Michels's analysis appeared in 1911 in a book titled Political Parties. The phenomenon of party oligarchy was stated thus: if internal democracy could not be found in an organization that was avowedly democratic, it would certainly not exist in parties, which did not claim to be democratic. This principle was called the Iron Law of Oligarchy. The Iron Law of Oligarchy works as follows: First, there is always a rather small number of persons in the organization who actually make decisions, even if authority is vested in the body of the membership. This is a purely functional, if decisions are left to the vulgar masses then nothing get done. The decisions go on at great length without getting to the necessary issues, until either people leave or keep quite. Second, the leaders who have this delegated authority tend to take on more power than the members who selected them do. Once in power they tend to remain there for a long time and are not influenced by the opinions from below. Reasons for this is partly functional, but more so because of the way resources of power are distributed in an organization. The leaders are a much smaller group than the body of the organization; therefore they have the advantage of being better organized. The members, as a whole, come together infrequently if at all; but the leadership is in constant contact with each other. The leadership tends to form a united, behind-the-scenes, informal group, this way making it much easier for them to make plans, carry out programs, etc. Third, the leaders gradually develop values that are at odds with those of the members. That is to say that peoples outlooks are determined by their social positions. For the ordinary member, the organization is something he or she belongs to and participates in from time to time, but it is not usually the center of his or her life. The leader's position is different; the organization is usually a full-time job, or at least a major part of their life. The leader becomes less interest in the concerns of the rank and file or the ideology of the group, and more concerned with staying in power. Does this conflict, dare I say corruption, of the leaders bring them into conflict with their followers? Sometimes it does, but Michels argues, the leadership has the upper hand in such struggles. Unless the bulk of the membership is extremely upset about something, they are very unlikely to dispose of their despot. The power of the organization goes to those in control of the administrative resources. They control the communications within the organization: distribution of news, setting the meetings, it agendas, etc. Most importantly they have legitimate power, therefore, they can claim dissenters as "factions" and "splitters" who represent only themselves and their own interests, there by making the factions the organization's enemies and creating internal dissension. "Who says organization," stated Michels, "says oligarchy."

Bibliography
Introductory—the need for organization

Democracy is inconceivable without organization. A few words will suffice to demonstrate this proposition.

A class which unfurls in the face of society the banner of certain definite claims, and which aspires to the realization of a complex of ideal aims deriving from the economic functions which that class fulfills, needs an organization. Be the claims economic or be they political, organization appears the only means for the creation of a collective will. Organization, based as it is upon the principle of least effort, that is to say, upon the greatest possible economy of energy, is the weapon of the weak in their struggle with the strong.

The chances of success in any struggle will depend upon the degree to which this struggle is carried out upon a basis of solidarity between individuals whose interests are identical. In objecting, therefore, to the theories of the individualists that nothing could please the employers better than the dispersion and disaggregation of the forces of the workers, the socialists, the most fanatical of all the partisans of the idea of organization, enunciate an argument which harmonizes well with the results of scientific study of the nature of parties.

We live in a time in which the idea of cooperation has become so firmly established that even millionaires perceive the necessity of common action. It is easy to understand, then, that organization has become a vital principle of the working class, for in default of it their success is a priori impossible. The refusal of the worker to participate in the collective life of his class cannot fail to entail disastrous consequences. In respect of culture and of economic, physical, and physiological conditions, the proletarian is the weakest element of our society. In fact, the isolated member of the working classes is defenseless in the hands of those who are economically stronger. It is only by combination to form a structural aggregate that the proletarians can acquire the faculty of political resistance and attain to a social dignity. The importance and the influence of the working class are directly proportional to its numerical strength. But for the representation of that numerical strength organization and coordination are indispensable. The principle of organization is an absolutely essential condition for the political struggle of the masses.

Yet this politically necessary principle of organization, while it overcomes that disorganization of forces which would be favorable to the adversary, brings other dangers in its train. We escape Scylla only to dash ourselves on Charybdis. Organization is, in fact, the source from which the conservative currents flow over the plain of democracy, occasioning there disastrous floods and rendering the plain unrecognizable.

Government by the masses
It is obvious that such a gigantic number of persons belonging to a unitary organization cannot do any practical work upon a system of direct discussion. The regular holding of deliberative assemblies of a thousand members encounters the gravest difficulties in respect of room and distance; while from the topographical point of view such an assembly would become altogether impossible if the members numbered ten thousand. Even if we imagined the means of communication to become much better than those which now exist, how would it be possible to assemble such a multitude in a given place, at a stated time, and with the frequency demanded by the exigencies of party life? In addition must be considered the physiological impossibility even for the most powerful orator of making himself heard by a crowd of ten thousand persons. There are, however, other persons of a technical and administrative character which render impossible the direct self-government of large groups. If Peter wrongs Paul, it is out of the question that all the other citizens should hasten to the spot to undertake a personal examination of the matter in dispute, and to take the part of Paul against Peter. By parity of reasoning, in the modern democratic party, it is impossible for the collectivity to undertake the direct settlement of all the controversies that may arise.

Hence the need for delegation, for the system in which delegates represent the mass and carry out its will. Even in groups sincerely animated with the democratic spirit, current business, the preparation and the carrying out of the most important actions, is necessarily left in the hands of individuals. It is well known that the impossibility for the people to exercise a legislative power directly in popular assemblies led the democratic idealists of Spain to demand, as the least of evils, a system of popular representation and a parliamentary state. (1)

Originally the chief is merely the servant of the mass. The organization is based upon the absolute equality of all its members. Equality is here understood in its most general sense, as an equality of like men. In many countries, as in idealist Italy (and in certain regions in Germany where the socialist movement is still in its infancy), this equality is manifested, among other ways, by the mutual use of the familiar "thou," which is employed by the most poorly paid wage-laborer in addressing the most distinguished intellectual. This generic conception of equality is, however, gradually replaced by the idea of equality among comrades belonging to the same organization, all of whose members enjoy the same rights. The democratic principle aims at guaranteeing to all an equal influence and an equal participation in the regulation of the common interests. All are electors, and all are eligible for office. The fundamental postulate of the Declaration des Droits de l'Homme finds here its theoretical application. All the offices are filled by election. The officials, executive organs of the general will, play a merely subordinate part, are always dependent upon the collectivity, and can be deprived of their office at any moment. The mass of the party is omnipotent.

At the outset, the attempt is made to depart as little as possible from pure democracy by subordinating the delegates altogether to the will of the mass, by tying them hand and foot. In the early days of the movement of the Italian agricultural workers, the chief of the league required a majority of four-fifths of the votes to secure election. When disputes arose with the employers about wages, the representative of the organization, before undertaking any negotiations, had to be furnished with a written authority, authorized by the signature of every member of the corporation. All the accounts of the body were open to the examination of the members, at any time. There were two reasons for this. First of all, the desire was to avoid the spread of mistrust through the mass, "this poison which gradually destroys even the strongest organism." In the second place, this usage allowed each one of the members to learn bookkeeping, and to acquire such a general knowledge of
the working of the corporation as to enable him at any time to take over its leadership. (2) It is obvious that democracy in this sense is applicable only on a very small scale. In the infancy of the English labor movement, in many of the trade unions, the delegates were either appointed in rotation from among all the members, or were chosen by lot. (3) Gradually, however, the delegates' duties became more complicated; some individual ability becomes essential, a certain oratorical gift, and a considerable amount of objective knowledge. It thus becomes impossible to trust to blind chance, to the fortune of alphabetic succession, or to the order of priority, in the choice of a delegation whose members must possess certain peculiar personal aptitudes if they are to discharge their mission to the general advantage.

