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BEYOND THE  
RULING CLASS

Strategic Elites in Modern Society



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### 3. STRATEGIC ELITES: CONCOMITANT SOCIAL FORCES

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To explain why strategic elites have proliferated in the modern world, we must turn to the social processes that have shaped that world.<sup>1</sup> Elites proliferate because of four main social processes: (1) the growth of population; (2) the growth of occupational specialization; (3) the growth of formal organization, or bureaucracy; and (4) the growth of moral diversity. With the continuing operation of these four processes, elites become more numerous, more varied, and more autonomous.

In small, relatively undifferentiated societies with a primitive technology, social leadership ranges from a council of elders convening during communal crises to a more organized and permanent chieftainship. The early chiefs were primarily priests and magicians, and only secondarily political leaders. As the community expanded, the apparatus of leadership grew more complicated, so that during the Middle Ages in the West, for example, a co-opted priestly caste existed side by side with a hereditary monarchy, a nobility of warriors largely but not exclusively hereditary, and a stratum of free citizens engaged in trade and crafts whose gradually accumulating wealth soon led them to demand more social power.

The industrial revolution permitted the rise of a new strategic elite and with it a new principle of recruitment. Henceforth, the possession of property—whether or not associated with inherited

status—was to permit access to positions of leadership, thereby expanding the reservoir of potential candidates. In America, in part a colony for refugees from a quasi-caste society, property became decisive for access into the higher circles. This was due to the continued technological and geographical expansion of the United States as much as to a distrust of hereditary privilege.

Thus, a major trend has been neither a decrease in the importance of birth as the major criterion of selection and succession. This development has taken place whenever societies have expanded rapidly and have needed skilled personnel quickly. Individual merit has always been valued in human society, but institutional arrangements for its discovery and cultivation have varied. Conceivably these arrangements may become more firmly established in advanced industrial societies.

However recruitment patterns change in these societies, the organization of strategic elites is altered. They are more numerous now and more varied principles affect their composition and interaction than was ever true in the past. Strategic elites have emerged from ruling classes and castes, but they should not be identified with them. Strategic elites are new historical phenomena; the social and cultural circumstances that have led to their emergence are considered in this chapter.

### *Growth of population*

Today, the world's population numbers more than 2.5 billion people and increases by some 34 million annually, nearly 4,000 per hour, more than one every second. The United States in 1800 had 5 million inhabitants; in 1962 it has nearly 200 million.<sup>2</sup> This growth in size can be paralleled in country after country. Its cause: the industrial revolution. The ancient civilizations that fashioned much of the moral order of the modern world were created by relatively small communities, and men feared the possibility of extinction due to underpopulation—hence the well-known biblical injunction to “be fruitful and multiply.” Their population ideals so reflected these circumstances that the stipulated utopian communities seem infinitesimal by current standards. Plato and Aristotle designed their ideal societies on the scale of the Greek polis only three of which—Syracuse, Acragas, and Athens—numbered more

than 20,000 citizens.<sup>3</sup> The ideal city-state was no larger than a medium-sized town of today, and its very size made possible its distinctive character—open-air democracy, intense communal participation, and a high degree of public spirit. With a growth in population, communities became more heterogeneous, organized, and complex.

The complexity that accompanies an increase in size necessitates more formal organization, more elaborate mechanisms of communication, greater specialization of work, and indirect rather than direct methods of management and supervision.<sup>4</sup> As Simmel has summarized the process:

The large group creates organs which channel and mediate the interaction of its members and thus operate as the vehicles of a societal unity which no longer results from the direct relations among its elements. Offices and representations, laws and symbols of group life, organizations and general social concepts are organs of this sort. . . . Typically, all of them develop fully and purely only in large groups.<sup>5</sup>

One of the consequences of this growth in size was, as Spencer was among the first to state, an increase in the dissimilarity between the various parts of the expanding society. The importance of centralized social leadership increases. Those who man these positions of leadership in industrial societies are the strategic elites.

### *Growth of the division of labor*

One of the differences between a local community and a more inclusive society lies in the scope and specialization of work. In a smaller and occupationally less differentiated community, all members must contribute toward its and their own survival. It tends to resemble a collection of like elements. In a society, members of an organized collectivity share unequal responsibilities—some assuming responsibility for the collectivity directly, some indirectly, and some not at all. A society may be described as a collection of unlike elements. Communities, though they can more readily act in concert, usually forego the advantages that elaborate differentiation provides; thus they are relatively poorer, but more unified morally. Cohesion and moral unity are more often a prob-

lem in complex societies; poverty and lack of development, in simpler communities.

