

Chapter 13:

The Shadows of Hitler (Michels, Mannheim, and Mills)

The attention of social theorists turned from social order to understanding social/political power and control.

The reason was the surprise rise of Hitler and **fascism**.

1

Fascism in Germany had surprised the intellectual world.

Fascism = authoritarianism
anti-modernism
anti-scientific
anti-rational
anti-democratic

Why would people allow for **fascism**?

2

Robert Michels (1876-1936)

- historian in Germany
- Predicted and provided an explanation for the fascist government in Germany.

(Iron Law of Oligarchy)

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Michels began by asking a series of questions:

If you expect democratic organizations (or governments) to begin replacing autocratic systems, who do you expect to hold the power?

The membership

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In modern organizations and governments, does the membership actually hold the power?

If not, who then?

The leaders

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Michels proposed his now famous **Iron Law of Oligarchy** (4 parts or stages of development)

1. A small number of persons (leaders) actually make the decisions

The masses of people typically turn the day-to-day decision-making over—if everyone tried to be involved nothing would get done.

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2. The leaders have more power than the membership

Once in power the leaders are able to stay and "nurture" their power—they "know the ropes"

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3. The leaders are in a different "social world" than the membership, subsequently they see things differently.

Leaders gradually develop their own values and purposes for the organization

The leader gives preference to her/his purposes over the membership's

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4. Leaders have a variety of methods they use to stay in power and maintain their power.

What might these be?

- 1 legitimacy
- 2 better organized than membership
- 3 control communications
- 4 better informed
- 5 control finances

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In sum, in modern organizations, does the focus of the leaders typically mirror the desire of the membership?

--leaders have better information and resources

-over time, leaders have their own agendas

-leaders focus on staying elected

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Michels concludes that the leaders of organizations often control their members rather than vice versa (i.e. oligarchy)

Do you agree?
What would be some examples?
Some exceptions?

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What organizational characteristics might increase oligarchy?

- Large, dispersed membership
- Large, centralized administrative staff that leadership controls

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What organizational characteristics might decrease the control of leaders (i.e. oligarchy)?

- Involved membership
- Issues that get attention of many members
- Competition with other organizations for members

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Michels eventually supported Fascism when Mussolini came to power .

Why would fascism be acceptable to people?

- Need for some kind of stability, avoid chaos
- Cynicism with regard to the failure of other ideologies
- Join a winner

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Research has supported Michels view in the study of a variety of organizations

—for example, political parties, trade unions, charities, PTAs, professional associations, government agencies.

Of course, oligarchy is not necessarily the case.

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Karl Mannheim
(1893 - 1947)

- A second German social thinker
- One of many coming out of the Frankfurt School in Germany
- presented a description of political ideologies

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Presented five unique political ideologies, each found to have some prominence at different points in history.

Proposed a sixth ideology to be used by modern societies.

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Five Political Ideologies:

1. Traditional Conservatism:

- Respect tradition.
- Don't try to change.
- Things are as they should be.
- Doesn't address truth

Who in society supports or has supported this view?

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2. Bureaucratic conservatism:

does not ask what should be done or why (ignores "truth"). People are to simply follow the rules that exist.

"Don't rock the boat"

Criticism?
Who has these beliefs?

bureaucrats

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3. Bourgeois Liberalism:

Argues that the problem with traditional and bureaucratic conservatism is that not everyone benefits.

We should consider issues and let the people decide.

Does this work? Is this our current ideology?

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Those with material wealth have the advantage in political debates.

What is an example where the wealthy are controlling the debate?

Issue Advocacy Groups
(the environment)

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4. Socialist Thought: reveals weakness of a democracy where the wealthy are able to control the economic system.

Only the workers should be involved in decision-making.

Criticism?

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Workers simply represent the interests of one group or one more set of politicians.

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5. Fascism: the control of the people by a single or few persons.

-Occurs as a reaction to cynicism in identifying "political truth"

-Truth is viewed as relative, no one position is right. Therefore, people select the winning side.

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Which of the following five do you think is best? Or, do you favor something else?

Bureaucratic conservatism - bureaucrats

Traditional Conservatism - aristocrats

Bourgeois Liberalism - middle class entrepreneurs

Socialist Thought - workers

Facism - ideologues

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Mannheim's theory of social relativism:

Truth is not absolute. No values are certain, no truths are sure. No political ideology the best.

Ideologies change from age to age.

Therefore, we should select those policies/ideas that match the values of the time.

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Mannheim believed that current social problems are the result of two social conditions:

1. **democratization/centralization** a small number of leaders who lead by emotion and simplistic solutions rather than intelligent understanding.

This is the opposite of what Saint Simon recommended.

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2. **Interdependence**—a crisis in one part of the society now effects all parts making it more harmful (a few "far-flung organizations can create huge damage).

--complexity results in only a small group of technical experts controlling things.

Example?

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Mannheim's solution for modern society:

1. Implement a "**planned economy**" to avoid catastrophic depressions, inflation, and unemployment (again, Saint Simon).

2. Implement a "**planned social environment**" to avoid irreconcilable conflicts (e.g., class conflict).

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C. Wright Mills (1916 - 1962)

- A maverick among intellectuals
- Over the course of his life he focused on three groups:
 - labor and unions
 - the emerging middle class
 - mega organizations

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Mills' The Power Elite

- Power is in the hands of the top leaders of three groups
 - National government bureaucracy
 - Corporations
 - Military

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The Power Elite

The top leadership provides the **rational**e for the masses.

Their positions are **interchangeable** (example: generals go to top corporate and government positions)

Can you think of any examples?

Eisenhower

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The Power Elite

Functional Rationality
Organizations/military control what is rational, e.g., rationality for Vietnam war.

prevails rather than

Substantial Rationality
Intellectual insight is in control.

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Functional rationality causes a variety of problems:

- New ideas are hard to come by
- National government carries out the desires of corporations and the military.

Can you think of any examples?

Monetary policy to assist corporations? Iraq?

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Mills (like Mannheim) believed modern governments can take one of three forms:

- Bumbling planlessness, functional rationality
- Fascist dictatorship
- Planning by a humanistic elite

Mills saw the U.S. clearly as the first form.

Do you agree or disagree?

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Wrote: Sociological Imagination

- Mills outlined how society should be viewed through sociological eyes
- Personal troubles reveal larger public issues

For example: high divorce rate may be the result of gender discrimination and unemployment may be the result of government policy to control inflation

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How would you
classify Mills, a
conflict theorist or
a functionalist?

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The End

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