Such were the methods which prevailed in the early days of the labor movement to enable the masses to participate in party and trade-union administration. Today they are falling into disuse, and in the development of the modern political aggregate there is a tendency to shorten and stereotype the process which transforms the led into a leader—a process which has hitherto developed by the natural course of events. Here and there voices make themselves heard demanding a sort of official consecration for the leaders, insisting that it is necessary to constitute a class of professional politicians, of approved and registered experts in political life. Ferdinand Tonnies advocates that the party should institute regular examinations for the nomination of socialist parliamentary candidates, and for the appointment of party secretaries. (4) Heinrich Herkner goes even farther. He contends that the great trade unions cannot long maintain their existence if they persist in entrusting the management of their affairs to persons drawn from the rank and file, who have risen to command stage by stage solely in consequence of practical aptitudes acquired in the service of the organization. He refers, in this connection, to the unions that are controlled by the employers, whose officials are for the most part university men. He foresees that in the near future all the labor organizations will be forced to abandon proletarian exclusiveness, and in the choice of their officials to give the preference to persons of an education that is superior alike in economic, legal, technical, and commercial respects. (5)

Even today, the candidates for the secretaryship of a trade union are subject to examination as to their knowledge of legal matters and their capacity as letter-writers. The socialist organizations engaged in political action also directly undertake the training of their own officials. Everywhere there are coming into existence "nurseries" for the rapid supply of officials possessing a certain amount of "scientific culture." Since 1906 there has existed in Berlin a Party-School in which courses of instruction are given for the training of those who wish to take office in the socialist party or in trade unions. The instructors are paid out of the funds of the socialist party, which was directly responsible for the foundation of the school. The other expenses of the undertaking, including the maintenance of the pupils, are furnished from a common fund supplied by the party and the various trade unions interested. In addition, the families of the pupils, in so far as the attendance of these at the school deprives the families of their breadwinners, receive an allowance from the provincial branch of the party or from the local branch of the union to which each pupil belongs. The third course of this school, from October 1, 1908, to April 3, 1909, was attended by twenty-six pupils, while the first year there had been thirty-one and the second year thirty-three. As pupils, preference is given to comrades who already hold office in the party or in one of the labor unions. (6) Those who do not already belong to the labor bureaucracy make it their aim to enter that body, and cherish the secret hope that attendance at the school will smooth their path. Those who fail to attain this end are apt to exhibit a certain discontent with the party which, after having encouraged their studies, has sent them back to manual labor. Among the 141 students of the year 1910-11, three classes were to be distinguished: one of these consisted of old and tried employees in the different branches of the
labor movement (fifty-two persons); a second consisted of those who obtained employment in the party or the trade unions directly the course was finished (forty-nine persons); the third consisted of those who had to return to manual labor (forty persons). (7)

In Italy, L'Umanitaria, a philanthropic organization run by the socialists, founded at Milan in 1905 a "Practical School of Social Legislation," whose aim it is to give to a certain number of workers an education which will fit them for becoming factory inspectors, or for taking official positions in the various labor organizations, in the friendly societies, or in the labor exchanges. (8) The course of instruction lasts for two years, and at its close the pupils receive, after examination, a diploma which entitles them to the title of "Labor Expert." In 1908 there were two hundred and two pupils, thirty-seven of whom were employees of trade unions or of cooperative societies, four were secretaries of labor exchanges, forty-five employees in or members of the liberal professions, and a hundred and twelve working men. (9) At the outset most of the pupils came to the school as a matter of personal taste, or with the aim of obtaining the diploma in order to secure some comparatively lucrative private employment. But quite recently the governing body has determined to suppress the diploma, and to institute a supplementary course open to those only who are already employed by some labor organization or who definitely intend to enter such employment. For those engaged upon this special course of study there will be provided scholarships of 2 a week, the funds for this purpose being supplied in part by L'Umanitaria and in part by the labor organizations which wish to send their employees to the school. (10) In the year 1909, under the auspices of the Bourse du Travail, there was founded at Turin a similar school (Scuola Pratica di Cultura e Legislazione Sociale), which, however, soon succumbed.

In England the trade unions and cooperative societies make use of Ruskin College, Oxford, sending thither those of their members who aspire to office in the labor organizations, and who have displayed special aptitudes for this career. In Austria it is proposed to found a party school upon the German model.

It is undeniable that all these educational institutions for the officials of the party and of the labor organizations tend, above all, towards the artificial creation of an elite of the working class, of a caste of cadets composed of persons who aspire to the command of the proletarian rank and file. Without wishing it, there is thus effected a continuous enlargement of the gulf which divides the leaders from the masses.

The technical specialization that inevitably results from all extensive organization renders necessary what is called expert leadership. Consequently the power of determination comes to be considered one of the specific attributes of leadership, and is gradually withdrawn from the masses to be concentrated in the hands of the leaders alone. Thus the leaders, who were at first no more than the executive organs of the collective will, soon emancipate themselves from the mass and become independent of its control.

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. The mechanism of the organization, while conferring a solidity of structure, induces serious changes in the organized mass, completely inverting the respective position of the leaders and the led. As a result of organization, every party or professional union becomes divided into a minority of directors and a majority of directed.

It has been remarked that in the lower stages of civilization tyranny is dominant. Democracy cannot
come into existence until there is attained a subsequent and more highly developed stage of social life. Freedoms and privileges, and among these latter the privilege of taking part in the direction of public affairs, are at first restricted to the few. Recent times have been characterized by the gradual extension of these privileges to a widening circle. This is what we know as the era of democracy. But if we pass from the sphere of the state to the sphere of party, we may observe that as democracy continues to develop, a backwash sets in. With the advance of organization, democracy tends to decline. Democratic evolution has a parabolic course. At the present time, at any rate as far as party life is concerned, democracy is in the descending phase. It may be enunciated as a general rule that the increase in the power of the leaders is directly proportional with the extension of the organization. In the various parties and labor organizations of different countries the influence of the leaders is mainly determined (apart from racial and individual grounds) by the varying development of organization. Where organization is stronger, we find that there is a lesser degree of applied democracy.

Every solidly constructed organization, whether it be a democratic state, a political party, or a league of proletarians for the resistance of economic oppression, presents a soil eminently favorable for the differentiation of organs and of functions. The more extended and the more ramified the official apparatus of the organization, the greater the number of its members, the fuller its treasury and the more widely circulated its press, the less efficient becomes the direct control exercised by the rank and file, and the more is this control replaced by the increasing power of committees. Into all parties there insinuates itself that indirect electoral system which in public life the democratic parties fight against with all possible vigor. Yet in party life the influence of this system must be more disastrous than in the far more extensive life of the state. Even in the party congresses, which represent the party-life seven times sifted, we find that it becomes more and more general to refer all important questions to committees which debate in camera.

As organization develops, not only do the tasks of the administration become more difficult and more complicated, but, further, its duties become enlarged and specialized to such a degree that it is no longer possible to take them all in at a single glance. In a rapidly progressive movement, it is not only the growth in the number of duties, but also the higher quality of these, which imposes a more extensive differentiation of function. Nominally, and according to the letter of the rules, all the acts of the leaders are subject to the ever vigilant criticism of the rank and file. In theory the leader is merely an employee bound by the instruction he receives. He has to carry out the orders of the mass, of which he is no more than the executive organ. But in actual fact, as the organization increases in size, this control becomes purely fictitious. The members have to give up the idea of themselves conducting or even supervising the whole administration, and are compelled to hand these tasks over to trustworthy persons specially nominated for the purpose, to salaried officials. The rank and file must content themselves with summary reports, and with the appointment of occasional special committees of inquiry. Yet this does not derive from any special change in the rules of the organization. It is by very necessity that a simple employee gradually becomes a "leader," acquiring a freedom of action which he ought not to possess. The chief then becomes accustomed to dispatch important business on his own responsibility, and to decide various questions relating to the life of the party without any attempt to consult the rank and file. It is obvious that democratic control thus undergoes a progressive diminution, and is ultimately reduced to an infinitesimal minimum. In all the socialist parties there is a continual increase in the number of functions withdrawn from the electoral assemblies and transferred to the executive committees. In this way there is constructed a powerful and complicated edifice. The principle of division of labor coming more and more into operation, executive authority undergoes division and subdivision. There is thus constituted a
rigorously defined and hierarchical bureaucracy. In the catechism of party duties, the strict observance of hierarchical rules becomes the first article. The hierarchy comes into existence as the outcome of technical conditions, and its constitution is an essential postulate of the regular functioning of the party machine.

It is indisputable that the oligarchical and bureaucratic tendency of party organization is a matter of technical and practical necessity. It is the inevitable product of the very principle of organization. Not even the most radical wing of the various socialist parties raises any objection to this retrogressive evolution, the contention being that democracy is only a form of organization and that where it ceases to be possible to harmonize democracy with organization, it is better to abandon the former than the latter. Organization, since it is the only means of attaining the ends of socialism, is considered to comprise within itself the revolutionary content of the party, and this essential content must never be sacrificed for the sake of form.

