

## Power and History: The Political Thought of James Burnham

*The Managerial Revolution.* By James Burnham. (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, Midland Books, 1960 reprint edition; originally published 1941). Referred to in the text as MR.

*The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom.* By James Burnham. (New York: The John Day Company, 1943). Referred to in the text as MDF.

*Suicide of the West: An Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism.* By James Burnham. (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1975, 2nd edition; originally published 1964). Referred to in the text as SW.

/(ore than any other single person," writes George H. Nash<sup>1</sup> **IVI** in his history of recent American conservative thought, "[James] Burnham supplied the conservative intellectual movement with the theoretical formulation for victory in the cold war."<sup>1</sup> It would be difficult-and unnecessary-to challenge Dr. Nash's statement. For almost exactly twenty-three years-from November 1955 to November 1978- James Burnham wrote a fortnightly column on foreign affairs for the leading American conservative journal, *National Review*, of which he was senior editor. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Burnham published a series of books on Communism and U. S. foreign policy that profoundly influenced American conservative perceptions of global affairs and which may have influenced the actual formulation of foreign policy in the early years of the cold war. These contributions by themselves would justify Nash's statement and raise James Burnham to the front rank of recent American conservative intellectuals.

Yet the political thought of James Burnham is by no means confined to his critique of Communism and his commentary on interna-

1. George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p. 91.

tional relations. His contributions in these fields are in fact derivative from his main concerns. Some years before Burnham had acquired a reputation as an analyst of foreign policy, he achieved wide recognition as a student of current economic, social, and political developments in the United States. He had also formulated a systematic political theory as a framework for his analysis, and it is in terms of this theory that Burnham's entire career as a writer and thinker must be understood.

Despite Burnham's influence on conservative anti-Communist thought, it is doubtful that the systematic character of his contributions to political theory has been appreciated or indeed widely perceived. Although a number of his contemporaries in the American conservative intellectual movement have been the subject of recent discussion by their disciples and critics, there is very little in recent conservative literature about Burnham as a political thinker. It is true, and ironic, that the American and European left concentrated considerable fire on Burnham's works as they appeared, but the right seems largely to have ignored these earlier writings and to have missed their significance for conservative political thought.<sup>2</sup>

Several reasons may account for this neglect of Burnham by the political right. First, the philosophical underpinnings of Burnham's conservatism are unusual and cannot be categorized as either libertarian or conventionally traditionalist in the strict sense of these terms. Indeed, one conservative publicist has questioned whether Burnham is a conservative at all.<sup>3</sup> Philosophically, Burnham's political thought appears to have developed from the empiricist and historicist tradition and to owe little to the principal source of modern traditionalist conservatism, the "Great Tradition" of natural law and philosophical realism. Nor does Burnham's thought owe much to the classical liberal tradition of which Ludwig von Mises and F. A. Hayek are representative. The eccentric foundations of Burnham's political thought therefore may have served to deflect scholarly conservative attention from it.

2. For conservative commentary on Burnham, see Brian Crozier, "My Pilgrimage to Kent (Connecticut)," *New Lugano Review*, no. 11-12 (1976), pp. 18-24; and Henry Regnery, "Emerging Conservatism: Kilpatrick, Morley, and Burnham," *Modern Age* XXII (Summer, 1978), pp. 237-45.

3. Peter P. Witonski, "The Conservative Consensus," *National Review*, December 1, 1970, p. 1306, calls Burnham a "right-wing counter-revolutionary" and "not strictly speaking a conservative" but does not define the former term.

Moreover, Burnham's thought, even at its most conservative, owed much to the Marxism of his youth, and his early writings after his definite political break with the Fourth International retain a strong coloration of Marxist themes and language. These writings, in other words, although profoundly anti-Marxist, are not self-evidently conservative, and considerable attention is necessary to make plain their conservative drift. Despite the subtlety or obscurity of these early writings, they are in fact the cornerstone of all of Burnham's later thought, and they articulate the principal themes of his later works.

The themes and prophecies that Burnham developed from the 1940s through the 1960s were often the object of criticism and even of ridicule. Yet today they may be taken more seriously. In *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) and *The Machiavellians* (1943) Burnham predicted and warned against the "fusion" of the political and economic orders and the potential tyranny that this fusion represented. Recent scholarship has tended to confirm the historical and economic analysis that underlies *The Managerial Revolution*, and contemporary concerns over bureaucracy in state and corporation, deregulation, and the "New Class" tend to justify and reflect Burnham's much earlier vaticinations.<sup>4</sup> In his trilogy on Communism of the late 1940s and early 1950s Burnham warned of the persistence of the revolutionary dynamic of established Marxism, the inherently tyrannical nature of Communism, and the tendency of the American governing elite to follow a "policy of vacillation" in responding to Communist conduct at home and abroad. The expansion of Soviet power in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America in the 1970s, the warnings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other recent anti-Communists, and the development of what has been called "appeasement" and "neo-isolationism" among American foreign policy-makers all tend to verify and recapitulate Burnham's much earlier prognostications. In *Congress and the American Tradition*, developing an idea first articulated in *The Managerial Revolution*, Burnham predicted and warned against the "Caesarist" tendencies of the American executive branch. Both conservative and liberal

4. Irving Kristol, "The 'New Class' Revisited," *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 1979, p. 24, mentions *The Managerial Revolution* as a source of neo-conservative ideas of the "new class"; see also the symposium, "Is There a New Class?" *Society* (January/February, 1979), pp. 14-62, and B. Bruce-Biggs, ed., *The New Class?* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979).

writers have more recently developed the same idea of an "Imperial Presidency."<sup>5</sup> Despite a certain amount of ambiguity in some of Burnham's early writings, therefore, these works not only remain relevant but also are extraordinarily prescient. A study of Burnham's early political thought will clarify the systematic and continuous nature of his theoretical contributions and will also perhaps suggest new approaches to contemporary public concerns.

### *The Managerial Revolution*

From 1934 to 1940 James Burnham was a member of the Fourth International, the Trotskyite branch of the international Communist movement, and a member and leading spokesman of its American section, the Socialist Workers Party. Despite his membership and role in the Trotskyite movement, Burnham was not an orthodox adherent of Marxism or even of its Trotskyite form. By the time of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August, 1939, Burnham had developed serious disagreements with Trotsky himself and with the very body of Marxist ideology. It was the impact of Stalin's agreement with Hitler-and more particularly Trotsky's own defense of Stalin's policies-coupled with growing skepticism about Marxism that led Burnham to resign from the Socialist Workers Party on May 21, 1940 and to renounce his allegiance to Marxism in all its forms.<sup>6</sup>

The principal point of dispute between Burnham and Trotsky lay in their differing understandings of the nature of the Soviet Union. Trotsky continued to regard the U.S.S.R., even under Stalin, as a "worker's state" that had transcended capitalism and was moving progressively toward socialism. The dictatorship of Stalin was, to be sure, a "deformation" of the worker's state, but Trotsky and his adherents regarded Stalinism as an aberration that would in time be overcome. Burnham, on the other hand, found it more and more difficult to regard the Soviet system as socialist in the Marxist sense and was increasingly persuaded that Stalinism was not a temporary

5. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973). William F. Buckley, Jr., "Mr. Reid's Bill," *National Review*, March 16, 1973, p. 331; and Irving Kristol, "The Inexorable Rise of the Executive," *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 1974, p. 12, both cited Burnham's *Congress and the American Tradition* as a conservative warning of expanded executive power during the Watergate affair.

6. See John P. Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 184-89.

aberration from but an inherent part of Marxism. In his letter of resignation to the National Committee of the Workers Party, Burnham wrote,

I consider that on the basis of the evidence now available to us a new form of exploitive society (which I call "managerial society") is not only possible as an alternative to capitalism but is a more probable outcome of the present period than socialism.'

In 1941 Burnham explored this "alternative to capitalism" in *The Managerial Revolution*.

In the Marxist interpretation of history, three stages of social development—feudalism, capitalism, and socialism—occur through violent and prolonged revolutionary upheavals. The transition from one state to another is inevitable and grows out of the relationship to the means of production and exchange of the elite or ruling class that controls them and the masses or subordinate classes that are controlled and exploited by the rulers. In *The Managerial Revolution* Burnham rejected the inevitability—indeed the very possibility—of the transition to the final stage of socialism. He did not, however, reject the Marxist account of history up to the present stage of capitalism, nor did he reject for the most part the economic determinism of Marx.

Burnham argued in *The Managerial Revolution* that capitalism was indeed undergoing a lethal crisis in the 1930s and that it would be succeeded by a new form of society with a different ruling class and different political and social institutions. The new society would be what he called "managerialism," and the transition from capitalism to managerial society would be as profound and as world-historically important as the earlier transition from feudalism to capitalism. Yet the new society would not be socialist (in which the workers own and control the means of production and exchange), and a new exploitive ruling class—the managerial class—would displace the capitalists and rule both them and the workers. The managerial elite would transform society and bring to an end the private property economy, the parliamentary and nationalist governments, and the individualistic society and values of the old capitalistic order. There was a strong possibility, wrote

7. Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), "Letter of Resignation of James Burnham from the Workers Party," (May 21, 1940), p. 207.

Burnham, that managerial society would develop in an anti-democratic and totalitarian way; and he saw managerialism manifested in Stalinist Russia, the Fascist states of Germany, Italy, and Japan, and in the "New Deal" revolution of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States.

Burnham had developed the theory of the managerial revolution from a number of earlier sociological and economic writers going back to Max Weber and Thorstein Veblen, but the main impetus for the idea came from the classic work of A. A. Berle and Gardiner Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*.<sup>8</sup> Berle and Means had noted the decline of entrepreneurial firms-i.e., firms in which the same persons own and operate the means of production-in the American economy and the increase in managerial firms-those in which the stock is owned by one group and the operation (and hence the control) is in the hands of another, specially trained group. They had noted that this "separation of ownership and control" meant that those who operated and controlled the economy (the managers) no longer had a vested interest in the rights of property. The larger corporations (in which managers are more common than in smaller firms) would therefore not oppose the development of a significant governmental role in the economy as much as the traditional entrepreneurs had.