One of the chief elements of social cohesion in simpler societies is work. Malinowski vividly shows how the routine of work in the Trobriand Islands cemented ties of friendship and kinship throughout the whole range of island villages.<sup>6</sup> But as the division of labor proceeds, this type of moral unity is seriously undermined. The members of the community are no longer able to judge each other's conduct in work, and therefore in life. What does the carpenter know of the world of the tradesman, or the peasant of the city artisan? The differentiation which accompanies the division of labor must be offset by parallel developments that unify the community once more, but on a more complex level. Centralized group organs emerge to perform some of the tasks that the membership once did for themselves. Among these tasks are, first, upholding moral unity and cohesion in the face of the daily division of work, habits, and outlook; and, second, co-ordinating these varied activities so as to avoid or settle intergroup discord and strife. Gradually, the internal group divisions grow so extensive that the community is no longer one in any but a moral sense. Centrifugal tendencies therefore must be balanced by centripetal ones, and in place of an actual uniformity there emerges an emotional, moral, and symbolic uniformity.

The division of labor has been viewed as the major force behind the advance of civilization by a number of thinkers—Adam Smith, Saint-Simon, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim. Durkheim observes that the development of the division of labor rests on the growth of material and moral density and on a concentration, rather than a dispersion, of individuals in a given territory.<sup>7</sup> Such a concentration must be followed by a multiplication of social relationships within the community. A growth in size that leads merely to a proliferation of like elements is not enough. There must also be an increase in the interconnections among them.

The preservation of social solidarity in a society increasingly differentiated morally, mentally, and occupationally, is a constant theme in Durkheim's writings. His notion that organic solidarity would come about spontaneously was not even to Durkheim himself entirely satisfactory. In dismissing Comte's suggestion that a new independent organ must be created whose function would be



the coordination and reconcentration of men, ideas, and social goals, dispersed by the expanded division of labor, Durkheim reveals that he was at least considering some such possibility. He rejected this view, however, on the ground that such an organ could not regulate in detail the particular activities in all social spheres. His solution was to claim that organic solidarity comes about spontaneously.<sup>8</sup>

Durkheim, noting the growth of specialization in the occupational world at large, suggested that this specialization and subdivision would affect the highest centers of society, bringing about a functional differentiation of these centers. "The division of labor," he observed, "does not present individuals to one another, but social functions."<sup>9</sup> Durkheim's observations apply to changes in strategic elites: their greater numbers, greater diversity, greater complexity, and their more complicated interrelationships. One need only compare a technologically primitive society such as the Fiji Islands, with its "chief of all trades," and our own society, with a veritable plethora of chiefs. Note the number of activities of which the Fijian chief is in charge:

The chief . . . organizes the activities in his district, directing work in the gardens, house building, and in fishing. . . . No decision of importance may be reached in the district without his approval. Funeral services, for example, may not begin until he has given the word. . . . The chief is also the arbiter of disputes within the district. . . . He holds the power of life and death over his subjects.<sup>10</sup>

Judge, executive, religious leader, social arbiter, ceremonial head—all are separate roles in modern societies, but they are fused into a single role in Fiji society. The social functions which this chief has to fulfill are identical with the social functions entrusted to the strategic elites of today: to organize productive work, to propitiate and communicate with supernatural powers, judge and punish offenders of the laws, coordinate communal activities, defend the community from enemy attack, discover new resources and solutions to life's problems, and encourage artistic expression. In the more primitive society, the personality of the chief is specialized; in the more advanced societies, the functions themselves have become specialized. This leads to an interesting paradox—that the

simpler societies may develop more complex leaders than advance societies, leaders, that is, with more complex personalities and talents.

Increasingly, those who supervise differentiated functions in modern societies are specialists in full-time jobs. Today no stratum of hereditary aristocrats could carry on all the complicated affairs of the Establishment by simply attending informally to demands as they arise, or by discussing affairs of state, economy, the arts, and morality at the dinner table where church leader, financier, and prime minister consult one another as members of one family.<sup>11</sup> Specialization thus affects the strategic elites no less than the general population and makes of that common centripetal core group a divided and separate series of specialists. The consequences of this are the greater autonomy and independence of these elites, their smaller degree of cohesion, and the decreasing likelihood that any single elite can long exert absolute, arbitrary power. "When parts are little differentiated," Spencer remarked, "they can readily perform one another's functions; but where much differentiated they can perform one another's functions very imperfectly, or not at all."

No single strategic elite can today know all there is to be known, and none can perform all the functions involved in social leadership. The Renaissance man is no longer a viable ideal but a heroic myth. Specialized knowledge, training, and experience are the standards by which men in high places are judged. Nobility of blood was displaced by nobility of wealth, and the latter now appears to be making way for a nobility of expert skill and interests. A man may bestow his land, wealth, and social connections upon his son, but he cannot bestow his corporation position, artistic pre-eminence, or elected office. What has long been true of the Catholic hierarchy—its emphasis on the calling—is now becoming true of most, if not all, strategic elites.

### *Growth of formal organization and its social implications*

Along with the growth in size and the division of labor in society, there has also been a growth of formal organization and of institutional differentiation. Society has come more and more to resemble

that system of differentiated yet interdependent parts that theorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth century referred to as the social organism.