In all times, in all phases of development, in all branches of human activity, there have been leaders. It is true that certain socialists, above all the orthodox Marxists of Germany, seek to convince us that socialism knows nothing of "leaders," that the party has "employees" merely, being a democratic party, and the existence of leaders being incompatible with democracy. But a false assertion such as this cannot override a sociological law. Its only result is, in fact, to strengthen the rule of the leaders, for it serves to conceal from the mass a danger which really threatens democracy.

For technical and administrative reasons, no less than for tactical reasons, a strong organization needs an equally strong leadership. As long as an organization is loosely constructed and vague in its outlines, no professional leadership can arise. The anarchists, who have a horror of all fixed organization, have no regular leaders. In the early days of German socialism, the Vertrauensmann (homme de confiance) continued to exercise his ordinary occupation. If he received any pay for his work for the party, the remuneration was on an extremely modest scale, and was no more than a temporary grant. His function could never be regarded by him as a regular source of income. The employee of the organization was still a simple workmate, sharing the mode of life and the social condition of his fellows. Today he has been replaced for the most part by the professional politician, Bezirksleiter (U.S. ward boss), etc. The more solid the structure of an organization becomes in the course of the evolution of the modern political party, the more marked becomes the tendency to replace the emergency leader by the professional leader. Every party organization which has attained to a considerable degree of complication demands that there should be a certain number of persons who devote all their activities to the work of the party. The mass provides these by delegations, and the delegates, regularly appointed, become permanent representatives of the mass for the direction of its affairs.

For democracy, however, the first appearance of professional leadership marks the beginning of the end, and this, above all, on account of the logical impossibility of the "representative" system, whether in parliamentary life or in party delegation.

The establishment of a customary right to the office of delegate

One who holds the office of delegate acquires a moral right to that office, and delegates remain in office unless removed by extraordinary circumstances or in obedience to rules observed with exceptional strictness. An election made for a definite purpose becomes a life incumbency. Custom becomes a right. One who has for a certain time held the office of delegate ends by regarding that office as his own property. If refused reinstatement, he threatens reprisals (the threat of resignation
being the least serious among these) which will tend to sow confusion among his comrades, and this confusion will continue until he is victorious.

Resignation of office, in so far as it is not a mere expression of discouragement or protest (such as disinclination to accept a candidature in an unpromising constituency), is in most cases a means for the retention and fortification of leadership. Even in political organizations greater than party, the leaders often employ this stratagem, thus disarming their adversaries by a deference which does not lack a specious democratic color. The opponent is forced to exhibit in return an even greater deference, and this above all when the leader who makes use of the method is really indispensable, or is considered indispensable by the mass. The recent history of Germany affords numerous examples showing the infallibility of this machiavellian device for the maintenance of leadership. During the troubled period of transition from absolute to constitutional monarchy, during the ministry of Ludolf Camphausen, King Frederick William IV of Prussia threatened to abdicate whenever liberal ideas were tending in Prussian politics to gain the upper hand over the romanticist conservatism which was dear to his heart. By this threat the liberals were placed in a dilemma. Either they must accept the king's abdication, which would involve the accession to the throne of Prince William of Prussia, a man of ultrareactionary tendencies, whose reign was likely to be initiated by an uprising among the lower classes; or else they must abandon their liberal schemes, and maintain in power the king now become indispensable. Thus Frederick William always succeeded in getting his own way, and in defeating the schemes of his political opponents. Thirty-five years later Prince Bismarck, establishing his strength with the weapon of his indispensability, consolidated his omnipotence over the German empire which he had recently created, by again and again handing in his resignation to the Emperor William I. His aim was to reduce the old monarch to obedience, whenever the latter showed any signs of exercising an independent will, by suggesting the chaos in internal and external policy which would necessarily result from the retirement of the "founder of the empire," since the aged emperor was not competent to undertake the personal direction of affairs. (11) The present president of the Brazilian republic, Hermes da Fonseca, owes his position chiefly to a timely threat of resignation. Having been appointed Minister of War in 1907, Fonseca undertook the reorganization of the Brazilian army. He brought forward a bill for the introduction of universal compulsory military service, which was fiercely resisted in both houses of parliament. Through his energetic personal advocacy, sustained by a threat of resignation, the measure was ultimately carried, and secured for its promoter such renown, that not only did he remain in office, but in the year 1910 was elected President of the Republic by 102,000 votes against 52,000.

It is the same in all political parties. Whenever an obstacle is encountered, the leaders are apt to offer to resign, professing that they are weary of office, but really aiming to show to the dissentients the indispensability of their own leadership. In 1864, when Vahlteich proposed a change in the rules of the General Association of German Workers, Lassalle, the president, was very angry, and, conscious of his own value to the movement, propounded the following alternative: Either you protect me from the recurrence of such friction as this, or I throw up my office. The immediate result was the expulsion of the importunate critic. In Holland today, Troelstra, the Dutch Lassalle, likewise succeeds in disarming his opponents within the party by pathetically threatening to retire into private life, saying that if they go on subjecting his actions to an inopportune criticism, his injured idealism will force him to withdraw from the daily struggles of party life. The same thing has occurred more than once in the history of the Italian socialist party. It often happens that the socialist members of parliament find themselves in disagreement with the majority of the party upon some question of importance, such as that of the opportuneness of a general strike; or in the party congresses they may
wish to record their votes in opposition to the views of their respective branches. It is easy for them to get their own way and to silence their opponents by threatening to resign. If necessary, they go still further, and actually resign their seats, appealing to the electors as the only authority competent to decide the question in dispute. In such cases they are nearly always re-elected, and thus attain to an incontestable position of power. At the socialist congress held at Bologna in 1904, some of the deputies voted in favor of the reformist resolution, in opposition to the wishes of the majority of the comrades whose views they were supposed to represent. When called to account, they offered to resign their seats, and the party electors, wishing to avoid the expense and trouble of a new election, and afraid of the loss of party seats, hastened to condone the deputies' action. In May, 1906, twenty-four out of the twenty-seven members of the socialist group in the Chamber resigned their seats, in consequence of the difference of views between themselves and the rank and file on the subject of the general strike, which the deputies had repudiated. All but three were re-elected.

Such actions have a fine democratic air, and yet hardly serve to conceal the dictatorial spirit of those who perform them. The leader who asks for a vote of confidence is in appearance submitting to the judgment of his followers, but in reality he throws into the scale the entire weight of his own indispensability, real or supposed, and thus commonly forces submission to his will. The leaders are extremely careful never to admit that the true aim of their threat to resign is the reinforcement of their power over the rank and file. They declare, on the contrary, that their conduct is determined by the purest democratic spirit, that it is a striking proof of their fineness of feeling, of their sense of personal dignity, and of their deference for the mass. Yet if we really look into the matter we cannot fail to see that, whether they desire it or not, their action is an oligarchical demonstration, the manifestation of a tendency to enfranchise themselves from the control of the rank and file. Such resignations, even if not dictated by a self-seeking policy, but offered solely in order to prevent differences of opinion between the leaders and the mass, and in order to maintain the necessary harmony of views, always have as their practical outcome the subjection of the mass to the authority of the leader.

The need for leadership felt by the mass

The same thing happens in party life as happens in the state. In both, the demand for monetary supplies is upon a coercive foundation, but the electoral system has no established sanction. An electoral right exists, but no electoral duty. Until this duty is superimposed upon the right, it appears probable that a small minority only will continue to avail itself of the right which the majority voluntarily renounces, and that the minority will always dictate laws for the indifferent and apathetic mass. The consequence is that, in the political groupings of democracy, the participation in party life has an echeloned aspect. The extensive base consists of the great mass of electors; upon this is superposed the enormously smaller mass of enrolled members of the local branch of the party, numbering perhaps one tenth or even as few as one thirtieth of the electors; above this, again, comes the much smaller number of the members who regularly attend meetings; next comes the group of officials of the party; and highest of all, consisting in part of the same individuals as the last group, come the half-dozen or so members of the executive committee. Effective power is here in inverse ratio to the number of those who exercise it. Thus practical democracy is represented by the following diagram: (12)

- Committee
Officials
• Habitues of meetings
• Enrolled members
• Voters

Though it grumbles occasionally, the majority is really delighted to find persons who will take the trouble to look after its affairs. In the mass, and even in the organized mass of the labor parties, there is an immense need for direction and guidance. This need is accompanied by a genuine cult for the leaders, who are regarded as heroes. Misoneism, the rock upon which so many serious reforms have at all times been wrecked, is at present rather increasing than diminishing. This increase is explicable owing to the more extensive division of labor in modern civilized society, which renders it more and more impossible to embrace in a single glance the totality of the political organization of the state and its ever more complicated mechanism. To this misoneism are superadded, and more particularly in the popular parties, profound differences of culture and education among the members. These differences give to the need for leadership felt by the masses a continually increasing dynamic tendency.

