who seek redress from public authority. The dominant business interests resist appeals to the government. The role of the government as the patron of the defeated private interest sheds light on its function as the critic of private power relations.

Since the contestants in private conflicts are apt to be unequal in strength, it follows that the most powerful special interests want private settlements because they are able to dictate the outcome as long as the conflict remains private. If A is a hundred times as strong as B he does not welcome the intervention of a third party because he expects to impose his own terms on B; he wants to isolate B. He is especially opposed to the intervention of public authority, because public authority represents the most overwhelming form of outside intervention. Thus, if \[ \frac{A}{B} = \frac{100}{1}, \]
it is obviously not to A's advantage to involve a third party a million times as strong as A and B combined. Therefore, it is the weak, not the strong, who appeal to public authority for relief. It is the weak who want to socialize conflict, i.e., to involve more and more people in the conflict until the balance of forces is changed. In the schoolyard it is not the bully but the defenseless smaller boys who "tell the teacher." When the teacher intervenes, the balance of power in the schoolyard is apt to change drastically. It is the function of public authority to modify private power relations by enlarging the scope of conflict. Nothing could be more mistaken than to suppose that public authority merely registers the dominance of the strong over the weak. The mere existence of public order has already ruled out a great variety of forms of private pressure. Nothing could be more confusing than to suppose that the refugees from the business community who come to Congress for relief and protection force Congress to do their bidding.

Evidence of the truth of this analysis may be seen in the fact that the big private interests do not necessarily win if they are involved in public conflicts with petty interests. The image of the lobbyists as primarily the agents of big business is not easy to support on the face of the record of congressional hearings, for example. The biggest corporations in the country tend to avoid the arena in which pressure groups and lobbyists fight it out before congressional committees. To describe this process exclusively in terms of an effort of business to intimidate congressmen is to misconceive what is actually going on.

It is probably a mistake to assume that pressure politics is the typical or even the most important relation between government and business. The pressure group is by no means the perfect instrument of the business community.

What does big business want? The winners in intrabusiness strife want (1) to be let alone (they want autonomy) and (2) to preserve the solidarity of the business community. For these purposes pressure politics is not a wholly satisfactory device. The most elementary considerations of strategy call for the business community to develop some kind of common policy more broadly based than any special-interest group is likely to be.

The political influence of business depends on the kind of solidarity that, on the one hand, leads all business to rally to the support of any businessman in trouble with the government and, on the other hand, keeps internal business disputes out of the public arena. In this system businessmen resist the impulse to attack each other in public and discourage the efforts of individual members of the business community to take intrabusiness conflicts into politics.

The attempt to mobilize a united front of the whole business community does not resemble the classical concept of pressure politics. The logic of business politics is to keep peace within the business community by supporting as far as possible all claims that business groups make for themselves. The tendency is to support all businessmen who have conflicts with the government and support all businessmen in conflict with labor. In this way special-interest politics can be converted into party policy. The search is for a broad base of political mobilization grounded on the strategic need for political organization on a wider scale than is possible in the case of the historical pressure group. Once the business community begins to think in terms of a larger scale of political organization the Republican party looms large in business politics.

It is a great achievement of American democracy that business has been forced to form a political organization designed to win elections, i.e., has been forced to compete for
power in the widest arena in the political system. On the other hand, the power of the Republican party to make terms with business rests on the fact that business cannot afford to be isolated.

The Republican party has played a major role in the political organization of the business community, a far greater role than many students of politics seem to have realized. The influence of business in the Republican party is great, but it is never absolute because business is remarkably dependent on the party. The business community is too small, it arouses too much antagonism, and its aims are too narrow to win the support of a popular majority. The political education of business is a function of the Republican party that can never be done so well by anyone else.

In the management of the political relations of the business community, the Republican party is much more important than any combination of pressure groups ever could be. The success of special interests in Congress is due less to the "pressure" exerted by these groups than it is due to the fact that Republican members of Congress are committed in advance to a general probusiness attitude. The notion that business groups coerce Republican congressmen into voting for their bills underestimates the whole Republican posture in American politics.26

It is not easy to manage the political interests of the business community because there is a perpetual stream of losers in intrabusiness conflicts who go to the government for relief and protection. It has not been possible therefore to maintain perfect solidarity, and when solidarity is breached the government is involved almost automatically. The fact that business has not become hopelessly divided and that it has retained great influence in American politics has been due chiefly to the over-all mediating role played by the Republican party. There has never been a pressure group or a combination of pressure groups capable of performing this function.