The growth of size and complexity make spontaneity inadvisable. There is need for planning, for formalized communication, and for coordination of diverse activities in separated institutional spheres. Reliance on particularly striking, devoted, and brilliant leaders is not enough—they may emerge too late or not at all. Positions of leadership must be established in advance of acute need, and individuals must be preselected to fill them.

In modern complex societies, a dichotomy exists between individual desires and communal needs, between the minority of dissenters and the majority of conformists, between the minority leadership presumably acting for the good of the whole and the majority of members subordinating themselves to this aim. As the core group becomes increasingly organized, it achieves that glimpse of immortality that Simmel attributed to the triad. To fix the start of this process is hardly possible nor necessary. The evolution began when collectivities first began to organize formally. Once the organized system, called society, ceases to be synonymous with the sum total of its membership, the paradox arises that while the society may be preserved, large portions of its members are destroyed; or conversely, the members may live and perhaps even live well, but the system decays.

The strategic elites, whose function is to act on behalf of the various aspects of the social system, likewise become dissociated from the membership that selects them. The cleavage between the system and its membership leads to consequences that have long been attributed to the evils in human nature, the corruptive effects of power, or the insatiable desire for domination and exploitation within man; yet they may be essentially a consequence of the difference between men acting *for* the system and men acting *within* and *under* it. As a result, the actions and indecisions of these elites, their ignorance and knowledge, their prejudices and vanities, become life-and-death matters.

The democratic ethos notwithstanding, men must become accustomed to bigger, more extensive, and more specialized elites in their midst as long as industrial societies keep growing and become

more specialized, and as the technical need for formal organization increases. What is true of large-scale formal organizations is in this respect also true of the larger society:

The organ charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating the work of all departments and of directing it in the service of the purposes of the organization as a whole is obviously the most responsible and powerful part of the whole structure. In commercial enterprise, it is usually called its "management" or "top management," but whatever its name, it is distinguished by the fact that it represents the unity of the whole organization in its diversity and is, therefore, the central repository of its authority.<sup>13</sup>

It is this development that Michels depicted, not without exaggeration, as the cause of the inevitable triumph of oligarchies in human affairs. "The sovereign masses," he wrote, "are incapable of undertaking the most necessary resolutions. The impotence of direct democracy is a direct outcome of the influence of numbers."<sup>14</sup> Large numbers, he continues, are unable to convene, and if they could, they could not synchronize activities. As a result, all responsibilities, powers of action, and decisions must be delegated to a selected group of representatives. Consequently:

Organization implies the tendency to oligarchy. In every organization, whether it be a political party, a professional union, or any other association of the kind, the aristocratic tendency manifests itself very clearly. . . . As a result of organization, every party or professional union becomes divided into a minority of directors and a majority of directed.<sup>15</sup>

It is not always clear to what Michels attributes the evils of organization, for his hypothesis is not free from serious ambiguities. Organization itself does not make for oligarchy; the emergence of a professional leadership does, he claims, because "a strong organization needs equally strong leadership."<sup>16</sup> Yet the nature of the mass itself, not the leadership, is often responsible for oligarchical trends in even the most radical of parties. Full-time workers who occupy themselves with organizational details and who become skilled in persuasion, oratory, literary expression, and behind-the-scenes politics are transformed from the original servants of the

members into their masters. Finally, he argues, democracy itself leads to oligarchy because democracy means large numbers, which in turn implies organization and delegation. Thus Michels alternately blames organization, specialization, human nature, and democracy for the rise of oligarchy.

Michels does not explain why a professional leadership, even granting its technical superiority to the mass, must become despotic. He merely implies that these leaders will tend to work for their own interests instead of for the good of all because they constitute but "a fraction of society." Whether this is true or inevitable, remains to be established. If leaders are bound principally by their functional roles in the organization and share few bonds of social origins, family obligations, political commitment, or religious faith—a possibility that C. Wright Mills, for example, viewed as highly unlikely—then, even though they are but a fraction of the membership, they may still work for the good of the aggregate whose welfare is in their hands. Nor is organization as such necessarily evil. Historically, the absence of organization in groups of large size often has been associated with the very worst abuses, arbitrariness, and tyrannies—as in the Greek tyrannies and Oriental despotism. Indeed, one answer to increasing organization may be not less but more organization of a certain type. In the Printers' Union in America, for example, the organization and persistence for many years of two groups of skilled, professional leaders prevented the abuses that Michels most feared, in that each kept watch on the other;<sup>17</sup> the British shadow governments illustrate a similar situation on a larger scale. It should also be pointed out that Michels assumes the mass of members necessarily remains indifferent and disinterested in the affairs of the organization and in the activities of the leaders they have chosen. As Bukharin has remarked, this rests on an "eternal category in Michels' presentation, namely the 'incompetence of the masses.'" <sup>18</sup> This incompetence, however, is neither a necessary nor a permanent attribute.