This tendency is manifest in the political parties of all countries. It is true that its intensity varies as between one nation and another, in accordance with contingencies of a historical character or with the influences of racial psychology. The German people in especial exhibits to an extreme degree the need for someone to point out the way and to issue orders. This peculiarity, common to all classes not excepting the proletariat, furnishes a psychological soil upon which a powerful directive hegemony can flourish luxuriantly. There exist among the Germans all the preconditions necessary for such a development: a psychical predisposition to subordination, a profound instinct for discipline, in a word, the whole still-persistent inheritance of the influence of the Prussian drill-sergeant, with all its advantages and all its disadvantages; in addition, a trust in authority which verges on the complete absence of a critical faculty. It is only the Rhinelanders, possessed of a somewhat more conspicuous individuality, who constitute, to a certain extent, an exception to this generalization. The risks to the democratic spirit that are involved by this peculiarity of the German character were well known to Karl Marx. Although himself a party leader in the fullest sense of the term, and although endowed to the highest degree with the qualities necessary for leadership, he thought it necessary to warn the German workers against entertaining too rigid a conception of organization. In a letter from Marx to Schweitzer we are told that in Germany, where the workers are bureaucratically controlled from birth upwards, and for this reason have a blind faith in constituted authority, it is above all necessary to teach them to walk by themselves. (13)

Accessory qualities requisite to leadership

... Those who aspire to leadership in the labor organizations fully recognize the importance of the oratorical art. In March 1909 the socialist students of Ruskin College, Oxford, expressed discontent with their professors because these gave to sociology and to pure logic a more important place in the curriculum than to oratorical exercises. Embryo politicians, the students fully recognized the profit they would derive from oratory in their chosen career. Resolving to back up their complaint by energetic action, they went on strike until they had got their own way.

The prestige acquired by the orator in the minds of the crowd is almost unlimited. What the masses appreciate above all are oratorical gifts as such, beauty and strength of voice, suppleness of mind, badinage; whilst the content of the speech is of quite secondary importance. A spouter who, as if
bitten by a tarantula, rushes hither and thither to speak to the people, is apt to be regarded as a
zealous and active comrade, whereas one who, speaking little but working much, does valuable
service for the party, is regarded with disdain, and considered but an incomplete socialist.

Unquestionably, the fascination exercised by the beauty of a sonorous eloquence is often, for the
masses, no more than the prelude to a long series of disillusionments, either because the speaker's
practical activities bear no proportion to his oratorical abilities, or simply because he is a person of
altogether common character. In most cases however, the masses, intoxicated by the speaker's
powers, are hypnotized to such a degree that for long periods to come they see in him a magnified
image of their own ego. Their admiration and enthusiasm for the orator are, in ultimate analysis, no
more than admiration and enthusiasm for their own personalities, and these sentiments are fostered
by the orator in that he undertakes to speak and to act in the name of the mass, in the name, that is,
of every individual. In responding to the appeal of the great orator, the mass is unconsciously
influenced by its own egoism.

Numerous and varied are the personal qualities thanks to which certain individuals succeed in ruling
the masses. These qualities, which may be considered as specific qualities of leadership, are not
necessarily all assembled in every leader. Among them, the chief is the force of will which reduces
to obedience less powerful wills. Next in importance come the following: a wider extent of
knowledge which impresses the members of the leader's environment; a catonian strength of
conviction, a force of ideas often verging on fanaticism, and which arouses the respect of the masses
by its very intensity; self-sufficiency, even if accompanied by arrogant pride, so long as the leader
knows how to make the crowd share his own pride in himself; in exceptional cases, finally, goodness
of heart and disinterestedness, qualities which recall in the minds of the crowd the figure of Christ,
and reawaken religious sentiments which are decayed but not extinct.

Thus the dominion dependent upon distinction acquired outside the party is comparatively
ephemeral. But age in itself is no barrier whatever to the power of the leaders. The ancient Greeks
said that white hairs were the first crown which must decorate the leaders' foreheads. Today,
however, we live in an epoch in which there is less need for accumulated personal experience of life,
for science puts at every one's disposal efficient means of instruction that even the youngest may
speedily become thoroughly well instructed. Today everything is quickly acquired, even that
experience in which formerly consisted the sole and genuine superiority of the old over the young.
Thus, not in consequence of democracy, but simply owing to the technical type of modern
civilization, age has lost much of its value, and therefore has lost, in addition, the respect which it
inspired and the influence which it exercised. It might rather be said that age is a hindrance to
progress within the party, just as in any other career which it is better to enter in youth because there
are so many steps to mount. This is true at least in the case of well organized parties, and where
there is a great influx of new members. It is certainly different as far as concerns leaders who have
grown old in the service of the party. Age here constitutes an element of superiority. Apart from the
gratitude which the masses feel towards the old fighter on account of the services he has rendered to
the cause, he also possesses this great advantage over the novice that he has a better knowledge of
his trade. David Hume tells us that in practical agriculture the superiority of the old farmer over the
young arises in consequence of a certain uniformity in the effects of the sun, the rain, and, the soil
upon the growth of plants, and because practical experience teaches the rules that determine and
guide these influences. (14) In party life, the old hand has a similar advantage. He possesses a
profonder understanding of the relationships between cause and effect which form the framework
of popular political life and the substance of popular psychology. The result is that his conduct is
guided by a fineness of perception to which the young have not yet attained.

Superiority of leaders

... All parties today have a parliamentary aim. (There is only one exception, that of the anarchists, who are almost without political influence, and who, moreover, since they are the declared enemies of all organization, and who, when they form organizations, do so in defiance of their own principles, cannot be considered to constitute a political party in the proper sense of the term.) They pursue legal methods, appealing to the electors, making it their first aim to acquire parliamentary influence, and having for their ultimate goal "the conquest of political power." It is for this reason that even the representatives of the revolutionary parties enter the legislature. Their parliamentary labors, undertaken at first with reluctance, but subsequently with increasing satisfaction and increasing professional zeal, remove them further and further from their electors. The questions which they have to decide, and whose effective decision demand on their part a serious work of preparation, involve an increase in their own technical competence, and a consequent increase in the distance between themselves and their comrades of the rank and file. Thus the leaders, if they were not "cultured" already, soon become so. But culture exercises a suggestive influence over the masses.

In proportion as they become initiated into the details of political life, as they become familiarized with the different aspects of the fiscal problem and with questions of foreign policy, the leaders gain an importance which renders them indispensable so long as their party continues to practice a parliamentary tactic, and which will perhaps render them important even should this tactic be abandoned. This is perfectly natural, for the leaders cannot be replaced at a moment's notice, since all the other members of the party are absorbed in their everyday occupations and are strangers to the bureaucratic mechanism. This special competence, this expert knowledge, which the leader acquires in matters inaccessible, or almost inaccessible, to the mass, gives him a security of tenure which conflicts with the essential principles of democracy.