Burnham adopted this idea of the separation of ownership and control from Berle and Means, but he refined and extended it to other social institutions besides the corporate firm. Managers, in Burnham's theory, are not simply "the operating executives, production managers, plant superintendents, and their associates [who] have charge of the actual technical process of producing" (MR, 82). The category of managers also includes, besides those engaged in the management of the economic processes, those bureaucratic administrators created by the New Deal and the state in other managerial regimes:

The active heads of the bureaus are the managers-in-government, the same, or nearly the same, in training, functions, skills, habits of thought as the managers-in-industry. Indeed; there is less and less distinction between the two.... In all countries, as government expands, it incorporates the tasks and fields which were before left to private industry. (MR, 150)

8. Adolf A. Berle, Jr., and Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933).

The expansion of government, however, is not a mere accident of our time but is itself integrally related to the managerial revolution. The decreasing interest of the managerial groups in private property rights and the difficulty of accumulating large personal fortunes through a corporate career mean that these groups have less and less objection to the expanding role of the government in the economy. Moreover, the internal crisis of entrepreneurial capitalism compels the expansion of the state. Massive amounts of new capital cannot be mobilized from private sources and must come, directly or indirectly, from government. The managers, indispensable to the technical processes of modern production, find cooperation with the state and use of its coercive monopoly valuable for the continuance of production and for their own benefits. The redistribution of goods, services, and wealth is facilitated by state intervention, planning, and, ultimately, control of the process of production. Yet the expanding role of the state does not mean that the state itself controls the economy. Rather, the result will be "a fused political-economic apparatus" (MR, 123).

Fusion of the economy with the state, expansion of the state functions to comprise also control of the economy, offers, whether or not the managers individually recognize it, the only available means, on the one hand for making the economic structure workable again after its capitalist breakdown, on the other for putting the managers in the position of the ruling class. (MR, 127)

In the collectivized managerial economy profit will no longer be the ultimate goal of production and will not be necessary, since state direction, funding, and control will provide coercive and non-competitive motivations. The discipline of the market will be replaced by that of centralized planning. The capitalist or bourgeois class will disappear, but the working class will enjoy no higher status, since it will be coerced into employment with no bargaining permitted. The periodic crises of capitalist economies, caused by the profit motive and its dynamics, will also disappear, but the managerial economy will have its own characteristic crises. These will be "technical and political in character: they will result from breakdowns in bureaucratized administration...or from mass movements of dissatisfaction and revolt" (MR, 132). Production, however, will not be dependent on the profit motive or on available private capital but will be dictated by the needs of the managerial economy as determined by its central planning and the interests of its ruling class. Despite the loss of political and economic freedom,

however, the managerial economy will probably be productive enough to raise the standard of living of most of its members, far beyond what capitalist economies could achieve.

Burnham did not limit his analysis of the coming managerial regime to its economy. He also undertook to predict and to analyze the political and social character of managerial society as well as its international relations. Politically, traditional entrepreneurial capitalism had tended to promote parliamentary government and a decentralized political structure. Socially and intellectually, entrepreneurial capitalism had been associated with individualism—with the nuclear family, individualized religion, and an emphasis on individual responsibility and action. Internationally, capitalism had been associated with the nation-state and a system of competing or conflicting nation-states in alliance or at war with each other. All these institutions and values expressed the economic and political interests of the old entrepreneurial elite; they were justified in terms of entrepreneurial ideologies, and they were now about to be replaced by new and very different institutions and values reflecting the ideologies and interests of the new managerial class (MR, 9-28 *passim*).

The managers will "shift the locus of sovereignty" from parliamentary assemblies representing the capitalist class to the administrative bureaus of the expanded state. The executive branch and its bureaucracy will undermine the older assemblies and intermediary institutions in the Congress, the state legislatures, local governments, and independent organizations. This shift will assist the fusion of state and economy and will be responsible for the totalitarian character of managerial society.

Under entrepreneurial capitalism, it was the interest of the entrepreneurial elite to maintain a "limited state" that could not interfere with the private economic power base of the elite. Thus, there was a distinction between the state and economy, and this distinction allowed for a certain degree of political and economic freedom. In the emerging managerial society this distinction will disappear. "The managers become the state," (MR, 157) and the fusion of the political and economic powers means that both will be united in one social formation. With the end of the distinction between state and economy, the conflict and maneuvering between them will cease, and all power will be centralized. There will be an erosion of the lines traditionally drawn between private and public, and the result will be totalitarianism, the monopolization of power



by a single political force and its control of all aspects of human social life.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, Burnham granted that some differentiations within the managerial class would persist, eventually develop, and bring about a gradual loosening of the totalitarian concentration of power. Economic managers would resent and resist the power of bureaucratic managers. These differentiations would lead to permanent oppositions and conflicts within the elite, so that a later phase of the managerial society would be more democratic (in the limited sense of allowing rights of political expression to minorities). In the early phase, however, the managers must have recourse to totalitarian rule in order to undermine the capitalist class, to control the masses, and to discipline each other. But they will find it expedient as well as irresistible to encourage an eventual democratization. It will be necessary to know the demands of the masses, and the managers will understand that discontent must have a "mechanism for orderly expression" (MR, 167). Yet Burnham was not sanguine about the future of democracy in managerial society, and he warned that

It would...be an error for those who like democracy to be over-optimistic about it. It is not certain on the evidence so far.... The democracy of managerial society will be some while being born; and its birth pangs will include drastic convulsions, (MR, 170-171)

The ideological and institutional character of managerial society would also be profoundly different from that of traditional capitalism. "All organized societies," Burnham wrote,

are cemented together, not merely by force and the threat of force, and by established patterns of institutionalized behavior, but also by accepted ways of feeling and thinking and talking and looking at the world, by ideologies. (MR, 185)

Ideologies are not scientific theories, under the control of empirical and logical validation, but expressions of "human interests, needs, desires, hopes, fears" (MR, 185). They have two functions, however. They must express in some way the interests of the ruling class, and they must appeal to the sentiments of the ruled classes. Under

9, See chs. 10 and 11 in Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* for the political differences between capitalist and managerial societies.

capitalism, ideologies of individualism, natural rights, and historical progress had expressed and justified the economic and political interests of the capitalist ruling class, and these ideologies had earlier challenged and replaced feudalistic doctrines (MR, 24-27). Under managerial rule, the capitalist and individualistic ideologies will be replaced by ideas more congruent to the interests of the new elite. The old ideologies not only fail to serve the new elite but also have lost their appeal to the masses, as is shown by the electoral successes of anti-capitalist political candidates in the United States, Germany, France, and England. The new ideologies are "concepts suited to the structure of managerial society and the rule of the managers."

In place of the "individual," the stress turns to the "state," the people, the folk, the race. In place of private enterprise, "socialism" or "collectivism." In place of "freedom" and "free initiative," planning. Less talk about "rights" and "natural rights"; more about "duties" and "order" and "discipline." Less about "opportunity" and more about "jobs." In addition, in these early decades of managerial society, more of the positive elements that were once part of capitalist ideology in its rising youth, but have left it in old age: destiny, the future, sacrifice, power.... (MR, 190-191)

Fascism-Nazism and Leninism-Stalinism are examples of managerial ideologies, and in the United States, "Technocracy and the much more important New Dealism are embryonic and less-developed types of primitive, native-American managerial ideologies" (MR, 192). Among these fascist, Communist, and New Deal ideologies, the bond is not formal but historical, pointing away from capitalist and toward managerial dominance. "Their conception of the state is a social extension generalized from managerial experience" (MR, 197). The fascist and Communist ideas of the Party and of an elite (a vanguard or master race)-which is "the managers and their political associates" (MR, 198)-are essential for securing social and political control. New Dealism developed in the same direction. "The notion that there is only one party-the New Deal party-that can represent the American people is no longer unfamiliar.... In each Roosevelt election the ideological line has been sharper" (MR, 202). Despite differences of intellectual ancestry, cultural disparities, personality traits of the leaders, and historical accidents, there is a unity among the ideologies of Communism, fascism, and the New Deal (which would later come to be known as "liberalism"). The unity is not found in the formal, philosophical,

logical, or rhetorical expression but in the common interests that they serve and the vectors of history that they represent:

the development of attitudes and patterns of response which are adverse to the continuance of capitalism and favorable to the development of managerial society, which are adverse to the continued social acceptance of the rule of the capitalists, and favorable to the social acceptance of the rule of the managers. (MR, 203)

The managerial revolution will also bring about profound changes in international policy and organization. The structural limitations of entrepreneurial capitalism prevented it from organizing large geographical regions effectively and kept its political organization within the bounds of the nation-state. The managerial elite will dominate in the areas of advanced economic development and will expand beyond them to coordinate the resources and markets of the underdeveloped world. Nationalism, with its parochial loyalties and animosities, would be resisted and overcome by the new elite, which would promote new transnational organizations that would supersede the nation-state and resemble empires. Only the advanced industrial areas of the world could form the cores of these new empires, and these areas in the 1930s were the United States, northwestern and central Europe, and Japan and Manchuria.

These areas would become the cores of three new managerial power blocs that would consolidate their strategic bases and then embark on a protracted struggle for the world. "This struggle among the three strategic centers for world control will be the fundamental theme of the coming wars of managerial society" (MR, 179). The "Second World War was 'the first great war of managerial society' and would end with the unification of Europe and the destruction of the British Empire, 'chief political representative of capitalist world society'" (MR, 176-177). The less developed areas of the world "will have to gravitate toward one or another of the great camps, even if they have some temporary success in a struggle for independence" (MR, 130-131). Already these tendencies could be observed in Japan and Europe, but the United States was also consolidating its strategic base in the northern hemisphere of North America and was hesitantly preparing for the coming struggle. In America, this preparation was slower than in Germany or Japan, for the old capitalist elite was still powerful in the United States and resisted the pressures for managerial imperialism.