Max Weber contributed what remains *the* influential analysis of the role of formal organization in the modern world. Specialization, limited spheres of competence, hierarchies of offices, specified responsibilities, rights, rules, and rewards, are all elements of the rise of bureaucratization in the world. Along with Weber most writers exempt administrators and heads of bureaucratic organiza-

tions from the rules and regulations of the organizations they supervise. "Only the supreme chief of the organization occupies his position of authority by virtue of appropriation, of election, or having been designated for the succession. . . . Thus at the top of bureaucratic organizations, there is necessarily an element which is at least not purely bureaucratic."<sup>19</sup> The members of the strategic elites constitute administrators for the society at large and they, too, must be partially viewed as being exempt from the constraints imposed on ordinary members of society.

Consequently, members of strategic elites must be studied both as the heads of large-scale organizations bound by formal rules, and as unpredictable, spontaneous, and potentially creative or destructive leaders who may transcend these rules. In representing the total membership of organized or unorganized majorities in the social system, strategic elites are complementary to that membership. A compensatory not a direct reciprocity exists between strategic elites and the relevant mass—appearing unified where the mass is diversified; appearing small where the mass is large; appearing specialized where the mass is generalized. Strategic elites must perceive the whole of social life, be articulate where the mass is mute, and stand for the ultimate purposes of communal life, emphasizing the public rather than private interest.

### *Growth of moral diversity*

Nostalgia for the small, intimate, familiar community has increased in proportion to its decline. Many would judge our modern world by its failure to live up to standards set by these communities, for in reliving the past men often transform it to suit their own desires. Many of the moral ideals of today, the standards of right and wrong, sacred and profane, were developed in these simpler communities and continue to be taught alongside the mores better adapted to an urban way of life.

But the communities of the soil that men cherished and defended with their blood bear little similarity to the far-flung societies of today. A world in which the construction of a single ship, the *Queen Elizabeth*, requires the labor of more than a quarter of a million people (Rome at its height as the center of the world had but one million people), and which serves 10,000 meals on a single

day of its five-day transatlantic crossing, has little in common with the world in which our moral codes were first created. Traditions die hard and reluctantly, however, and many of the mores, though not the manners, of earlier nomadic and peasant communities are with us still. These mores survive in a society in which almost all else has changed. Modern industrial society is a world of *variety*. More people than ever before in larger communities must cope with a mechanized world in which even machines can think. The innumerable and growing number of occupations defy systematic and inclusive classification; over 40,000 occupational titles are used currently in the United States. In addition, there are regional, religious, racial, national, and personal differentiations. People belong to a multiplicity of groups and associations, separated from the majority of men by the work they do, by the things they know, by what they take for granted, by the people they habitually meet, and by the maps of the world that they carry inside their heads.

When Durkheim cited greater interdependence and reciprocal fulfillment as among the advantages of an expanded division of labor, he hardly anticipated the extensive division that currently exists. Today, when no one can know more than a fraction of these occupations and the ways of life they entail, men are more and more confined to occupational societies within their society. It is difficult, if not impossible, for all to be morally committed to the same goals, not only because of specialized occupational moralities, but also because the gap between the core values of a society and the personal values of individual members is growing wider. Individuals, though they still belong to the same society, no longer share all of its burdens and therefore cannot, except in the most abstract sense, live up to all of its ultimate moral claims. Today, only the strategic elites can do so. At the very time that a general morality has become crucial, in part because it is in danger of being lost, most individuals can do little more than pay lip service to the norms of the societies in which they live. Units have become so big and complicated that individuals feel powerless to alter or affect the shape of things to come. Societies, said Max Weber, are collectivities rationally organized for the achievement of consciously designated ends; communities function smoothly because its members *feel* that they belong together. In this sense, strategic elites resemble communities—they must feel committed to large collec-

tive purposes within a common cultural framework. Most people, in their everyday working lives, tend to refer to "they," the anonymous eyes and ears of the world or the men in control of things as sources of authority. The strategic elites, who are the originators rather than the instruments of social action, must be able, at least some of the time, to say "we."

### *Rise of functional elites*

"The state," Aristotle wrote, "is a union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life."<sup>20</sup> Now, though families may still be included in this union, there are entire regions, huge cities, and even continents in the place of villages. The rise of strategic elites both reflects and reinforces the decline of local centers where much of history was once made. The shift of power and influence from the local to the national and now to the international scene has occurred in politics, business, religion, and the arts.

The victims of this shift are many. Chief among them are those centers that once captured the imagination—cities like Charleston and Boston in America—that live on rather than up to their reputations. The social landscapes of most industrial societies are dotted with similar places, of which even a young country like America has its share. New centers of power and influence have sounded the decline of old ones; a fatalistic view of the world has combined with the conviction that individuals no longer control their own destinies because the world has become too big, too impersonal, too unfamiliar.