The technical competence which definitely elevates the leaders above the mass and subjects the mass to the leaders, has its influence reinforced by certain other factors, such as routine, the social education which the deputies gain in the chamber, and their special training in the work of parliamentary committees. The leaders naturally endeavor to apply in the normal life of the parties the maneuvers they have learned in the parliamentary environment, and in this way they often succeed in diverting currents of opposition to their own dominance. The parliamentarians are past masters in the art of controlling meetings, of applying and interpreting rules, of proposing motions at opportune moments; in a word, they are skilled in the use of artifices of all kinds in order to avoid the discussion of controversial points, in order to extract from a hostile majority a vote favorable to themselves, or at least, if the worst comes to the worst, to reduce the hostile majority to silence. There is no lack of means, varying from an ingenious and often ambiguous manner of putting the question when the vote is to be taken, to the exercise on the crowd of a suggestive influence by insinuations which, while they have no real bearing on the question at issue, none the less produce a strong impression. As referendaries (rapporteurs) and experts, intimately acquainted with all the hidden aspects of the subject under discussion, many of the deputies are adepts in the art of employing digressions, periphrases, and terminological subtleties, by means of which they surround the simplest matter with a maze of obscurity to which they alone have the clue. In this way, whether acting in good faith or in bad, they render it impossible for the masses, whose "theoretical
interpreters" they should be, to follow them, and to understand them, and they thus elude all possibility of technical control. They are masters of the situation. (15)

The intangibility of the deputies is increased and their privileged position is further consolidated by the renown which they acquire, at once among their political adversaries and among their own partisans, by their oratorical talent, by their specialized aptitudes, or by the charm of their intellectual or even their physical personalities. The dismissal by the organized masses of a universally esteemed leader would discredit the party throughout the country. Not only would the party suffer from being deprived of its leaders, if matters were thus pushed to an extreme, but the political reaction upon the status of the party would be immeasurably disastrous. Not only would it be necessary to find substitutes without delay for the dismissed leaders, who have only become familiar with political affairs after many years of arduous and unremitting toil (and where is the party which between one day and the next would be able to provide efficient substitutes?); but also it has to be remembered that it is largely to the personal influence of their old parliamentary chiefs that the masses owe their success in social legislation and in the struggle for the conquest of general political freedom.

The democratic masses are thus compelled to submit to a restriction of their own wills when they are forced to give their leaders an authority which is in the long run destructive to the very principle of democracy. The leader's principal source of power is found in his indispensability. One who is indispensable has in his power all the lords and masters of the earth. The history of the working class parties continually furnishes instances in which the leader has been in flagrant contradiction with the fundamental principles of the movement, but in which the rank and file have not been able to make up their minds to draw the logical consequences of this conflict, because they feel that they cannot get along without the leader, and cannot dispense with the qualities he has acquired in virtue of the very position to which they have themselves elevated him, and because they do not see their way to find an adequate substitute. Numerous are the parliamentary orators and the trade-union leaders who are in opposition to the rank and file at once theoretically and practically, and who, none the less, continue to think and to act tranquilly on behalf of the rank and file. These latter, disconcerted and uneasy, look on at the behavior of the "great men," but seldom dare to throw off their authority and to give them their dismissal.

The struggle between the leaders and the masses

Those who defend the arbitrary acts committed by the democracy, point out that the masses have at their disposal means whereby they can react against the violation of their rights. These means consist in the right of controlling and dismissing their leaders. Unquestionably this defense possesses a certain theoretical value, and the authoritarian inclinations of the leaders are in some degree attenuated by these possibilities. In states with a democratic tendency and under a parliamentary regime, to obtain the fall of a detested minister it suffices, in theory, that the people should be weary of him. In the same way, once more in theory, the ill-humor and the opposition of a socialist group or of an election committee is enough to effect the recall of a deputy's mandate, and in the same way the hostility of the majority at the annual congress of trade unions should be enough to secure the dismissal of a secretary. In practice, however, the exercise of this theoretical right is interfered with by the working of the whole series of conservative tendencies to which allusion has previously been made, so that the supremacy of the autonomous and sovereign masses is rendered purely illusory. The dread by which Nietzsche was at one time so greatly disturbed, that every individual might become a functionary of the mass, must be completely dissipated in face of the truth that while all
have the right to become functionaries, few only possess the possibility.

With the institution of leadership there simultaneously begins, owing to the long tenure of office, the transformation of the leaders into a closed caste.

Unless, as in France, extreme individualism and fanatical political dogmatism stand in the way, the old leaders present themselves to the masses as a compact phalanx—at any rate whenever the masses are so much aroused as to endanger the position of the leaders.

The election of the delegates to congresses, etc., is sometimes regulated by the leaders by means of special agreements, whereby the masses are in fact excluded from all decisive influence in the management of their affairs. These agreements often assume the aspect of a mutual insurance contract. In the German Socialist Party, a few years ago, there came into existence in not a few localities a regular system in accordance with which the leaders nominated one another in rotation as delegates to the various party congresses. In the meetings at which the delegates were appointed, one of the big guns would always propose to the comrades the choice as delegate of the leader whose "turn" it was. The comrades rarely revolt against such artifices, and often fail even to perceive them. Thus competition among the leaders is prevented, in this domain at least; and at the same time there is rendered impossible anything more than passive participation of the rank and file in the higher functions of the life of that party which they alone sustain with their subscriptions. (16) Notwithstanding the violence of the intestine struggles which divide the leaders, in all the democracies they manifest vis-à-vis the masses a vigorous solidarity. "They perceive quickly enough the necessity for agreeing among themselves so that the party cannot escape them by becoming divided." (17) This is true above all of the German social democracy, in which, in consequence of the exceptional solidity of structure which it possesses as compared with all the other socialist parties of the world, conservative tendencies have attained an extreme development.

When there is a struggle between the leaders and the masses, the former are always victorious if only they remain united. At least it rarely happens that the masses succeed in disembarrassing themselves of one of their leaders.

There is no indication whatever that the power possessed by the oligarchy in party life is likely to be overthrown within an appreciable time. The independence of the leaders increases concurrently with their indispensability. Nay more, the influence which they exercise and the financial security of their position become more and more fascinating to the masses, stimulating the ambition of all the more talented elements to enter the privileged bureaucracy of the labor movement. Thus the rank and file becomes continually more impotent to provide new and intelligent forces capable of leading the opposition which may be latent among the masses. (18) Even today the masses rarely move except at the command of their leaders. When the rank and file does take action in conflict with the wishes of the chiefs, this is almost always the outcome of a misunderstanding. The miners' strike in the Ruhr basin in 1905 broke out against the desire of the trade-union leaders, and was generally regarded as a spontaneous explosion of the popular will. But it was subsequently proved beyond dispute that for many months the leaders had been stimulating the rank and file, mobilizing them against the coal barons with repeated threats of a strike, so that the mass of the workers, when they entered on the struggle, could not possibly fail to believe that they did so with the full approval of their chiefs.

It cannot be denied that the masses revolt from time to time, but their revolts are always suppressed. It is only when the dominant classes, struck by sudden blindness, pursue a policy which strains social relationships to the breaking-point, that the party masses appear actively on the stage of history and
overthrow the power of the oligarchies. Every autonomous movement of the masses signifies a profound discordance with the will of the leaders. Apart from such transient interruptions, the natural and normal development of the organization will impress upon the most revolutionary of parties an indelible stamp of conservatism.

The struggle among the leaders themselves

The thesis of the unlimited power of the leaders in democratic parties, requires, however, a certain limitation. Theoretically the leader is bound by the will of the mass, which has only to give a sign and the leader is forced to withdraw. He can be discharged and replaced at any moment. But in practice, as we have learned, for various reasons the leaders enjoy a high degree of independence. It is none the less true that if the Democratic Party cannot dispense with autocratic leaders, it is at least able to change these. Consequently the most dangerous defect in a leader is that he should possess too blind a confidence in the masses. The aristocratic leader is more secure than the democratic against surprises at the hands of the rank and file. It is an essential characteristic of democracy that every private carries a marshal's baton in his knapsack. It is true that the mass is always incapable of governing; but it is no less true that each individual in the mass, in so far as he possesses, for good or for ill, the qualities which are requisite to enable him to rise above the crowd, can attain to the grade of leader and become a ruler. Now this ascent of new leaders always involves the danger, for those who are already in possession of power, that they will be forced to surrender their places to the newcomers. The old leader must therefore keep himself in permanent touch with the opinions and feelings of the masses to which he owes his position. Formally, at least he must act in unison with the crowd, must admit himself to be the instrument of the crowd, must be guided, in appearance at least, by its goodwill and pleasure. Thus it often seems as if the mass really controlled the leaders. But whenever the power of the leaders is seriously threatened, it is in most cases because a new leader or a new group of leaders is on the point of becoming dominant, and is inculcating views opposed to those of the old rulers of the party. It then seems as if the old leaders, unless they are willing to yield to the opinion of the rank and file and to withdraw, must consent to share their power with the new arrivals. If, however, we look more closely into the matter, it is not difficult to see that their submission is in most cases no more than an act of foresight intended to obviate the peril by which they are threatened—the formation of a new elite.