Everywhere, men will have to line up with one or the other of the super-states of tomorrow. There will not be room for smaller sovereign nations; nor will the less advanced peoples be able to stand up against the might of the metropolitan areas. Of course, polite fictions of independence may be preserved for propaganda purposes; but it is the reality and not the name of sovereignty about which we are talking. (MR, 181)

The managerial revolution therefore did not consist merely in a change within American corporate structure, as Berle and Means had argued. In Burnham's extended concept of the manager, the foundation was laid for an analysis of world affairs that included the economy, political systems, ideologies and institutions, and international policies and wars of the twentieth century. There was little that the effete and dying entrepreneurial ruling class could do to retard or reverse the trend, for the entrepreneurial resistance was centered in obsolescent organizations, institutions, ideologies, and personalities:

the Hoovers, the Lippmanns, the Girdlers and Weirs and Wilkies, the New York *Herald Tribune* and the Chicago *Tribune*, the leaders of the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.... The "Liberty League" was their organization. (MR, 188)

The entrepreneurial elite resists the ideologies, the increasing governmental role, the globalist foreign policies of the managers, but the resistance is fruitless because the structure of traditional capitalism and its social and political expressions can no longer resolve its own crises or continue to control and appeal to the masses. Burnham in several passages pointed out that capitalist critiques of the New Deal and of the emergent managerial order were correct, but it was not enough to be right.

The old structure of society, once healthy, is now breaking up and a new structure is being built; an old class is on its way out and a new class marching in, (MR, 188)

As the foregoing account may suggest, *The Managerial Revolution* was an extremely controversial book. Few of the ideological and political factions of the 1940s could take much comfort in it. The Marxists were obviously displeased, since Burnham had argued that Communism was a sham and inherently totalitarian. Conservatives might have used the book to argue against New Deal economic planning and policies, but Burnham had argued that the traditional

capitalism that conservatives defended was doomed to oblivion. Liberals might have been attracted to Burnham's critique of capitalism, but they found the overt elitism and authoritarianism that Burnham predicted (sometimes with apparent relish) distasteful. Some critics not only disagreed with Burnham's predictions but also went so far as to accuse Burnham of appointing himself to the position of unofficial spokesman for the managerial class. C. Wright Mills called Burnham "A Marx for the Managers" in his review of the book.<sup>10</sup>

The controversy around *The Managerial Revolution* did not end quickly, nor did the currency of the book. As late as the late 1960s it was still assigned reading in courses on American economic history, and debate about its thesis is still continuing. Daniel Bell has criticized it in his recent *Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, and the American left has been especially critical of the theory of the managerial revolution."

Ideologically, the left dislikes Burnham's theory because the American corporate and governmental hierarchy must be portrayed as a closed and self-perpetuating establishment, a "Power Elite" in C. Wright Mills' theory. The theory of the managerial revolution implies that the traditional elite is being broken up or displaced from social power and that a new elite, more open to merit, is developing. Burnham did not emphasize the openness of the managerial elite, but later writers who adopted the central idea of the separation of ownership and control did develop it.

The principal controversy around *The Managerial Revolution* and books with related themes was on this point of the separation of ownership and control and on the validity of the differentiation of the managerial and capitalist classes. In general, the left has argued against both points. In 1977, however, Alfred D. Chandler of Harvard published his *The Visible Hand; The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, a massive study that analyzed the administrative

10. C. Wright Mills and Hans H. Gerth, "A Marx for the Managers," in *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. and with an Introduction by Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Ballantine Books, n.d.), pp. 53-71.

11. Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 90-94; for left-wing criticism of the theory of the managerial revolution, see T. B. Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 77-82, and G. William Domhoff, *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling-Class Domination in America* (New York: Random House, 1978), pp. 19-24.

and financial history of American business and which received the Pulitzer Prize in 1978.<sup>12</sup> In general, Chandler's research endorsed the basic ideas on which Burnham's book relied. Chandler found that "administrative coordination [has become] more efficient and more profitable than market coordination," that "career managers preferred policies that favored the long-term stability and growth of their enterprises to those that maximized current profits," and that "the management of the enterprise became separated from its ownership."<sup>13</sup>

Chandler did not discuss the cultural, political, or social implications of the managerial revolution, but he did provide firm scholarly underpinning for Burnham's theory and endorsed the central economic basis of it. Reviewing this final confirmation of his ideas in one of his last book reviews, Burnham noted that current theories of a "new class" are inadequate unless they attribute actual power to the dominant group.

No theory about a new class in modern societies-whether they're called capitalist, socialist, or fascist-is going to get very far unless it has a plausible slot for those chaps whose advance to "permanence, power, and continued growth" Professor Chandler recounts and explains.<sup>14</sup>

To be sure, a great many of the predictions of *The Managerial Revolution* were simply wrong. The economic determinism, the Marxist interpretation of history, and the stark, overstated language of Marxism still lingered in Burnham's mind in 1941 and frequently led him to erroneous predictions. In 1959 Burnham himself admitted that some of his statements appeared "too rigid and doctrinaire" and that some propositions were "wrong or incomplete." The United States did not develop into a totalitarian state; Germany and Japan did not win World War II; the capitalist class and its institutions did not disappear; and Congress and the nation-state were not overcome by a bureaucratic Caesarism and managerial empires. A literal reading of *The Managerial Revolution* would probably lead to the conclusion that its analysis and predictions were so erroneous as to be worthless.

12. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1977).

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-11.

14. James Burnham, "What New Class?" *National Review*, January 20, 1978, p. 99.

Yet it is impossible to read Burnham's book of 1941 without affirming that he had correctly identified a number of emerging patterns and forces in American and world affairs, even if the full development of these tendencies did not (or has not yet) come to pass. The mass organizations of modern economic and political life appear to require a bureaucracy with specialized technical and administrative skills (managers), and the ideology and interests of these managers are frequently in conflict with those of traditional entrepreneurs and leaders. Moreover, whether managers operate in the economy, in government, or in mass social organizations, they appear to share certain values and ideals that tend to unite them as a class. These values and ideals would include a faith in mass collective organizations and administration, a bias toward secularism and materialism, and at least a vague sympathy for what is often called "elitism," "paternalism," or "statism." The settlement of disputes by law rather than by administrative decree and social planning, a preference for local and private approaches rather than for central and public ones, and a firm commitment to traditional values and institutions rather than a penchant for social innovation have not characterized modern managerial groups. If their economic and political power has not been as total as Burnham predicted in 1941, it has certainly been much greater than before he wrote.

Burnham in 1959 felt that his predictions of the replacement of the nation-state system by a small group of super-states had been fulfilled—if not by Germany, Japan, and the United States, then by the Soviet Union and the United States—as had his predictions of a protracted conflict between the super-states for control of the world (MR, vii). Moreover, the two super-states sought to organize their power bases through transnational regional or geographical blocs—NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the Common Market and COMECON, the United Nations Organization (MR, vii). Again, it is possible to argue that Burnham's original predictions had not been fulfilled, but they seem to have discerned correctly an important vector of modern history.

Congress and other parliamentary assemblies did not disappear, nor did the class of entrepreneurial capitalists and its ideology and institutions. But the executive branch in the United States and in several other advanced economies did continue to expand its power and functions through the instrument of a bureaucratic elite and at the expense of representative assemblies. Entrepreneurial firms continued to decline in political and economic influence, and the

ideologies of individualism and the Capitalist Ethic continued to decline in popularity against those of collectivism, hedonism, and an ethic of consumption and gratification.

What Burnham had achieved in *The Managerial Revolution* was an identification and analysis, in quasi-Marxist terms, of some of the dominant forces of the twentieth century and an explanation of these forces and their interrelationships in terms of a coherent, schematic theory. The exaggerations and errors of the original statement of the theory of the managerial revolution do not invalidate those predictions that were correct or suggestive. As Burnham himself stated in an interview some ten years after the publication of *The Managerial Revolution*,

The people who point these [errors] out don't bother to point out how many predictions were right. It's easy enough to avoid mistakes in prediction by never saying anything definite about any problem. I could do that. But I'm not interested in playing safe. I'm interested in a problem-and in an answer. I think that's serious, don't you?"

For all of its faults and the controversies it generated, *The Managerial Revolution* was a profoundly influential book. Despite his criticisms, C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* appears to have developed strikingly similar ideas to those of Burnham. Burnham himself believed that Milovan Djilas' *The New Class* "is a fairly direct application of the theory of the managerial revolution to Soviet developments" (MR, ix). Jeffrey Hart, Irving Kristol, and other writers have been directly influenced by Djilas' book, and Kristol has acknowledged the influence of Burnham on the development of the idea of a "new class" in contemporary American society.<sup>15</sup> But perhaps the most influential of all those who were af-

15. Harvey Breit, "Talk with James Burnham," *New York Times Book Review*, February 26, 1950, p. 16.

16. See Jeffrey Hart, "Earthquake Time in America," *National Review*, March 5, 1976, pp. 208-212; Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: New American Library, 1979), esp. ch. 2 and v. n. 4 *supra*; Robert W. Whitaker, *A Plague on Both Your Houses* (Washington and New York: Robert B. Luce, 1976); William A. Rusher, *The Making of a New Majority Party* (Ottawa, Ill.: Green Hill Publishers, 1975); Kevin P. Phillips, *Mediocracy: American Parties and Politics in the Communications Age* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1975); and Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* and *idem*, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) are other recent books dealing with the idea of a "new class" in America.



fectured by *The Managerial Revolution* was George Orwell, whose 1984 presented a fictional projection of Burnham's portrayal of managerial society and who wrote two long essays on Burnham's political thought."