The strategic elites themselves are caught in the struggle between local loyalties and national commitments, between regional attachments and national perspectives. The counterpart to this struggle may be found in many different types of societies throughout history, societies unable, institutionally, to keep up with demographic and geographic expansion and therefore unable to profit from it. The case of Mesopotamia is not atypical:

The Sumerians had a phrase, "the black-headed people," to designate themselves as an ethnic unit; and the gods of Enlil and Anu, among others, were worshipped throughout the land. But this feeling never found expression in a political form; it remained without effect, it



seems, on the country's history. The particularism of the cities was never overcome.<sup>21</sup>

In time, Mesopotamia was to be invaded by neighbors, often in collusion with one of her own cities, until the final, successful attack by Cyrus, the Persian, in 539 B.C. This recalls the experience of Greece in the fifth century B.C. and that of Rome in the fifth century A.D. In each case the failure to control and curb the desires for local autonomy accelerated the decline of these civilizations. The inability to transcend sectional interests has plagued primitive societies as well, many of whom must manage to solve these problems without benefit of inclusive political organization. Various alternative measures—strict village exogamy, or membership in age-sets that override local village loyalties on specific occasions, or membership in far-flung trading associations—might be considered functional equivalents of political organizations such as the state.<sup>22</sup>

Advanced industrial societies, it appears, are currently on the way toward ever larger, functional divisions. This trend was anticipated by Saint-Simon, among others, who envisaged an international order based not on national but occupational coordination. Durkheim continued this line of thought. He favored the displacement of segmental, territorial solidarity by a comprehensive, functional solidarity based on occupational interdependence, residence becoming less and occupation more important. "A day will come," he prophesied, "when our social and political organization will have a base exclusively, or almost exclusively, occupational."<sup>23</sup> Increasingly it does appear as if local trading, academic, artistic, financial, and fashion centers are yielding ground, and territorial solidarities are making way for other kinds.\*

### *Elites as minorities*

Whatever the variations in opinion regarding the origin, organization, and current significance of strategic elites, there is essential agreement about their size. Generally, elites are assumed to be small in number in relation to the total population.<sup>24</sup> In fact, some of the distrust of elites by the populace stems from their being con-

\* This may also be seen in fields such as entertainment, which used to be local and part of an area but is now national and part of an era.

spicuous minorities. Simmel cites an interesting instance of an attempt to make such a minority less conspicuous. In Venice, he tells us, "all noblemen had to wear a simple black costume: no striking dress was to call this small number of men in power to the attention of the people."<sup>25</sup> As to the actual size of these leading minorities, evidence is sparse. Few estimates, however, would have them exceed 3 per cent of any given population. Machiavelli, referring to the cities of his own day, thought that no more than forty to fifty men attained real power in any city.<sup>26</sup> Barnard calculates that 100,000 individuals occupy major executive positions in the United States; presumably he refers to executives in big business. In a population close to 200 million, 100,000 individuals amounts to one executive per 2,000 persons, or one tenth of 1 per cent of the total.<sup>27</sup>

Elites are also, though not always explicitly, minorities in other respects: (a) the positions they occupy—these being the topmost or central ones; (b) the attributes on the basis of which they were selected—possessing or appearing to possess some sort of excellence, be it wisdom, courage, intelligence, breeding, or some forms of expert knowledge and skill; (c) their social responsibilities—having a greater share of these than the rest of the population; and (d) their rewards—getting proportionately more of the good things of life.

Most writers are content merely to state, as a general conviction, that elites must be numerically small. But they do not further explore the matter. Three notable exceptions are Simmel, Michels, and Mosca whose writings contain explicit as well as inferential material which warrants examination.

Simmel traced the development of what he called central group organs to the growing size of the group, but also suggested that the maintenance of these organs depends in turn on their remaining small. This was especially necessary for aristocratic groups:

If it is to be effective as a whole, the aristocratic group must be "surveyable" by every single member of it. Each element must still be personally acquainted with every other. . . . The tendency toward extreme numerical limitation, characteristic of historical aristocracies from Sparta to Venice, is not only due to the egoistic disinclination to share a ruling position but also to the instinct that the vital conditions of an aristocracy can be maintained only if the number of its

members is small, relatively and absolutely. . . . It is very characteristic that . . . when Plato speaks of the Ruling Few, he also directly designates them, as the Not-Many.<sup>28</sup>

Simmel also suggests that both the absolute as well as the relative size of prominent members of a group should be taken into account. One individual, he points out, can less readily control a village of 100, than 100,000 men can control a society of ten million, though the proportions in each case are identical. But he did not further explain or develop this idea.<sup>29</sup> A recent study by Anderson and Warkov is germane to this problem. The authors sought to ascertain the relationship between the growth of an organization and the growth of its administrative component. They found that the larger the organization ( in this case, hospitals), the smaller the proportion of personnel in administration. They therefore proposed three elements as intervening variables between an increase in the size of an organization and the size of its administration: the number of persons performing identical tasks; the number of different places at which work is carried on; and the number of tasks performed.<sup>30</sup>

Mosca attributes the necessity for minority leadership to the characteristics of organization. This minority, "to which the majority willingly or unwillingly defer," can organize itself and therefore obey "a single impulse," whereas the majority must ever remain unorganized and thus impotent.