The semblance of obedience to the mass which is exhibited by the leaders assumes, in the case of the feeble and the more cunning among them, the form of demagogy. Demagogues are the courtiers of the popular will. Instead of raising the masses to their own level, they degrade themselves to the level of the masses. Even for the most honest among them, the secret of success consists in "knowing how to turn the blind impulsiveness of the crowd to the service of their own ripely pondered plans." (19) The stronger leaders brave the tempest, well-knowing that their power may be attacked, but cannot be broken. The weak or the base, on the other hand, give ground when the masses make a vigorous onslaught; their dominion is temporarily impaired or interrupted. But their submission is feigned; they are well aware that if they simply remain glued to their posts, their quality as executants of the will of the masses will before long lead to a restoration of their former dominance. One of the most noted leaders of German socialism said in a critical period of tension between the leaders and the masses, that he must follow the will of the masses in order to guide them. (20) A profound psychological truth is hidden in this sarcasm. He who wishes to command must know how to obey.
The struggle between the old leaders and the aspirants to power constitutes a perpetual menace to freedom of speech and thought. We encounter this menace in every democratic organization in so far as it is well ordered and solidly grounded, and in so far as it is operating in the field of party politics (for in the wider life of the state, in which the various parties are in continual reciprocal concussion, it is necessary to leave intact a certain liberty of movement). The leaders, those who already hold the power of the party in their hands, make no concealment of their natural inclination to control as strictly as possible the freedom of speech of those of their colleagues from whom they differ. The consequence is that those in office are great zealots for discipline and subordination, declaring that these qualities are indispensable to the very existence of the party. They go so far as to exercise a censorship over any of their colleagues whom they suspect of rebellious inclinations, forcing them to abandon independent journals, and to publish all their articles in the official organs controlled by the leaders of the majority in the party. The prohibition, in the German Socialist Party, of collaboration on the part of its members with the capitalist press, is in part due to the same tendency; whilst the demand that the comrades should have nothing to do with periodicals which, though socialist, are founded with private capital and are not subject to the official control of the party executive, arises solely from this suspicion on the part of the leaders.

In the struggle against the young aspirants, the old leader can as a rule count securely upon the support of the masses. The rank and file of the working-class parties have a certain natural distrust of all newcomers who have not been openly protected or introduced into the party by old comrades; and this is above all the case when the newcomer is derived from another social class. Thus the new recruit, before he can come into the open with his new ideas, must submit, if he is not to be exposed to the most violent attacks, to a long period of quarantine. In the German Socialist Party, this period of quarantine is especially protracted, for the reason that the German party has been longer established than any of the others, and because its leaders therefore enjoy an exceptional prestige. Many of them were among the actual founders of the party, and their personalities have been consecrated by the baptism of fire which they suffered during the enforcement of the anti-socialist laws. A socialist who has had his party card in his pocket for eight or ten years is often regarded in his branch as a "young" member. This tendency is reinforced by the respect for age which is so strong among the Germans, and by the tendency towards hierarchy of which even the democracy has not been able to divest itself. Finally, it may be added that the bureaucracy of the German labor movement, like every strongly developed bureaucracy, tends instinctively towards exclusivism. Consequently in the German social democracy, in contradistinction to other socialist parties which are less solidly organized, we find that not merely the recently enrolled member of the party (the so-called Fuchs), but also the ordinary member who does not live in the service and by the service of the party but has preserved his outward independence as a private author or in some other capacity, and has therefore not been incorporated among the cogwheels of the party machine, very rarely succeeds in making his influence felt. There can be no doubt that this fact plays a large part in the causation of that lack of a number of capable young men, displaying fresh energies, and not greatly inferior to the old leaders, a lack which has often been deplored. The annual congresses of the Socialist Party have even been spoken of as "congresses of the party officials." The criticism is not unjust, for among the delegates to the socialist congresses the percentage of party and trade-union officials is enormous. It is above all in the superior grades of the organization that the tendencies we are here analyzing are especially conspicuous. In Germany, the management of the Socialist Party is not entrusted to young men, as often happens in Italy, or to free publicists, as in France, but to old members, des anciens, elderly officials of the party. Moreover, the conservative psychology of the masses supports the aspirations of the old leaders, for it would never occur to the rank and file to
entrust the care of their interests to persons belonging to their own proper sphere, that is to say, to those who have no official position in the party and who have not pursued a regular bureaucratic career.

Often the struggle between the old leaders in possession of power and the new aspirants assumes the aspects of a struggle between responsible and irresponsible persons. Many criticisms leveled by the latter against the former are beside the mark, because the leaders have grave responsibilities from which the aspirants are free. This freedom gives the aspirants a tactical advantage in their conflict with the old leaders. Moreover, precisely because they are irresponsible, because they do not occupy any official position in the party, the opponents are not subject to that simulacrum of democratic control which must influence the conduct of those in office.

In order to combat the new chiefs, who are still in a minority, the old leaders of the majority instinctively avail themselves of a series of underhand methods through which they often secure victory, or at least notably retard defeat. Among these means, there is one which will have to be more fully discussed in another connection. The leaders of what we may term the "government" arouse in the minds of the masses distrust of the leaders of the "opposition" by labeling them incompetent and profane, terming them spouters, corrupters of the party, demagogues, and humbugs, whilst in the name of the mass and of democracy they describe themselves as exponents of the collective will, and demand the submission of the insubordinate and even of the merely discontented comrades.

In the struggle among the leaders an appeal is often made to loftier motives. When the members of the executive claim the right to intervene in the democratic functions of the individual sections of the organization, they base this claim upon their more comprehensive grasp of all the circumstances of the case, their profounder insight, their superior socialist culture and keener socialist sentiment. They often claim the right of refusing to accept the new elements which the inexpert and ignorant masses desire to associate with them in the leadership, basing their refusal on the ground that it is necessary to sustain the moral and theoretical level of the party. The revolutionary socialists of Germany demand the maintenance of the centralized power of the executive committee as a means of defense against the dangers, which would otherwise become inevitable as the party grows, of the predominant influence of new and theoretically untrustworthy elements. The old leaders, it is said, must control the masses, lest these should force undesirable colleagues upon them. Hence they claim that the constituencies must not nominate parliamentary candidates without the previous approval of the party executive.

The old leaders always endeavor to harness to their own chariot the forces of those new movements which have not yet found powerful leaders, so as to obviate from the first all competition and all possibility of the formation of new and vigorous intellectual currents. In Germany, the leaders of the Socialist Party and the trade-union leaders at first looked askance at the Young Socialist movement. When, however, they perceived that this movement could not be suppressed, they hastened to place themselves at its head. There was founded for the guidance of the socialist youth a "Central Committee of Young German Workers," comprising four representatives from each of the three parties, that is to say, four from the executive of the Socialist Party, four from the general committee of trade unions, and four from the Young Socialists (the representatives of the latter being thus outnumbered by two to one). The old leaders endeavor to justify the tutelage thus imposed on the Young Socialists by alleging (with more opportunist zeal than logical acuteness) the incapacity of the youthful masses, if left to their own guidance, of wisely choosing their own leaders and of exercising over these an efficient control.
Final considerations

Leadership is a necessary phenomenon, in every form of social life. Consequently it is not the task of science to inquire whether this phenomenon is good or evil, or predominantly one or the other. But there is great scientific value in the demonstration that every system of leadership is incompatible with the most essential postulates of democracy. We are now aware that the law of the historic necessity of oligarchy is primarily based upon a series of facts of experience. Like all other scientific laws, sociological laws are derived from empirical observation. In order, however, to deprive our axiom of its purely descriptive character, and to confer upon it that status of analytical explanation which can alone transform a formula into a law, it does not suffice to contemplate from a unitary outlook those phenomena which may be empirically established; we must also study the determining causes of these phenomena. Such has been our task.