Orwell, like other critics of Burnham, appears to have believed that Burnham approved of the predictions he had made. This Burnham emphatically denied. "I am concerned exclusively," he wrote,

with the attempt to elaborate a *descriptive* theory able to explain the character of the present period of social transition and to predict, at least in general, its outcome. I am not concerned, in this book at any rate, with whether the facts indicated by this theory are "good" or "bad," just or unjust, desirable or undesirable-but simply with whether the theory is true or false on the basis of the evidence now at our disposal. (MR, 8)

And, at the end of the book, he wrote,

I have no personal wish to prove the theory of the managerial revolution true. On the contrary, my personal interests, material as well as moral, and my hopes are in conflict with the conclusions of this theory. (MR, 273)

Nevertheless, the starkness of Burnham's style, his clear contempt for a decadent elite, and his admiration for the rising managerial class with its efficiency and lack of sentimentality appeared to confirm his critics' judgments. His refusal to make an explicit moral judgment of the events he predicted also strengthened their argument against him, and in his next book Burnham undertook to elaborate more clearly his view of political morality and of what he called "the science of power."

### *The Machiavellians*

*The Managerial Revolution* had grown out of Burnham's dispute with Trotsky in the 1930s and was an answer to Trotsky. Stalinist Russia was not a "deformed worker's state" but a new kind of society

17. For the influence of Orwell, see William Steinhoff, *George Orwell and the Origins of 1984* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), esp. ch. 3, pp. 43-54; George Orwell, "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution" and "Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle," in *In Front of Your Nose, 1945-1950*, Vol. IV of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (4 vols.; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), pp. 160-81 and 313-26.

that Marxism had not anticipated-managerial society. Yet, despite Burnham's political and intellectual break with Marxism, significant fragments of Marxist ideology remained with him and seriously marred his statement of the theory of the managerial revolution. In *The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom*, Burnham eradicated many of his remaining Marxist preconceptions, formulated a general theory of human political behavior, and restated the theory of the managerial revolution in terms of this theoretical framework.

In his first book, which had begun with a long epigraph from Machiavelli's letters, Burnham had revealed a scathing contempt for what he called "ideology." Although he recognized the social need for ideologies as sets of beliefs that hold societies together, he had dismissed them as unscientific beliefs that were uncontrolled by facts (MR, 185). This discrepancy between logic and reality, between the verbalized form and the concrete meaning, is one that is a persistent theme in all of Burnham's writings and one that he explicitly developed in *The Machiavellians*.

Burnham found in Machiavelli and in the four political theorists of the twentieth century whom he described as Machiavellians the foundations of a realistic method of social and political analysis. Contrasting the theological and metaphysical political philosophy of Dante Alighieri in *De Monarchia* with the historically and empirically grounded approach of Machiavelli, Burnham developed a fundamental distinction between the "formal" and the "real" meaning of a statement. The formal meaning of a statement is "the meaning which is explicitly stated" but which "serves to express, in an indirect and disguised manner, what may be called the *real* meaning."

By 'real meaning' I refer to the meaning not in terms of the fictional world of religion, metaphysics, miracles, and pseudo-history...but in terms of the actual world of space, time, and events. (MDF, 9-10)

The real meaning, then, is the empirically discoverable and verifiable meaning, the only meaning that has value for expressing the truth. In Machiavelli, Burnham argued, there is no distinction between the formal and real meanings, because Machiavelli explicitly stated his goals and meaning, did not attempt to disguise them, and took pains to verify them empirically and to make them clear.

Whether this is an accurate presentation of Machiavelli or not is not particularly important to the political theory that Burnham developed. His purpose was not to write a learned treatise on

Renaissance history and philosophy but to elaborate an empirically sound method of analyzing human political affairs. The tradition of political thought that Burnham labelled "Machiavellian" did indeed derive many of its ideas from the sixteenth-century Florentine, but whether this was an accurate derivation and whether Machiavelli himself would have endorsed "Machiavellianism" are separate and secondary questions.<sup>18</sup>

The four thinkers whom Burnham discussed in detail in *The Machiavellians* were Georges Sorel, Robert Michels, Gaetano Mosca, and Vilfredo Pareto. To at least some extent all four saw themselves as the heirs of Machiavelli. Like him they were all concerned with the problems of political power—not with how to justify power, nor the external forms and appearances of power, but with how men actually use, pursue, attain, and lose power. Like Machiavelli, all four were profoundly conscious of the radical discrepancies between the formal disguises of power in rhetoric, ideology, and institutions and the terrible realities of power in the actual history of men. Thirdly, like Machiavelli, they believed that through the observation and study of the history of power relationships, a set of generalizations about power and men's usage of it could be formulated: in other words, that a historically grounded science of power—not a philosophy or ethical theory—was possible.

Behind these common beliefs was a body of common assumptions about the nature of political man and human history. The Machiavellians saw political life as constantly in flux, but the "process of change is repetitive, and roughly cyclical" (MDF, 62).

The recurring pattern of change expresses the more or less permanent core of human nature as it functions politically. The instability of all governments and political forms follows in part from the limitless human appetite for power. (MDF, 63)

Because of the recurrent patterns of change, history moves in cycles and is not a unilinear progression. The repetitive cycles make possible a science of human political behavior. What men have done

18. Burnham's interpretation is entirely at odds with that of Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1978), which has been enormously influential on conservative political thought, even among non-Straussians. For a critique of Strauss' anti-Machiavellian interpretation from a Catholic conservative perspective, see Dante Germino, "Second Thoughts on Leo Strauss' Machiavelli," *Journal of Politics* XXVIII (November, 1966), pp. 794-817.

before, they will do again in the future, and within limits it is therefore possible to predict their behavior through analogies drawn from history.

Machiavelli and his followers saw men in general as evil: "all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature, whenever the may find occasion for it."<sup>19</sup> The Machiavellians depicted human beings as insatiable in their desire for power, wealth, and pre-eminence but also as irrational, prejudiced, ignorant, and easily deceived by others as well as by themselves. Mosca specifically criticized and rejected the optimistic progressivism of Rousseau. Pareto devoted much of the six volumes of *The Mind and Society* to exposing human irrationality and appetitive motivations. Sorel explicated the role of myths and falsehoods in providing a unifying force for political action (especially violent action). Michels throughout his work on political parties showed how minorities continually monopolize power by deceiving and coercing the mass membership.

This emphasis on human evil and irrationality is central to the Machiavellian argument. Burnham and the Machiavellians saw politics-and to a large extent the human condition-in terms of the savage and incessant struggle for power at all levels of society, regardless of how this struggle might be disguised by language, symbolism, and institutional forms. Driven by insatiable appetites and irrational beliefs, men seek to dominate each other or to escape domination by others. This struggle invariably results in a minority coming to power, monopolizing as much as possible political, economic, military, technical, and honorific resources and excluding and oppressing the majority. Thus is formed an "elite" (Pareto), "ruling class" (Mosca), or "oligarchy" (Michels) that rules the majority and exploits it for its own benefit through force and fraud. The rule of elites in human societies is inevitable, and therefore oligarchy is the only possible distribution of power-what Michels called "The Iron Law of Oligarchy."<sup>20</sup> There is no end to

19. Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, I, 3, in Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses*, with an Introduction by Max Lerner (New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 1950), p. 117 (hereafter cited as Machiavelli, *Discourses*).

20. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden and Charles Paul (1915; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1959), see esp. Part Six, "Synthesis: The Oligarchical Tendencies of Organization," pp. 365-408.

oligarchical rule. Although one elite may lose its power-indeed, always loses its power, sooner or later-another minority takes its place through what Pareto calls "the circulation of elites," and the record of this unending rise and fall of ruling minorities is human history.

These conclusions are bleak, and the Machiavellians saw little ground for hope of democratic emancipation. Modern democracy they interpreted as a special kind of disguised oligarchy based on commercial and industrial power and not fundamentally different from earlier kinds of elitism. Mosca and Pareto in particular saw socialism as no more than an illusion that threatened to subordinate all of society to an elite based on the power of the state. To Michels, oligarchy was an inherent part of social and political organization.

A doctrine that was common to most of the Machiavellians and which Burnham emphasized was the concept of what Mosca called the "political formula," Pareto called "derivations," and Sorel called "myths." According to these writers, elites do not hold power simply through force and intimidation. They formulate doctrines that rationalize or justify their control in logical, moral, theological, or philosophical terms. These doctrines-political formulas, derivations, or myths, or, as Burnham called them in *The Managerial Revolution*, ideologies-act as socially and politically integrative forces and are often quite sophisticated and complex in their structures. Most members of a society-elites as well as non-elites-believe them and, to at least some extent, take them seriously. Nevertheless, despite their sophistication and large number of adherents, these ideologies are not to be regarded as scientific in purpose or content. Their purpose is not to express or explain reality in a way that can be proved or disproved but to provide a rationalization for the existence and power of the dominant minority. The fact that ideologies are not scientific and that those who believe in them do so for non-rational reasons means that it is useless to criticize ideologies in terms of verifiable facts or logic. Ideology is impervious to such criticism because belief in it is dependent on non-rational factors such as self-interest or emotion. The fact that an elite itself usually believes in most or all of its own ideology also means that no elite can be entirely scientific in its own thinking and behavior; any elite must always, to some extent, be the victim of its own myths. Burnham argued that the Machiavellian "science of power" could provide a non-ideological framework for an elite, but

he was highly skeptical that any elite could for long make successful use of this science.

Burnham and the Machiavellians tended to interpret all of social and political reality in terms of the doctrine of the elite. For them, the nature of the elite is largely determinative of other social, economic, political, and cultural institutions. Institutions that are not consistent with the perceived interests of an elite are abolished or discouraged, while those that are or would be consistent with its perceived interests are created or promoted.

From the point of view of the theory of the ruling class, a society is the society of its ruling class. A nation's strength or weakness, its culture, its powers of endurance, its prosperity, its decadence, depend in the first instance upon the nature of its ruling class. More particularly, the way in which to study a nation, to understand it, to predict what will happen to it, requires first of all and primarily an analysis of the ruling class. Political history and political science are thus predominantly the history and science of ruling classes, their origin, development, composition, structure, and changes. (MDF, 91-92)

The importance that the Machiavellians attached to the elite or ruling class resembles and to a degree parallels Marx's emphasis on economic forces in interpreting history. Yet the Machiavellian theory of elites is a broader doctrine than that of Marx and allows for consideration of non-economic and non-material forces in understanding men and history far more than Marx did. Nevertheless, because Burnham and the Machiavellians saw politics in terms of a struggle for power, and the struggle for power was central to the nature of an elite and to all other social relationships, it would not be inaccurate to describe Machiavellianism as a kind of "political determinism" paralleling the economic determinism of Marx.