A hundred men acting uniformly in concert, with a common understanding, will triumph over a thousand men who are not in accord and can therefore be dealt with one by one. Meanwhile, it will be easier for the former to act in concert and have mutual understanding simply because they are a hundred and not a thousand.<sup>31</sup>

But aside from his insistence that the majority cannot, in principle, discover means of organization, Mosca does not say how the minority is able to do so beyond asserting that its small size will be helpful. In large part, Mosca was reacting against the sincere but naïve view that universal suffrage would eliminate the age-old problems of dominating minorities, dominated majorities, and despotism. But, one wonders, would 100 organized men be superior to 1,000 organized men? Is it not the absence of organization, rather

than size, that accounts for the superiority of the small as against the large group? In any case, Mosca postulates an inverse relationship between the size of a population and the size of its ruling minority.

Michels agreed substantially with Mosca, considering an organized minority of professional leaders both indispensable and inevitable in mass societies. The mass is unable to act directly on its own behalf and must therefore delegate responsibility to professional representatives. The only hope for the mass of men is to win the right to choose its masters.<sup>32</sup>

Three different reasons have been suggested as to why elites must remain minorities: the structural features of hierarchical organizations; the search for desirable attributes which by definition are scarce; and the necessity for rapid communication which limits the size of the communicating parties, in this case, of the elites. These views illustrate the lack of agreement, as well as evidence, concerning the relation between size and effective minority leadership. It is generally agreed that elites must be minorities, but two contrasting qualifications have been maintained. It has been argued that elites are inversely proportional to the growth of the general population, and, conversely, that elites are directly proportional to such growth.

If strategic elites are viewed as analogous to administrators and executives in large-scale organizations in relation to the larger society, their relative size will depend on the degree of diversification or social and occupational homogeneity of that society. Where diversification is relatively slight, as in technologically primitive societies, these elites will be small and relatively uniform and unified. Where diversification is extensive and elaborate, as in technologically complex societies, the strategic elites will be diversified and relatively more numerous.

The fact that elites must be minorities has been evaluated in different ways. Aristotle favored the supremacy of the multitude rather than the few best because he felt the former's collective judgment to be superior in the long run:

For each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and sense. . . . Hence the

many are better judges than a single man of music and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole . . . if people are not utterly degraded, although individually they may be worse judges than those who have special knowledge—as a body they are as good or better.<sup>83</sup>

At the same time, Aristotle deplored the difficulties that arise as the size of the city increases. "Since cities have increased in size, no other form of government appears to be any longer even easy to establish."<sup>84</sup>

James Madison favored representative government as a way of controlling the "mischief of faction" and considered that the advantages of representation increase with the growth in size of the republic:

In the first place, it is to be remarked that however small the republic may be, the representative must be raised to a certain number, in order to guard against the cabals of a few; and that, however large it may be, they must be limited to a certain number, in order to guard against a confusion of a multitude. Hence, the number of representatives in the two cases not being proportionally greater in the small republic, it follows that, if the proportion of fit characters be not less in the large than in the small republic, the former will represent a greater option, and consequently a greater possibility of a fit choice.<sup>85</sup>

Madison argues that since more people will participate in the election of the representatives in the large republic, better men are likely to be chosen. The representatives of the larger republic will have fewer local prejudices and broader tastes because they must please a larger and more varied group.

Michels had less confidence in the majority. In contrast to the writers just cited, he drew rather gloomy conclusions from his analysis of mass political parties. Inevitably, he warned, delegation of responsibility to selected leaders will lead to self-perpetuating elites and to despotism. "It is easier to dominate a large crowd," he observes, "than a small audience." Contrast this with Simmel's observation that other things being equal, "the larger the group, the smaller is the range of ideas and interests, sentiments and other characteristics in which its members coincide and form a 'mass.' Therefore, insofar as the domination of the members extends to their common features, the individual member bears it the more

easily, the larger his group. Thus in *this* respect, the essential nature of one-man rule is shown very clearly: the more there are of those over whom one rules, the slighter is that proportion of every individual which he dominates.”<sup>30</sup> Simmel maintained that although a tyranny is more oppressive in small groups (citing parents and their children as one example), it may be easier to dominate a large group. He who dominates a small group, Simmel concluded, can do so only because the members wish it, and their bondage, though voluntary, is the more complete and severe; he who dominates a large group has a wider but shallower reach. Thus Michels’ hypothesis should be reformulated to include Simmel’s telling insight: it is easier to dominate a large crowd than a small audience, but on fewer matters.

Thus strategic elites—administrators as well as leaders—will, on both grounds, be small in number relative to the total population. But it does not necessarily follow that they will be despotic minorities, since despotism depends on more than size. The possibility of despotism, however, is ever present.