Now, if we leave out of consideration the tendency of the leaders to organize themselves and to consolidate their interests, and if we leave also out of consideration the gratitude of the led towards the leaders, and the general immobility and passivity of the masses, we are led to conclude that the principal cause of oligarchy in the democratic parties is to be found in the technical indispensability of leadership.

The process which has begun in consequence of the differentiation of functions in the party is completed by a complex of qualities which the leaders acquire through their detachment from the mass. At the outset, leaders arise spontaneously; their functions are accessory and gratuitous. Soon, however, they become professional leaders, and in this second stage of development they are stable and irremovable.

It follows that the explanation of the oligarchical phenomenon which thus results is partly psychological; oligarchy derives, that is to say, from the psychological transformations which the leading personalities in the parties undergo in the course of their lives. But also, and still more, oligarchy depends upon what we may term the psychology of organization itself, that is to say, upon the tactical and technical necessities which result from the consolidation of every disciplined political aggregate. Reduced to its most concise expression, the fundamental sociological law of political parties (the term "political" being here used in its most comprehensive significance) may be formulated in the following terms: "It is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy."

Every party organization represents an oligarchical power grounded upon a democratic basis. We find everywhere electors and elected. Also we find everywhere that the power of the elected leaders over the electing masses is almost unlimited. The oligarchical structure of the building suffocates the basic democratic principle. That which is oppress that which ought to be. For the masses, this essential difference between the reality and the ideal remains a mystery. Socialists often cherish a sincere belief that a new elite of politicians will keep faith better than did the old. The notion of the representation of popular interests, a notion to which the great majority of democrats, and in especial the working-class masses of the German-speaking lands, cleave with so much tenacity and confidence, is an illusion engendered by a false illumination, is an effect of mirage. In one of the most delightful pages of his analysis of modern Don Quixotism, Alphonse Daudet shows us how the "bray' commandant" Bravida, who has never quitted Tarascon, gradually comes to persuade himself, influenced by the burning southern sun, that he has been to Shanghai and has had
all kinds of heroic adventures. (21) Similarly the modern proletariat, enduringly influenced by
glib-tongued persons intellectually superior to the mass, ends by believing that by flocking to the
poll and entrusting its social and economic cause to a delegate, its direct participation in power will
be assured.

The formation of oligarchies within the various forms of democracy is the outcome of organic
necessity, and consequently affects every organization, be it socialist or even anarchist. Haller long
ago noted that in every form of social life relationships of dominion and of dependence are created
by Nature herself. (22) The supremacy of the leaders in the democratic and revolutionary parties has
to be taken into account in every historic situation present and to come, even though only a few and
exceptional minds will be fully conscious of its existence. The mass will never rule except in abstrac
to. Consequently the question we have to discuss is not whether ideal democracy is
realizable, but rather to what point and in what degree democracy is desirable, possible, and
realizable at a given moment. In the problem as thus stated we recognize the fundamental problem
of politics as a science. Whoever fails to perceive this must, as Sombart says, either be so blind and
fanatical as not to see that the democratic current daily makes undeniable advance, or else must be
so inexperienced and devoid of critical faculty as to be unable to understand that all order and all
civilization must exhibit aristocratic features. (23) The great error of socialists, an error committed
in consequence of their lack of adequate psychological knowledge, is to be found in their
combination of pessimism regarding the present, with rosy optimism and immeasurable confidence
regarding the future. A realistic view of the mental condition of the masses shows beyond question
that even if we admit the possibility, of moral improvement in mankind, the human materials with
whose use politicians and philosophers cannot dispense in their plans of social reconstruction are not
of a character to justify excessive optimism. Within the limits of time for which human provision is
possible, optimism will remain the exclusive privilege of utopian thinkers.

The socialist parties, like the trade unions, are living forms of social life. As such they react with the
utmost energy against any attempt to analyze their structure or their nature, as if it were a method of
vivisection. When science attains to results which conflict with their apriorist ideology, they revolt
with all their power. Yet their defense is extremely feeble. Those among the representatives of such
organizations whose scientific earnestness and personal good faith make it impossible for them to
deny outright the existence of oligarchical tendencies in every form of democracy, endeavor to
explain these tendencies as the outcome of a kind of atavism in the mentality of the masses,
characteristic of the youth of the movement. The masses, they assure us, are still infected by the
oligarchic virus simply because they have been oppressed during long centuries of slavery, and have
never yet enjoyed an autonomous existence. The socialist regime, however, will soon restore them to
health, and will furnish them with all the capacity necessary for self-government. Nothing could be
more anti-scientific than the supposition that as soon as socialists have gained possession of
governmental power it will suffice for the masses to exercise a little control over their leaders to
secure that the interests of these leaders shall coincide perfectly with the interests of the led. This
idea may be compared with the view of Jules Guesde, no less antiscientific than anti-Marxist
(though Guesde proclaims himself a Marxist), that whereas Christianity has made God into a man,
socialism will make man into a god. (24)

The objective immaturity of the mass is not a mere transitory phenomenon which will disappear
with the progress of democratization au lendemain du socialisme. On the contrary, it derives from
the very nature of the mass as mass, for this, even when organized, suffers from an incurable
incompetence for the solution of the diverse problems which present themselves for
solution—because the mass per se is amorphous, and therefore needs division of labor, specialization,
and guidance. "The human species wants to be governed; it will be. I am ashamed of my kind," wrote Proudhon from his prison in 1850. (25) Man as individual is by nature predestined to be guided, and to be guided all the more in proportion as the functions of life undergo division and subdivision. To an enormously greater degree is guidance necessary for the social group.

From this chain of reasoning and from these scientific convictions it would be erroneous to conclude that we should renounce all endeavors to ascertain the limits which may be imposed upon the powers exercised over the individual by oligarchies (state, dominant class, party, etc.). It would be an error to abandon the desperate enterprise of endeavoring to discover a social order which will render possible the complete realization of the idea of popular sovereignty. In the present work, as the writer said at the outset, it has not been his aim to indicate new paths. But it seemed necessary to lay considerable stress upon the pessimist aspect of democracy which is forced on us by historical study. We had to inquire whether, and within what limits, democracy must remain purely ideal, possessing no other value than that of a moral criterion which renders it possible to appreciate the varying degrees of that oligarchy which is immanent in every social regime. In other words, we have had to inquire if, and in what degree, democracy is an ideal which we can never hope to realize in practice. A further aim of this work was the demolition of some of the facile and superficial democratic illusions which trouble science and lead the masses astray. Finally, the author desired to throw light upon certain sociological tendencies which oppose the reign of democracy, and to a still greater extent oppose the reign of socialism.

The writer does not wish to deny that every revolutionary working-class movement, and every movement sincerely inspired by the democratic spirit, may have a certain value as contributing to the enfeeblement of oligarchic tendencies. The peasant in the fable, when on his death-bed, tells his sons that a treasure is buried in the field. After the old man's death the sons dig everywhere in order to discover the treasure. They do not find it. But their indefatigable labor improves the soil and secures for them a comparative well-being. The treasure in the fable may well symbolize democracy. Democracy is a treasure which no one will ever discover by deliberate search. But in continuing our search, in laboring in indefatigably to discover the undiscoverable, we shall perform a work which will have fertile results in the democratic sense. We have seen, indeed, that within the bosom of the democratic working-class party are born the very tendencies to counteract which that party came into existence. Thanks to the diversity and to the unequal worth of the elements of the party, these tendencies often give rise to manifestations which border on tyranny. We have seen that the replacement of the traditional legitimism of the powers-that-be by the brutal plebiscitary rule of Bonapartist parvenus does not furnish these tendencies with any moral or aesthetic superiority. Historical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy. If laws are passed to control the dominion of the leaders, it is the laws which gradually weaken, and not the leaders. Sometimes, however, the democratic principle carries with it, if not a cure, at least a palliative, for the disease of oligarchy. When Victor Considerant formulated his "democratico-pacificist" socialism, he declared that socialism signified, not the rule of society by the lower classes of the population, but the government and organization of society in the interest of all, through the intermediation of a group of citizens; and he added that the numerical importance of this group must increase pari passu with social development. (26) This last observation draws attention to a point of capital importance. It is, in fact, a general characteristic of democracy, and hence also of the labor movement, to stimulate and to strengthen in the individual the intellectual aptitudes for criticism and control. We have seen how the progressive bureaucratization of the democratic organism tends to neutralize the beneficial effects of such criticism and such control. None the less it is true that the labor movement, in virtue of the theoretical postulates it proclaims, is apt to bring
into existence (in opposition to the will of the leaders) a certain number of free spirits who, moved by principle, by instinct, or by both, desire to revise the base upon which authority is established. Urged on by conviction or by temperament, they are never weary of asking an eternal "Why?" about every human institution. Now this predisposition towards free inquiry, in which we cannot fail to recognize one of the most precious factors of civilization, will gradually increase in proportion as the economic status of the masses undergoes improvement and becomes more stable, and in proportion as they are admitted more effectively to the advantages of civilization. A wider education involves an increasing capacity for exercising control. Can we not observe every day that among the well-to-do the authority of the leaders over the led, extensive though it be, is never so unrestricted as in the case of the leaders of the poor? Taken in the mass, the poor are powerless and disarmed vis-a-vis their leaders. Their intellectual and cultural inferiority makes it impossible for them to see whither the leader is going, or to estimate in advance the significance of his actions. It is, consequently, the great task of social education to raise the intellectual level of the masses, so that they may be enabled, within the limits of what is possible, to counteract the oligarchical tendencies of the working-class movement.