It should also be understood that Burnham and his mentors were not arguing for elitism in the sense of "aristocracy." They were not arguing that elites should rule the majority because their members are better, more virtuous, stronger, more intelligent, or wiser than most men. They were arguing for the sociological inevitability of minority domination, for the impossibility of majority rule and democracy in any literal or meaningful sense. The fact of oligarchy, they argued, was founded on an empirical and comparative study of history, on the biological and psychological realities of human beings, and on the nature of human societies. It was a fact that could

be neither ignored nor altered, and moral approbation or criticism of the fact of oligarchy is irrelevant to its truth.

Yet elites are not permanent, and the laws that govern the changes in the composition and the rise and fall of elites were an important theme for Burnham and for Mosca and Pareto, to whom he devoted most attention. Mosca had recognized in all elites an "aristocratic tendency" by which they tend to restrict or encourage entrance to or exit from their ranks. When the restrictive aristocratic tendency is predominant, society is stable and may begin to stagnate. When the democratic tendency is predominant, society is in flux, with many innovations, social and political crises, cultural ferment, and perhaps disorder, chaos, and revolution (MDF, 102-106).

Pareto himself went further and developed a psychology of elites that is at the root of his theory of the circulation of elites. Pareto distinguished between "derivations" or ideologies and "residues," which are constant, universal psychological instincts or impulses. Among the six classes of residues that Pareto recognized the two most important were those of "Class I-the instinct for combinations" and "Class II-group persistence." These residues Pareto specifically correlated with Machiavelli's distinction between the fox and the lion among rulers. Just as the ruler who is a fox relies on cunning, deceit, and verbal and intellectual skills, elites whose members are driven by Class I residues tend to synthesize arbitrary elements of their experience. Class I residues include behavioral patterns such as those of magic, philosophical system-making, and financial manipulation. Elites that contain primarily verbalists, intellectuals, and administrators will exhibit a high proportion of Class I residues and will try to preserve their own power and resolve problems through verbal, administrative, and manipulative behavior rather than through the use of force. They thus correspond to Machiavelli's foxes:

They live by their wits; they put their reliance on fraud, deceit, and shrewdness. They do not have strong attachment to family, church, nation, and traditions.... They live in the present, taking little thought of the future, and are always ready for change, novelty, and adventure.... They are not adept, as a rule, in the use of force. They are inventive and chance-taking. (MDF, 211)

The residues of Class II, group persistence, correspond to the lions of Machiavelli, for those who exhibit a high proportion of Class II residues

are able and ready to use force, relying on it rather than brains to solve their problems. They are conservative, patriotic, loyal to tradition, and solidly tend to supra-individual groups like family or church or nation. (MDF, 211)

Class II residues are psychic forces that tend to sustain and perpetuate existing combinations. They are sociologically conservative while those of Class I are sociologically innovative.

A healthy elite, according to Pareto, will have an equilibrium in the distribution of these psychic types within it, but under certain conditions an imbalance will result. If too many Class II residues accrue in the elite, it will rely excessively on force and will fail to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances and challenges. If too many Class I types come to predominate-as Pareto believed was happening in the late nineteenth century-the elite and its society will become soft, unstable, corrupt, and disorderly, although the society may produce a very high level of cultural expression. Worst of all, however, the society will be unwilling and unable to use force to protect itself from either internal or external challenges. While the foxes of Class I predominate in the elite, the lions of Class II are concentrated in the non-elite and may use force against the foxes in rebellion or other forms of violence. External enemies may also commit aggression against the societies ruled by foxes, and, in any case, because of the lack of qualities of group persistence, a society led by Class I types will have few psychic resources for mustering endurance and sacrifice.

Elites that are imbalanced by too many Class I or Class II residues are unstable and are likely to be overthrown or replaced. They tend to create the conditions that lead to their fall from power. The rise and fall of elites and changes in their composition Pareto called "the circulation of elites." Normally, a healthy elite will be in continual but slow circulation, admitting new members and expelling or ostracizing old and decadent elements. When the circulation occurs too rapidly or when one elite is suddenly and entirely replaced by another, the result is revolution.

The theory of elites as developed by Mosca and Pareto and endorsed and expounded by Burnham was by no means an argument for the monopolization of power and privilege by an established few. Indeed, Mosca and Pareto were emphatic that healthy elites should alter in composition slowly and regularly and that they should not become homogeneous or monolithic. Mosca in particular dwelled on these points and developed a method that went beyond



the descriptive analysis of Machiavellianism to a normative mode of analysis by which elites and the societies they ruled could be evaluated.

Although the rule of elites-unelected and unrepresentative-is inevitable, Mosca argued that the internal structure of elites is an important means of distinguishing them. All societies, according to Mosca, are composed of contending "social forces"-groups that have interests and values associated with particular kinds of activities (e.g., agriculture, industry, education, religion, the army, etc.). Within these social forces there are hierarchies and differentiations of power, wealth, merit, or geographical location. The most significant social forces become part of the elite and pursue their particular interests and values within it. When, according to Mosca, there is a multiplicity of independent social forces within the elite or ruling class such that no one force has sufficient power to exclude or exploit the others, then a *de facto* condition of "juridical defense" obtains. Mosca's concept of juridical defense is approximate to what is more generally known as "the rule of law." Because of the mutually balancing and restraining action of the social forces in the ruling class, no single force or faction can accumulate or exercise arbitrary, irregular power. Each social force-and the groups and individuals composing or attached to it-protects itself from exploitation by the checking power it holds against the others. Even though this system of sociopolitical checks may not be formally recognized in law, it can still exist and be a substantive restraint on tyrannical power (MDF, 107-115).

Mosca's concept of juridical defense owed much to both Machiavelli and Montesquieu as well as to the exponents of the classical theory of the mixed constitution. Unlike Montesquieu, however, Mosca did not limit his idea of "checks and balances" to the formal and legalistic components of the government but extended it to the substantial, concrete, or "real" component social forces within a ruling class. This departure from the formal to the real was part of the Machiavellian tradition, and Mosca thus welded it to the classical tradition of the mixed constitution. In Burnham's words,

Juridical defense can be secure only where there are at work various and opposing tendencies and forces, and where these mutually check and restrain each other. (MDF, 110)

The product of juridical defense is liberty. "The specific forms of juridical defense include the familiar 'democratic rights': security of private property, security against arbitrary arrest, freedom of religion, discussion, and assembly (MDF, 109). Moreover, the multiplicity of social forces participating and sharing power in the ruling class leads to a high "level of civilization" and an efflorescence of cultural life. By way of contrast, the monopolization of power by one social force leads to its unchecked power and to a low level of civilization as other social forces with other resources, values, and skills are excluded and exploited (MDF, 109-111).

Using the concept of juridical defense and its antithesis, Mosca was able to evaluate different kinds of polities depending on the internal structure and composition of their elites. The worst kind of government would be the uniform regimes in which the unrestrained power of a single social force prevents all others from obtaining power and contributing to the public culture. The best kind of government, to both Mosca and Pareto, was the representative, middle class-aristocratic, parliamentary governments of the mid to late nineteenth century. This type, however, was threatened by the rise of mass democracy, new classes of wealth and power, and socialism. These forces, to both Mosca and Pareto, threatened to upset the delicate balance that underlies juridical defense and to impose a monolithic regime on modern society.

It should be noted that this normative measure of governments is fundamentally modern, and as such it follows Machiavelli and Montesquieu. The best regime to Mosca and Pareto is not that in which the virtue of the citizen is most developed but that in which the security and liberty of the citizen and the commonwealth are best protected. Although Mosca and the Machiavellians were influenced by Aristotle, Cicero, and the pre-modern tradition of political thought, their primary concern was not, as with the earlier school, the ethical realization of man in society. The special contribution of the Machiavellian tradition, however, is the establishment of a criterion of normative judgment of regimes based on empirical rather than on transcendental grounds.

Burnham accepted this Machiavellian formulation, and it is fundamental to his entire career as a political thinker. His primary concern, like Machiavelli's, was to establish a verifiable methodology for the analysis of social and political affairs, but he was also concerned to discover a realistic means of evaluating and judging political institutions and behavior. He found both in the

Machiavellians, and it was the limitation of power that remained for him the primary political ideal.

The Machiavellians are the only ones who have told us the full truth about power.... the primary object, in practice, of all rulers is to serve their own interest, to maintain their own power and privilege... no theory, no promises, no morality, no amount of good will, no religion will restrain power. Neither priests nor soldiers, neither labor leaders nor businessmen, neither bureaucrats nor feudal lords will differ from each other in the basic use which they will seek to make of power.... Only power restrains power.... when all opposition is destroyed, there is no longer any limit to what power may do. A despotism, any kind of despotism, can be benevolent only by accident. (MDF, 246-247)

In *The Managerial Revolution* Burnham had developed a model for the explanation of current world events-the Depression; the rise of totalitarianism; revolutionary changes in social and economic structure, political behavior, and intellectual and cultural fermentation. The chief problem with his presentation of the theory of the managerial revolution was its over-reliance on Marxist economic determinism and analogies drawn from the Marxist interpretation of history. The Machiavellians, however, were not economic determinists, and their interpretation of history was far more flexible than that of Marx. Burnham therefore undertook to restate the theory of the managerial revolution in terms of the Machiavellian analytical framework (MDF, 223 et seq.).