In sum, at least four social forces have contributed to the emergence of strategic elites in their present form: a growth in size, division of labor, formal organization, and moral diversity. Advanced industrial societies are marked by occupational differentiation within functional sectors and by functional specialization among them. More and more, the political, economic, scientific, religious, educational, cultural, and recreational sectors are organizationally, occupationally, and morally autonomous. At the same time, overriding goals of these functionally specialized elites are as they have always been, the preservation of the ideals and practices of the societies at whose apex they stand.

Wherever they have emerged, whether in simple or in complex forms, the strategic elites had, and continue to have, roughly similar responsibilities. They symbolize the moral unity of a community becoming subdivided by emphasizing common purposes and interests. They attempt to coordinate and harmonize the diversified activities, combat factionalism, and resolve group conflicts. And they try to protect the community from external danger.

Increasingly, no single social stratum is likely to monopolize access to elite positions. The widely accepted model of society re-

sembling a single pyramid is giving way to one with a number of parallel pyramids, each capped by an elite. The class system of industrial societies foreshadowed this trend in its stress on two principles: the status principle, depending on style of life and on qualitative distinction; and the achievement principle, depending on individual accomplishments in an impersonal market. Strategic elites stress both distinctions, for they are composed of men of proven ability as well as of men who represent a given set of moral ideals and a style of life adapted to their functional roles. The President of the United States, the president of a giant corporation, the top atomic scientist, and the leading writer of an era have little in common beyond their general cultural backgrounds and their achievement of prominence. How they arrived at their pre-eminent positions, what they must do to remain there, and how they affect the lives and fortunes of other men through the exercise of their functional responsibilities, differ for each.

The existence of an all-powerful economic ruling class is no longer valid. The economic sector is of course powerful and well-organized, and its leaders keenly interested in maintaining its influence and their power. But economic power is not the sole form of power even in a society obsessed by the idols of the market place. The political, the military, and the cultural functions have not generally nor even typically been carried out by leading entrepreneurs and their sons. In advanced industrial societies, wealth and property are never *all* that is needed to be accorded social honor.

The current business elite, for example, is better organized than ever before and at the same time less powerful than in the early stages of its rise to prominence. Moreover, a deep split is apparent between those entrepreneurs who have made the big time and those in the modest role of the small businessman. The first comprises the economic elite, an elite still in the making, which mirrors the contradictions of a rapidly expanding industrial society in that high birth and property most assuredly do not hurt the aspiring candidate although motivation, native ability, and training are equally or perhaps more important. Wealth may well continue to be an entrance ticket to the higher echelons, to the best schools, and to the self-confidence that accompanies these entries. Yet it is also true that the biggest corporations are most advanced in recruitment on the basis of merit irrespective of social background.<sup>37</sup>

Repeated reference has been made to the interdependence and functional differentiation among strategic elites as well as to their growing significance in occupationally, organizationally, and technologically complex societies. Their principal functional responsibilities will be examined in the next chapter.

## Notes

1. Following Emile Durkheim, the causes of a phenomenon may be divided into two types: (1) the antecedent cause—in this case, strategic elites must be studied as outgrowths of the ruling castes, aristocracies, and ruling classes that historically preceded them, as was done in the previous chapter; (2) the concomitant cause—those forces that continue to operate and exert their influence. In this case, strategic elites must be studied in relation to the social forces that foster social expansion. See, Emile Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method* (1950), pp. 95 ff.
2. Julian Huxley, "World Population," *Scientific American*, LXCIV, No. 3, 64-7. Mankind appeared on the surface of the earth between 500,000 and one million years ago. At the birth of Christ, the world's population was approximately 350 million. In two thousand years, the population has grown from 350 million to 2,700 million. See, P. K. Whelpton, "A Generation of Demographic Change," in Roy G. Francis (ed.), *The Population Ahead* (1958).
3. H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks* (1960), pp. 72-3. The total population was of course much larger since the citizens constituted only a portion of the entire adult males of the community. At the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War the population of Attica numbered about 350,000—one half Athenian (men, women, and children), one tenth resident aliens, and the rest slaves. Sparta was much smaller in population though much larger in size—its 3,200 square miles, considered enormous by the Greeks, could be traversed on foot in two days. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
4. The elaboration of potential relationships with an expansion of group size is truly astounding. In a small group of seven members, the number of potential pair relationships is twenty-one. For a small household of ten members, the total number of potential relationships, including pair relationships, relations between a member and combinations of members, and relations among subgroups, reaches the fantastic total of 29,268. Theodore Caplow, "Organizational Size," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (March, 1957), pp. 484-505.