In view of the perennial incompetence of the masses, we have to recognize the existence of two regulative principles:—

- 1. The ideological tendency of democracy towards criticism and control;
- 2. The effective countertendency of democracy towards the creation of parties ever more complex and ever more differentiated—parties, that is to say, which are increasingly based upon the competence of the few.

To the idealist, the analysis of the forms of contemporary democracy cannot fail to be a source of bitter deceptions and profound discouragement. Those alone, perhaps, are in a position to pass a fair judgment upon democracy who, without lapsing into dilettantist sentimentalism, recognize that all scientific and human ideals have relative values. If we wish to estimate the value of democracy, we must do so in comparison with its converse, pure aristocracy. The defects inherent in democracy are obvious. It is none the less true that as a form of social life we must choose democracy as the least of evils. The ideal government would doubtless be that of an aristocracy of persons at once morally good and technically efficient. But where shall we discover such an aristocracy? We may find it sometimes, though very rarely, as the outcome of deliberate selection; but we shall never find it where the hereditary principle remains in operation. Thus monarchy in its pristine purity must be considered as imperfection incarnate, as the most incurable of ills; from the moral point of view it is inferior even to the most revolting of demagogic dictatorships, for the corrupt organism of the latter at least contains a healthy principle upon whose working we may continue to base hopes of social resanation. It may be said, therefore, that the more humanity comes to recognize the advantages which democracy, however imperfect, presents over aristocracy, even at its best, the less likely is it that a recognition of the defects of democracy will provoke a return to aristocracy. Apart from certain formal differences and from the qualities which can be acquired only by good education and inheritance (qualities in which aristocracy will always have the advantage over democracy—qualities which democracy either neglects altogether, or, attempting to imitate them, falsifies them to the point of caricature), the defects of democracy will be found to inhere in its inability to get rid of its aristocratic scoriae. On the other hand, nothing but a serene and frank examination of the oligarchical dangers of democracy will enable us to minimize these dangers even though they can never be entirely avoided.
The democratic currents of history resemble successive waves. They break ever on the same shoal. They are ever renewed. This enduring spectacle is simultaneously encouraging and depressing.

When democracies have gained a certain stage of development, they undergo a gradual transformation, adopting the aristocratic spirit, and in many cases also the aristocratic forms, against which at the outset they struggled so fiercely. Now new accusers arise to denounce the traitors; after an era of glorious combats and of inglorious power, they end by fusing with the old dominant class; whereupon once more they are in their turn attacked by fresh opponents who appeal to the name of democracy. It is probable that this cruel game will continue without end.

Endnotes:

1. Cf. the letter of Antonio Quiroga to King Ferdinand VII, dated January 7, 1820 (Don Juan van Halen, Memoires, Renouard, Paris, 1827, Part II, p. 382)
2. Egidio Bernaroli, Manuale per la constituzione e il funzionamento delle leghe dei contadini, Libreria Soc. Ital., Rome. 1902, pp. 20, 26, 27, 52.
12. This figure must not be regarded as intended to represent such relationships according to scale, for this would require an entire page. It is purely diagrammatic. [I could not get the actual diagram included in the text. The reader is referred to the original source. LRR]
14. David Hume, Inquiries Concerning the Human Understanding: "Why is the aged husbandman more skillful in his calling than the young beginner but because there is a certain uniformity in the operation of the sun, rain, and earth towards the production of vegetables; and experience teaches the old practitioner the rules by which this operation is governed and directed?" (Clarendon Press edition, edited by Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1902, p. 85.)
15. It is interesting to note that the developing bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century found itself in relation to the monarchy in the same state of intellectual inferiority as that in which today are the democratic masses in relation to their leaders, and for very similar reasons. The ingenious Louis XIV expressed the point in the following words: In Franche Comte, "all authority is found, then, in the hands of Parliament which, like an assembly of simple bourgeois, would be easy either to fool or to frighten " (Trans. from Dreyss, op. cit., vol ii, p 328).
16. Similar phenomena have been observed in party life in America (Astrogorsky, La

17. Trans. from Antoine Elisee Cherbuliez, Théorie des Garantis constitutionelles, Ab.

18. Thus Pareto writes: "If B [the new elite] took the place of A [the old elite] by slow
infiltration, and if the social circulation is not interrupted, C [the masses~ are deprived of the
leaders who could incite them to revolt." (Trans. from Vilfredo Pareto, Les Systemes

19. Kochanowski, Urzeitklange, und Wetterleuchten Geschichtlicher Gesetze in den

20. "Ich bin Ihr Fuhrer, also muss ich ihnen folgen.' (Cf. Adolf Weber, Der Kampf zwischn
Kapital u. Arbeit, ed. cit., p. 369.)


304 et seq.

23. Werner Sombart, Dennoch!, ed cit., p. 90. Cf. also F. S. Merlino, Pro e contro il
Socialismo, ed cit., pp. 262 et seq.


25. Charles Gide et Charles Rise, Histoire des Doctrines économiques depuis les Physiocrates

26. Victor Considerant, Principes du Socialisme. Manifeste de la Democratie au xixie Siecle,

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### THE BIG IDEA

**Robert Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' (1911) – Who says organization says oligarchy**

Before Michels declaimed his 'iron law' ...

The belief in the viability of an ideal form of direct popular democracy (drawing heavily on Rousseau) was still very prevalent, particularly on the left of political spectrum. Socialist parties aimed to mobilize the working class to take up their democratic rights. All citizens were equal and through direct democracy laws were to further the collective interest.

**The essence of Michels' critique**

- Citizens cannot be mobilized on a large-scale without large-scale organizations.
- Such organizations cannot exist effectively without a bureaucracy to administer them
- Those at the top of this bureaucracy will inevitably have more influence over the operation of the organization than the rank and file members.

Therefore, the formation of organizations designed to bring power to the people will have the opposite effect, concentrating power in the elite leadership of the organization.

**How do those at the top of an organization accrue power?**

- Their resources are greatly superior to rank and file members.
  a) They have far greater knowledge of the organization.
  b) They have control over communication within the organization.
  c) As professional leaders, their political skills will exceed those of members.
- 'Incompetence of the masses': why members offer little resistance to their leaders
  a) Attempting to maintain influence within an organization is time consuming.
  b) Unlike those running the organization, rank and file members cannot afford to spend all their time working in the organization so apathy is natural.

**But it's even worse ...**

- Michels argues that although leaders come from the same social class as the mass membership, once they enter the hierarchy they inevitably join a new 'power elite'.
- The power elite operates in a very different environment to the rank and file.
- Like everyone, the power elite is self-interested. However, their primary interest no longer lies in furthering democratic goals, but in maximizing their own influence.
- Representative leadership is thus impossible, as the interests of leaders will often conflict with those of their members. The elite will do whatever it takes to further their interests, including restricting the democratic rights of members that the organization was intended to guarantee.

**Some Evidence**

- The decision of the German Social Democratic party to embrace the First World War saw the leaders abandoning their organization's pacifist principles to maintain their influence.
- The Russian Revolution showed that the triumph of the masses would soon be succeeded by the dictatorship of a minority.