According to the Machiavellian model, an elite or ruling class suffers a crisis of power under certain conditions. Burnham retained in *The Machiavellians* the essentially economic definition of the old elite as a capitalist, bourgeois, or entrepreneurial class that owned and operated the means of production. However, the economic forces and relationships were not the central factors in bringing about the crisis of the old elite and the rise of a new one. The rise of new social forces, especially technological developments, over which the capitalist or entrepreneurial elite has no control, has made its institutions and ideologies obsolescent and less useful for preserving its power. The old elite has also undergone a psychological, intellectual, and moral degeneration. It shows little faith in its own ideology and institutions, and it exhibits Mosca's "aristocratic tendency" and a crystallization of its membership, interests, and activities instead of a dynamic, innovative expansion. Finally, the entrepreneurial elite is tending to abandon political and professional pursuits in favor of cultural and leisure activities. It is

drawn to humanitarian and irrationalist ideologies that undermine its own rule, and it shows an increasing reluctance and inability to use force effectively. The Class I or "fox-like" residues of Pareto are accumulating too heavily in the entrepreneurial elite (MDF, 229-231).

In opposition to these signs of decadence is the aggressive, efficient, dynamic, and sometimes fanatical character of the rising managerial class, itself a new social force-

the production executives and organizers of the industrial process, officials trained in the manipulation of the great labor organizations, and the administrators, bureau chiefs and commissars developed in the executive branch of the unlimited modern state machines. And, that the managers may function, the economic and political structure must be modified, as it is now being modified, so as to rest no longer on private ownership and small-scale nationalist sovereignty, but primarily upon state control of the economy, and continental or vast regional world political organization. (MDF, 232)

This vast reorganization will require the use of force, military machines, and soldiers far more than did the old capitalist society. Hence, the ruling class of managers will include more lions or Class II residues than did the entrepreneurial elite. The political formula of the managers will be democratist and will appeal to the emotions and material wants of the masses, but the political reality will be autocracy. What Burnham calls "Bonapartism," represented by the Nazi, Stalinist, and New Deal political style and ideologies, will prevail over the constitutionalist, decentralized parliamentary governments of the capitalist era (MDF, 233-235, 238-239).

The tendency of Bonapartism and of the managerial class is totalitarian. The managers want, need, and find valuable a state that is unitary and all-powerful. Intermediary and non-political institutions and groups are denounced and undermined if they do not support the rising managerial powers. Not only does the managerial class need an extended and omnipotent state for its own internal and international policies and goals but also the crisis of the Depression and the Second World War gives it the opportunity to create one. Hence, managerial propaganda denounces the entrepreneurial class and its supportive institutions-churches, non-politicized labor unions, small businessmen, schools, the opposition press, local political institutions, the Congress itself-and seeks to portray them as reactionary, parochial, and responsible for the present crisis and

its misery. Only by destroying and moving beyond these obsolescent forces can the crisis be resolved (MDF, 249-250).

Burnham was not happy about the totalitarian vector of managerial society. "Private-capitalist ownership of the economy," he wrote,

meant a dispersion of economic power and a partial separation between economic and other social forces in a manner that prevented the concentration of an overwhelming single social force. Today the advance of the managerial revolution is everywhere concentrating economic power in the state apparatus, where it tends to unite with control over the other great social forces—the army, education, labor, law, the political bureaucracy, art, and science even. This development, too, tends to destroy the basis for those social oppositions that keep freedom alive. (MDF, 251)

The entrepreneurs are therefore correct to argue that the New Deal and other managerial policies were a threat to freedom, but the entrepreneurial formulas of market capitalism, a limited state, and national sovereignty had lost their credibility. In any case, the debate between "the conservative spokesmen for the old-line capitalist class" and "the Marxists and the democratic totalitarians" who defend the rising managerial class is a debate in ideology and myths that "express...a contest for control over the despotic and Bonapartist political order which they both anticipate" (MDF, 253-254). The apologists for the managers would destroy all liberty and juridical defense in pursuit of utopianism, and the apologists of traditional capitalism are simply whistling in the wind, for "it is in any case impossible to return to private capitalism" (MDF, 253-254).

Yet Burnham was not entirely pessimistic about the survival of some liberty. He suggested that some social opposition might persist or develop that would create a balance of forces in the managerial elite, and he also hoped that the principles of the Machiavellian "science of power" would inform the new ruling class of its real interests and of the utility of liberty. He developed a brilliant defense of liberty and juridical defense on the grounds that they actually enhance the cohesion, strength, and flexibility of a society rather than limit it (MDF, 255-270, 251-252).

*The Machiavellians* is probably Burnham's most widely misunderstood book. George Orwell appears to have seen in it a blueprint for the "doublethink" of 1984.<sup>21</sup> The sociologist David

21. On Orwell, see Steinhoff, *George Orwell and the Origins of 1984*, pp. 49-52.

Spitz took a similar view of the book and included Burnham as an anti-democratic ideologue.<sup>22</sup> The very subtitle of Burnham's book - "Defenders of Freedom" - should be sufficient to refute this misinterpretation, and it may be that some critics of the book have not read far beyond the subtitle. It is true that Burnham described the coming society in the starkest language, yet this style is typical of Machiavelli and his disciples and is appropriate to their claim to realism and disavowal of ideology and sentiment. It is difficult to see how any familiarity with the contents and arguments of *The Machiavellians* could overlook Burnham's exposition of the theory of juridical defense, his criticism of managerial political tendencies, or his own defense of liberty. The fact that many critics have missed these points suggests that Burnham's discussion of ideology applies to the authors of such criticism.

### Liberalism, Conservatism, and the Future of the West

Burnham's later career as a publicist dealt with international affairs - specifically, with the Communist challenge to the West and the ability of the West to respond to it successfully. In his last book, *Suicide of the West*, Burnham was pessimistic about this ability and about the very survival of non-Communist civilization. Yet he was somewhat evasive on the exact causes of the contraction and decline of the West. It is true that the causes of the decline were not the subject of the book and that Burnham narrowed the possible causes to a failure of the will to survive within the governing elite, a failure rationalized by liberal ideology but more deeply associated, as Burnham suggested, "with the decay of religion and with an excess of material luxury" (SW, 301). He did not pursue this suggestion further, however, and indeed it is too large a problem to be treated in *Suicide of the West*.

It may be noted that Machiavelli had also attached central importance to the decline of religion and the rise of luxury as subversive forces in political society. Machiavelli had written in the *Discourses*, "there is no greater indication of the ruin of a country than to see religion contemned" and "in well-regulated republics the state

22. David Spitz, *Patterns of Anti-Democratic Thought: An Analysis and a Criticism, with Special Reference to the American Political Mind In Recent Times* (rev. ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1965), ch. 2 *passim*, esp. pp. 48 *et seq.*

ought to be rich and the citizens poor."<sup>23</sup> The decline of religion removes the principal unifying force in society able to rationalize sacrifices and suffering; the rise of luxury contributes to factionalism and the usurpation of the public interest by private groups and to the general softening and corruption of the physical and moral strength of the citizens. It is therefore not surprising that Burnham would have suggested these two phenomena as likely causes of Western civilizational decline, but he did not develop them.

Yet it is possible to reconstruct more clearly Burnham's views on the causes of the decline of the West and on the future of the West from the body of his published writings. Both problems in his mind were closely related to the internal structure and mentality of the Western governing elite. From *The Managerial Revolution* to *Suicide of the West* Burnham had predicted that the rising managerial elite would contain a heavy proportion of Class II residues and would be efficient in the use of force. Although he had regarded the totalitarian tendencies of the new elite as a serious threat to freedom and to the flexibilities that societal survival requires, he had praised the coming elite for its dynamism, its resoluteness, and its ability and willingness to seize leadership. In *The Machiavellians* he had written that "We may be sure that the soldiers, the men of force, the Lions, will be much more prominent among the new rulers than in the ruling class of the past century" (MDF, 232). In *The Coming Defeat of Communism*, published over a decade later, he again dwelt on the dynamism of the new elite and the decadence and vacillation of the old entrepreneurial class.

In *Suicide of the West*, however, he reversed this prediction and portrayed the managerial groups, under the influence of liberal ideology, as foxes, vacillating, unwilling and unable to use force, and relying on negotiations, propaganda, and opportunism. The correlation of liberal ideology with the managerial social forces was explicit, and it contradicted Burnham's earlier optimistic estimate of the new elite.

Although Burnham never explicitly accounted for his change of opinion, in *Suicide of the West* he suggested an explanation for the change that is entirely consistent with his earlier Machiavellian formulation of the theory of the managerial revolution. While it remained true that the social transformation has led to a greater

presence within the elite of, and a greater reliance on, military leaders, the very nature of the managerial revolution, with its shift from small-scale, personal leadership to mass-scale, bureaucratic leadership, altered the character of the new military elite.

Technological change brings into the military force more and more persons exercising "civilian skills" (administrative, technical, scientific) that lack the inbred immunity of the older, narrower military vocation to liberal ideas and values. (SW, 240)

Two years later, in a highly controversial article in *National Review* on Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, Burnham made the point more explicitly. Burnham praised McNamara, "a perfect exemplar of the top level of the new managerial class," for trying to "make the defense establishment as closely as possible an integral element of our advanced managerial economy."<sup>24</sup> Much of the criticism directed at McNamara Burnham saw as originating from traditional, entrepreneurial elements in American society and from traditional military types in the armed services. These critics were resisting the technical modernization of the armed forces as part of their general social resistance to the managerial revolution and the new class that was leading it. Yet Burnham was not entirely laudatory of McNamara and the elite he represented. He cited a letter-perhaps apocryphal-from a naval electronics technician who commented that he had seen no proof that "McNamara & Co. have an intuitive feel for the use of force: they seem to be more foxes than lions."<sup>25</sup> Burnham, then, was aware that military leadership by foxes or Class I residues may lack the qualities of command, combativeness, and endurance that lions would exhibit. "There are things in war," Burnham commented, "not dreamt of by IBM's computers."<sup>26</sup>

The point that Burnham was making was that managerial society, perhaps by its very nature, requires or finds useful the residues and psychic forces of the fox, not those of the lion. As he had written of the Class I residues in *The Machiavellian*:

24. James Burnham, "Why Do They Hate Robert Strange McNamara?" *National Review*, November 15, 1966, p. 1162.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*



it is this residue that leads restless individuals to large-scale financial manipulations, merging and combining and re-combining of various economic enterprises, efforts to entangle and disentangle political units, to make and remake empires. (MDF, 187)

These are precisely the traits needed by those who manage mass-scale organizations—whether economic, political, educational, religious, social, or professional in function. They are traits that lead to success in the mastery of technical and administrative skills; the use of language in argument, negotiations, and propaganda; and the disciplines of modern organizational life. The traits of the lions or Class II residues—fierce loyalties and hatreds, a capacity for violence or brutality, and a willingness to endure suffering and sacrifice—are not required by modern managerial society to any great degree. Thus, managerial society, even in its military organizations, tends to promote and encourage those elements of the population that exhibit Class I residues and to demote, exclude, and discourage those that exhibit Class II residues. It also has an affinity for derivations such as liberalism that reflect Class I values and ideas, and an aversion to derivations such as conservatism that do not reflect Class I values and ideas and to some extent reflect those of Class II.