5. Georg Simmel, in Kurt Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950), p. 96.
6. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1951), *passim*.
7. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1947), Book II.
8. "The division of labor varies in direct ratio with the volume and density of societies, and, if it progresses in a continuous manner in the course of social development, it is because societies become regularly denser and generally more voluminous." *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 361.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 407.
10. Clellan S. Ford, "The Role of the Fijian Chief," *American Sociological Review*, III (August, 1938), esp. 542-50.
11. An excellent illustration of conflicts engendered by the growth of occupational specialties as distinct from family loyalties among the elite of a town is provided in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*. The leading scientist who discovers that the town's water supply is polluted is virtually destroyed by his own brother, the Mayor, who fears that this discovery will, if publicized, ruin the town's tourist trade on which its survival depends. In the end, the scientist is silenced. "By the vote of everyone here except the tippy man, this meeting of citizens declares Dr. Thomas Stockman to be an enemy of the people. Three cheers for our ancient and honourable citizen community! Three cheers for our able and energetic Mayor who has so loyally suppressed the promptings of family feeling!" The tension between family and community roles runs throughout the play. Henrik Ibsen, *Enemy of the People* (1942), pp. 151-2.
12. Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I (1896), Part II, Chaps. x-xii.
13. E. Strauss, *The Ruling Servants* (1961), pp. 34-5. "We are going to have to face the fact," writes one observer, "that there are going to be more and more industrial giants . . . bigger and bigger trade unions, and this means that as competition lessens, the importance that the decisions taken should be the right ones increases. It will not wreck the national economy if a small firm makes the wrong decision, but if I.O.I. does, it may." Laurence Thompson, *The Challenge of Change* (1956), p. 52.
14. Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (1959), p. 25.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
17. S. M. Lipset et al., *Union Democracy* (1956), Chap. xi, pp. 219-37.
18. Nicolai Bukharin, *Historical Materialism* (1925), p. 310.
19. Max Weber, trans. in A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1947) p. 335.
20. Aristotle, *Politics* (1941), p. 1189.
21. Henri Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization in the Near East* (1956), p. 88.
22. J. G. Peristiany, "Law," in *The Institutions of Primitive Society* (1956), p. 45.
23. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1947), p. 190. The distinction between local and national, and segmental and comprehensive power corresponds to Mannheim's classification of power into "com-

- munal" and "functional" types. Karl Mannheim, *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* (1950), pp. 48-76.
24. An exception to the general view that elites are small minorities is provided by Dahrendorf, who maintains that this is no longer the case in advanced industrial societies, although he is of two minds about it. He notes that "the assumption that in any association the number of those subjected to authority is larger than the number of those in possession of authority does seem capable of generalization." But he is "hardly surprised to find that in many modern industrial enterprises almost one-third of all employees exercise superordinate functions. Delegation of authority in industry, in the state, and in other associations makes possible in industrial societies dominating groups which are no longer small minorities, but which in size hardly fall short of subjected groups." Here Dahrendorf seems to confuse responsibility *within* an organization with responsibility *for* it. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959), p. 195.
  25. Georg Simmel, *op. cit.*, p. 365.
  26. Quoted in Mosca, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
  27. Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (1950), p. 289.
  28. Georg Simmel, *op. cit.*, pp. 97, 105-7, 171-2.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
  30. Their findings thus challenge those of an earlier study by Terrien and Mills who found a direct relationship between an increase in the size of an organization and the size of its administration. However, closer examination dissolves the contradiction. The findings of Anderson and Warkov belong in the context of the first intervening variable (the number of persons performing identical tasks has grown); the findings of Terrien and Mills belong to the second (the number of different places at which work is carried on has increased). Frederick W. Terrien and Donald L. Mills, "The Effect of Changing Size Upon the Internal Structure of Organizations," *American Sociological Review*, XX (February 1955), 11-14. See also, Theodore E. Anderson and Semour Warkov, "Organizational Size and Functional Complexity," *American Sociological Review*, XXVI (February 1961), 23-8. Anderson and Warkov found that 12 per cent of the personnel in both large and small hospitals belonged to the administration of these hospitals. In postulating an inverse relationship between size of an organization and size of the administration, however, it would first be necessary to ascertain whether both the large and the small hospitals with identical proportions in the administrations were equally efficient and adequate. In the absence of any evaluation of their functioning, it is impossible to know whether the large hospitals operated as well as the small ones. It may still be true, ideally, that the larger the size the larger *should be* the administrative component, which is not to say that it will be.
  31. Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (1939), p. 53.
  32. Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
  33. Aristotle, *op. cit.* (1941), Book III, Chap. xi.
  34. *Ibid.*, Chap. xvi.
  35. James Madison, *The Federalist*, No. 10, in Richard D. Heffner, *A Documentary History of the United States* (1952), pp. 38-44.
  36. Georg Simmel, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
  37. Of the American business elite in 1950, for example, two thirds had

worked twenty years or longer to obtain the top positions in their firms, even though three fifths of this same group had been born to business families. See, Suzanne Keller, "The Social Origins and Career Lines of Three Generations of American Business Leaders," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University (1953), p. 98.