

This Week's Citation Classic

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Dahrendorf R. *Class and class conflict in industrial society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1959. 336 p.

While building on Marx, social conflict theory has to substitute relations of power for property as the cause of conflict and explore the intensity and violence of conflicts as variable rather than linear. Thus, conflict gives rise to changes of differing degrees of radicalness and rapidity. In this form, the theory is applicable to capitalist as well as post-capitalist society. [The *Science Citation Index*[®] (SCI[®]) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (SSCI[™]) indicate that this book has been cited over 625 times since 1961.]

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"When I wrote the first (German)' version of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* in 1956-57, conflict was still a rare and distant, indeed for many an objectionable, notion in social science. The original book was submitted as a thesis for admission to the senior teaching staff (*Habilitationsschrift*) at the University of Saarbrücken, and in the disputation which accompanied the process, a senior professor evoked the mirth of his colleagues when he said: 'If your thesis is correct that there is conflict in all organisations, then there would have to be conflict in universities too....' Perhaps the fact that 10 years after the original publication few doubted that this was the case has contributed to the success of the book.

"In 1957-58, I spent a memorable year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto. Talcott Parsons was at the Center during that year,

and in the course of a 'Conflict Seminar,' he, the senior and distinguished theorist, and I, the young and perhaps slightly prepotent social scientist, had several disputes. Their central subject was the question of how one would go about explaining social processes —by assuming the essential cohesiveness of an integrated social system and looking at change as disturbance, deviance, and dysfunction, or by regarding society as held together by constraint, and thus assuming the built-in conflictuality of social life. It was during that year, and on the basis of lively discussions at the Center, that I began to translate, or rather rewrite, the book. Its English version, first published in 1959, is the only authentic version and the one which has met with much comment, both critical and appreciative.

"Digging a little deeper, however, my motives were neither the continuing debate with Parsons, nor above all any desire to be original. They were, rather, to look at Marx's theory of social change with the eyes of someone who believed that Popper's strict concept of theory could be applied in the social sciences as well. Obviously, Marx had been wrong so far as explaining social processes in industrialized societies was concerned. Why? And what kind of approach promised more explanatory power?

"The approach suggested in *Class and Class Conflict* is in many ways rather formal. The elements of a theory of change which the book suggests are concerned above all with the rate of social change, that is, with its tempo and its depth. Since then, much of my thought has been devoted to the more difficult question of the direction of change and thus the substance of social conflict. But that is another story.

"The book, being an early contribution to conflict theory, became a college textbook and thus a starting point for further development: this above all is why it was widely cited."

1. Dahrendorf R. *Soziale Klassen und Klassenkonflikt in der industriellen Gesellschaft*. Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1957. 270 p.