Burnham's psychological analysis of the implications of managerial rule raises a dilemma. If managerial society requires for the control of its internal power structure the psychic forces that are efficient at managerial and verbal skills but have an aversion to force, then there is a contradiction between the internal requirements of managerial power and its external requirements, which demand skill in the use of force. Hence it is that the principal threat to the survival of a managerial society, in which Class I forces predominate, must come from outside it or from below, from Class II residues consigned to the lower strata of society. Pareto had made this contradiction explicit, and Burnham had quoted his lengthy statement of it in *Suicide of the West*.<sup>27</sup>

Burnham's final formulation of the theory of the managerial revolution in *Suicide of the West* recognized the importance of Class I residues in the governing elite, and this recognition implied a dif-

27. See also Burnham's column in *National Review*, January 25, 1966, p. 70, on the vulnerability of "centralized, intricately interdependent, industrial mass civilization" to its own "self-paralyzing poisons."

ferent estimate for the future of the West under managerial rule. Whereas Burnham's earlier discussions of appeasement, retreat, and decline had associated these phenomena largely with the decadent entrepreneurial elite, he now linked them with the managers. The implication was that the phenomenon of decline was not a passing phase that would be reversed by the new elite but a permanent feature of the dominant managerial class. "The decay of religion and the excess of material luxury" were not so much the causes of Western decline, in this analysis, as part of the syndrome of phenomena associated with an elite of foxes. Pareto himself had correlated the rise of religious skepticism and the increase of wealth with the accumulation of Class I residues in the elite.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, the West could not survive against external or internal coercive threats as long as the liberal managerial elite held power. The alternative to this elite, logically, is either a managerial elite that has abandoned liberalism or a non-managerial elite that would exhibit an entirely different psychic make-up, ideology, and behavior. Burnham never discussed either alternative explicitly, although he did entertain the at least hypothetical possibility that the incumbent governing elite would abandon liberal ideology. It was unlikely that the abandonment of liberalism would come about through rational argument and presentation of evidence, but it could occur through a shock to the elite that would destroy its emotional commitment to liberalism.

By 1970, with the United States in a period of urban riots, high crime, New Left rebellion, the Vietnam War, and the counter-culture, Burnham had concluded that liberalism as a motivating force was moribund.

Liberalism can do nothing to cleanse or halt this Augean wave; can only, in fact, smooth its advance. The secular relativism and permissiveness to which liberalism is committed provides no metaphysical foothold on which a stand might be taken.<sup>29</sup>

Incapable of contributing to the mainstream moral and intellectual beliefs of the West, liberalism could only thrive as a parasite on the body of the West and make use of its vitality.

28. Vilfredo Pareto, *Sociological Writings*, selected and introduced by S. E. Finer, translated by Derick Mirfin (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), pp. 63-64.

29. James Burnham, "Notes on Authority, Morality, Power," *National Review*, December 1, 1970, p. 1284.

From a political standpoint, the cause of increasing disorder is the decay in the *authority* of the ruler, the sovereign. The cure is the restoration of authority.

Authority rests on three primary factors: habit (custom), respect (reverence, awe) and fear...liberalism has always rejected the traditional ties of custom and respect as backwardness, prejudice and superstition. Now it confronts a generation of militants who take its lessons seriously. With custom and respect dissolved, only force remains. But liberalism has also-on principle, at least-rejected force, too, except as a last-minute recourse; and precisely because of that refusal to see force, in act or threat, as inevitably and continuously involved in human society, has never been able to understand force or use it wisely. Liberals always turn to force at the wrong moment in the wrong amount, and therefore bungle in using it.<sup>30</sup>

Since liberalism was unable to uphold or use the basic supports of social order and authority, its days were numbered. Not only was liberalism as an ideology moribund, but "the political regime associated with liberalism...may also be moribund."<sup>31</sup> This regime traditionally had been a kind of game in which different groups pursued their own interests in competition with others and bargained and compromised to achieve a final equilibrium. The game was bound by certain rules, formal or implicit, that limited the means and ends by which the participants contended. Yet the disorder, crime, and political violence of the late 1960s involved not merely the violation of the rules of the game but an entirely new game played by new rules formulated by the rebelling groups. Liberalism was inseparable from the old game and its rules, and thus it had little future if the new game were begun. But conservatism also was part of the old game of equilibriumist politics and appeared in practice to share most of the liberal assumptions about the game.<sup>32</sup> Burnham in 1970 was uncertain what the future of America and the West would be. Neither liberalism nor conventional conservatism seemed likely to survive.

The key questions now are: What is to come after liberalism? Can the American type of government under the pluralistic compete-bargain-compromise rules survive the decay of liberalism? How can authority be reasserted in the moral and political mash compounded during the permissive epoch? Can a post-liberal government be authoritative without being authoritarian? What social strata will the post-liberal government be based on?<sup>33</sup>

30. *Ibid.*, p. 1286.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 1288.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 1289.

Burnham was doubtful that the revolutionary left would replace the liberal governing elite: the " 'social formations' that line up back of them are inadequate" and had no support from the productive elements of society. He ended with a suggestive glance at the "regimes of the Right [which] in our time display a remarkable variety, not a little creative flair... and in several conspicuous cases an impressive endurance," and he inclined to believe that the American right would either go down with the beleaguered liberal ideology and elite or have to resist "uninhibited. . .by liberal proprieties as to method."

Burnham did not appear to have a high opinion of American conservatism. Throughout his career at *National Review* he frequently found himself at odds with the ideas of free market conservatives and libertarians on issues such as medicare, the supersonic transport (SST), the space program, the federal highway system, and the welfare state. These remnants of classical liberal ideology among conservatives as well as those of isolationism were part of the entrepreneurial class and ideology that Burnham had long since come to regard as obsolete.<sup>35</sup> In 1965 he had commented on the tenth anniversary of *National Review*, "the conservative movement will have to break out of the sectarian and doctrinaire clannishness that is natural enough in the early stages of every political movement."<sup>36</sup> In 1971, in a reply to a critic of his endorsement of federal funding for the SST, Burnham commented

I share with . . . conservatives generally a *presumption* in favor of the free market, and against governmental intervention. However, in the real world (as distinguished from the theoretical world of Von Misesian abstractions) it does not follow that government intervention is never in order.... In today's intricate society, moreover, there is inevitably a border country where private and governmental enterprise overlap, and we Americans have demonstrated a special creativity in operating therein."

Yet Burnham's criticism of American conservatism was only in part economic or political. If liberalism was the ideology of the

34. *Ibid.*

35. See James Burnham, "Rhetoric and Medicare," *National Review*, August 24, 1965, p. 720; "The Welfare Non-Issue," March 11, 1969, p. 222; "What the SST Means," *ibid.*, February 24, 1970, p. 194; "To Fly or Not to Fly," *ibid.*, June 30, 1970, p. 666; "Sorry, Can't Make It," *ibid.*, April 1, 1977, p. 377.

36. *National Review*, November 30, 1965, p. 1123.

37. *Ibid.*, June 29, 1971, p. 720.

managerial elite, then conservatism was that of the old and obsolescent entrepreneurial class, and Burnham does not appear to have changed his low opinion of this group from the 1940s. He had recognized that the capitalist critics of the New Deal, the managerial institutions, and liberalism were formally correct in much of their ideology, but he also condemned the exponents and practitioners of capitalism as selfish and short-sighted. While he praised the economic achievements and even the culturally unifying role of American business, he also accused it of harboring a "suicidal mania" and of cultural philistinism. Of the American businessman as a type Burnham wrote,

In art, philosophy, and in political or social affairs of any but the crudest sort, he is likely to be dreadfully prejudiced, emptily pompous, narrowly unperceptive, hopelessly backward-looking, naively credulous.... In relation to the struggle against communism, the American businessman is too ignorant, too greedy, too reactionary and, in a certain sense, too cowardly."

Burnham cited instances of American businessmen preferring to deal with Communist unions at lower wages rather than with anti-Communist ones. American businesses appeared eager to trade with the Soviets, but they were unrelenting in criticism of anti-Communist socialists who criticized capitalism.<sup>38</sup> Yet those responsible for this backwardness of American businessmen were largely drawn from the entrepreneurs, and in the early 1950s Burnham still looked to the managerial class for national leadership.

If businessmen in general continue to be as short-sighted and incompetent in the struggle against communism as they have been in the past, if they are incapable of leading that struggle, there are, then, other forces available to conduct it and to carry it through. These other forces, newly powerful in our society, with new men and new interests, together with newly developing sections of the business class itself, are in any case gradually pushing the old-line businessmen aside.<sup>40</sup>

By the mid-1960s, however, Burnham had given up on the new class as well as on the old, and he was looking outside both categories of the elite—the new managerial sectors as well as the old entrepreneurial branch—to the "middle Americans" for a new

38. James Burnham, *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (New York: John Day Company, 1949), pp. 253-54.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-61.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

leadership. This category might provide the social basis of a new elite, and Burnham examined the grassroots of American society in an annual series of travelogues in *National Review*. Beyond the Northeastern seaboard, in the Midwest or the South, he frequently noted the persistence of traditional values and enduring social strength.