Notes

1. Pressure groups have been defined by V. O. Key as "private associations . . . (which) promote their interests by attempting to influence government rather than by nominating candidates and seeking responsibility for the management of government," Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, 4th ed., New York, 1958, p. 23.

2. Earl Latham, The Group Basis of Politics, Ithaca, 1952, pp. 35 and 36, says, "The legislature referees the group struggle, ratifies the victories of the successful coalitions, and records the terms of the surrenders, compromises, and conquests in the form of statutes..." "the legislative vote on which any issue tends to represent the composition of strength, i.e., the balance of power, among the contending groups at the moment of voting."


4. References to the public interest appear under a variety of headings in the literature of political theory.

   See C. D. H. Cole’s comment on “the will of all” and the “general will,” pp. xxx and xxxi of his introduction to Everyman’s edition of Rousseau’s Social Contract, London, 1913.

   See Ernst Cassirer, The Myth of the State, Garden City, 1955, pp. 88–93, for a discussion of Plato’s concept of “justice” as the end of the state in his criticism of the sophists.

   See S. D. Lindsay, The Essentials of Democracy, Philadelphia 1929, p. 49, for a statement regarding consensus.

5. It does not seem necessary to argue that nationalism and national interests are forces in the modern world. E. H. Carr writes about “the catastrophic growth of nationalism” in Nationalism and After, New York, 1945, p. 18. D. W. Brogen describes nations as “the only communities that now exist,” The American Character, New York, 1944, p. 169. “The outstanding and distinctive characteristic of the people of the Western States System is their devotion and allegiance to the 'nations' into which they have got themselves divided,” Frederick L. Schumann, International Politics, 3d ed., New York, 1941, p. 300. A. D. Lindsay in The Essentials of Democracy, Philadelphia, 1929, p. 49, has stated the doctrine of the democratic consensus as follows: "Nationality, however produced, is a sense of belonging together, involving a readiness on the part of the members of a state to subordinate their differences to it. It involves something more. It has a connection with the notion of a distinctive culture—some sort of
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22. Ibid., pp. 11, 12, 13, 21.

23. Forces Affecting Participation of Farm People in Rural Organizations, University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 423, 1936, p. 103.
24. "Associational participation is greatest at the top of Jonesville society and decreases on the way down the class hierarchy. The upper class belongs to the greatest number of associations, the upper-middle class next, and so on down to the lower-lower class which belongs to the least." Warner, Democracy in Jonesville, New York, 1949, p. 117. See also pp. 138, 140, 141, 143.

25. A higher proportion of the members of the upper class belong to more associations than the members of any other class." Warner, Jonesville, p. 131.

The upper and upper-middle classes are highly organized, well integrated social groups. The lower-middle and lower classes are more loosely organized and have fewer devices for maintaining their own distinctiveness in the community." Warner, Jonesville, p. 148. See also p. 153.

26. Many organized groups touch only a few people in a community. Studies in cities reveal that 40 to 60 per cent of adults are members of these organized groups if church membership is excluded. In rural communities the percentage is smaller. So when we bring in representatives from these organized groups, we should not pretend that we are getting a complete representation of the people of the community. The American practice of 'joining' is not as universal as it is popularly assumed." C. W. Blackwell, "Community Analysis," Approaches to the Study of Politics, Roland Young, ed., Northwestern University Press, 1958, p. 306.

27. "Aside from church participation, most urban individuals belong to one organization or none. Low socio-economic rank individuals and middle-rank individuals, usually belong to one organization at most, and it is usually work-connected for men, child-church connected for women. Only in the upper socio-economic levels is the 'joiner' to be found with any frequency. When attendance at organizations is studied, some twenty per cent of the memberships are usually 'paper' memberships." Scott Greer, "Individual Participation in Mass Society," Approaches to the Study of Politics, p. 332.

29. See Reporter, November 25, 1958, for story of Senator Bricker and the Ohio Right-to-Work referendum.