But our governors-not the officeholders only but the whole broad naturally governing class, the established elite-are proving themselves no longer capable of governing, of ruling. They have lost confidence in themselves; therefore they can no longer fight wars or stand up to outlaws.... In our country, it is the paradoxical and unnatural fact that, more and more, the people-the broad middle mass of people who do the work-are holding the country together, giving it, if unconsciously for the most part, what direction it has, and sustaining the governing elite that, having lost its nerve, must before long lose its mission. This creates a historical monstrosity, since the broad masses cannot govern, and in truth do not want to. If, therefore, the natural governors quit, the masses will have to fashion new ones.<sup>41</sup>

The ousting of a decadent elite was not as simple as it might seem, however, and the conservative and anti-liberal forces would have difficulty in asserting their leadership and organization of "the middle mass" of the country. Burnham later noted that "In their current flirtation with blue-collar workers, most conservative intellectuals and politicians do not seem to realize that this liaison could be prolonged only with the blessings of neo-populist social and economic policies."<sup>42</sup> The entrepreneurial structure and ideology of conservatism thus contradicted the opportunity for a mass-based anti-liberal movement. By 1975, with the fall of Vietnam, the rise of global terrorism, and the energy shortage, liberalism had been unable to resolve the crisis, and Burnham's view of the prospects for conservatism was bleak:

a renewed conservative movement, incorporating beliefs and a program consonant with the epoch's issues, challenges, and perils, and able to rally a mass following, has not taken form and is not in sight: a Ronald Reagan might conceivably be elected President, but will not lead a resurgence of the West. (SW, 320)

41. James Burnham, "More Notes from the Road," *National Review*, December 16, 1969, p. 1271.

42. "Notes on Authority, Morality, Power," p. 1289.

The decline of the West was therefore in large part a result of the structure and attendant psychic forces of its governing elite, and the ideologies of liberalism and conservatism could not mobilize mass loyalties or overcome the threats to the West. Yet Burnham was not a pure determinist; there remained hope for the West simply because of the freedom of the human will and the ability to assert decisive action and alter destiny. The residues do not completely control human action, and the disappearance of the West remained merely "probable," not "inevitable." "The past is determined," wrote Burnham, in the afterword to the second edition of his last book, "but, for human beings the future is free. It is too early to publish the West's obituary" (SW, 320).

### **The Philosophical Foundations of Burnham's Political Thought**

At the foundation of Burnham's political thought is a position of epistemological historicism, the clearest statement of which is to be found in *Suicide of the West*:

The fundamental law of every genuine science is the postulate that the pattern of what happens in the future will probably resemble that of what has been observed to happen in the past. Any belief requiring the assumption that the future will be radically different from the past is not only false on the evidence—it could not be otherwise, since the only evidence available to man is the observations he has made in the past—but non-scientific in kind, no matter how many invocations the believer makes to Science and Reason. (SW, 134)

This statement limiting human knowledge to what can be known from historical (empirical) sources excludes other possible sources of knowledge—e.g., reason, revelation, intuition, etc. It is a postulate that underlies and unifies Burnham's Machiavellianism as well as his unique formulation of traditionalist conservatism.

Burnham's reliance on history in his political theory is evident as early as *The Managerial Revolution*. Much of his development of the social, political, and cultural implications of the theory of the managerial revolution is based on historical analogy with previous revolutions. It was to history also—not to nature or to transcendent sources—that Machiavelli and his followers appealed for the support of their political generalizations. Throughout Burnham's later writings his reliance on historical analogies and experience for his political analyses and predictions is abundantly clear. Burnham later distinguished the "historical and pragmatic" roots of his own

formulation of conservatism from those of theologically or metaphysically based conservatism.' In a letter to William F. Buckley, Jr., he was even more explicit:

I believe this integral incorporation of history to be of the essence of conservatism and almost always absent from ideologism, especially from liberal ideologism."

Yet historical knowledge is not absolute or certain, since its sources are themselves limited, imprecise, or deceptive. Moreover, the historical observer is himself part of the historical process, and his own ideas, judgments, values, and thinking will be affected by his historical environment. Hence, there is a large element of uncertainty and relativity in human knowledge.

The ultimate uncertainty of human knowledge and the inherent limitations of human reason led Burnham to avoid absolute moral judgments, abstract thinking, and deductive conclusions and to emphasize the importance of myth, tradition, ideologies, and political formulas in the social and mental life of human beings. The myths and formulas may be demonstrably false, but their falsity does not necessarily affect their utility for social cohesion. In *The Machiavellians*, describing Mosca's concept of the political formula, Burnham had written:

it may be seen from historical experience that the integrity of the political formula is essential for the survival of a given social structure. Changes in the formula, if they are not to destroy the society, must be gradual, not abrupt. The formula is indispensable for holding the social structure together. A widespread skepticism about the formula will in time corrode and disintegrate the social order. It is perhaps for this reason, half-consciously understood, that all strong and long-lived societies have cherished their "traditions," even when, as is usually the case, these traditions have little relation to fact, and even after they can hardly be believed literally by educated men. (MDF, 100)

A tradition, that is, does not necessarily reflect transcendent truths. Its function is socially and politically cohesive and morally and

43. James Burnham, "Selective, Yes; Humanism, Maybe," *National Review*, May 12, 1972, p. 514.

44. Letter of James Burnham to William F. Buckley, Jr., undated, quoted in William F. Buckley, Jr., *Did You Ever See A Dream Walking? American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), p. 216.



psychologically unifying, and the truth or falsity of a tradition is largely irrelevant to this function. What is important is that men believe in and be guided by it, not whether it is true or false or whether its content can be rationally or scientifically validated.

Burnham's concept of tradition as the embodiment of specific social experience and beliefs is fundamental to his conservatism. In 1972, replying to Peter Berger's proposal for a "conservative humanism," Burnham criticized the attempt to formulate a universal conservatism that would make no distinctions among different orders and categories of men and societies, and he explained his own "historical and pragmatic" conservatism.

Conservatism can be considered humanist only if humanism is interpreted to mean a concern with the interests and well-being not of abstract Man or Mankind but of the existential man, historical man, or actual men as they actually exist in space and time. Existential man is not a bare identity, a featureless constant, but a node of particularities, distinctive relationships, differences, qualities, peculiarities. Actual men are citizens of this country or that, members of this or that family, male or female, young or old, pursuing such and such an occupation, believing in one God, many Gods or none, stupid or brilliant, rich or poor, literate or ignorant.<sup>46</sup>

Conservatism therefore has little to do with metaphysical, ethical, or theological speculation and deduction. It does not proceed from reflections on the nature of transcendent realities—men have no verifiable knowledge of the transcendent—but from observations of human experience in history and from prudential, circumstantially based inductions from history. Conservatism, for Burnham, is inextricably connected to "all the interlinked ties that form man's existential context" and finds "the meaning of human life in and with and through them."<sup>4e</sup>

Burnham's concept of tradition was the antithesis of his concept of ideology. Although belief in both a tradition and an ideology is non-rational and non-empirical, and both are normative commitments, tradition incorporates experience while ideology is an abstraction from it. Because it is an abstraction, ideology is impervious to the intrusions of reality. The "form of contemporary self-styled conservatism that is really a kind of right-wing anarchism," wrote Burnham, is an ideology, but

45. "Selective, Yes; Humanism, Maybe," p. 514.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 515.

The form of contemporary conservatism that might be called traditional—which is not an ideology—would not judge, or feel, that there is any fixed order of priority for the major social values. (SW, 161-162)

Traditionalist conservatism, unlike ideology, would order the priority of the social values of liberty, freedom, peace, and justice "under the specific circumstances of this specific time" (SW, 162). Tradition, in other words, responds to reality; it changes in accordance with experience, develops, or becomes outmoded. Ideology, however, remains fixed in its abstraction and, by its own definition of reality, can never change. "It is only when inner doubts arise about the content of the commitment that the ideology begins to crumble or, sometimes very suddenly, to evaporate" (SW, 314).

Burnham's traditionalist conservatism is thus an outgrowth of his historicism. Limited in his knowledge of reality to the past, man can turn only to the past or to mythical interpretations of the past for prudential guidance and social cohesion. Denied the possibility of certainty and verifiable knowledge of the transcendent, men seek to capture reality in abstract, fixated ideologies that in fact distort and amputate reality. Yet Burnham's historicism did not lead only to traditionalism. His examination of history and his incorporation of it into his analysis of politics led also to the Machiavellian "science of power" that he continued to develop and apply throughout his career.

The essence of the Machiavellian science of power may be summarized concisely. The scientific study of history—through the verification and analysis of historical facts and assimilation of these facts into patterns—leads to the conclusion that the phenomenon of power is the central and most determinative factor in human social relationships. As Burnham wrote in *The Machiavellians*,

The recurring pattern of change expresses the more or less permanent core of human nature as it functions politically. The instability of all governments and political forms follows in part from the limitless human appetite for power. (MDF, 63)

From the repetitive patterns of human behavior that can be observed in history it is possible to construct a set of generalizations (which remain only approximate and not exact) about power and its uses by men that serves as a descriptive and predictive model of analysis and also as a prudential guide for political action.

What Burnham calls "the appetite for power" lies at the center of

his interpretation of history and politics. Politics is itself the "struggle for power," but it is not limited to a formal level of elections, appointments, and legal and governmental affairs. The struggle for power pervades all human institutions and activities in many different forms and names, on the economic, social, cultural, and intellectual level as well as that of formal politics. It is therefore possible to interpret and understand human society in terms of the struggle for power and its dynamics.

It was by means of the Machiavellian "science of power" that Burnham discovered and reformulated the theory of the managerial revolution-the major historical event of the twentieth century-as well as the other concepts that characterize his writings: the theory of elites, juridical defense, the political formula, and the "struggle for the world." All of these ideas have their roots in the writings of other thinkers-Machiavelli and his disciples, Berle and Means, Toynbee and Mackinder, and the Founding Fathers-but Burnham synthesized them and developed them into a distinctive political theory.

The view of man and society that Burnham developed through the "science of power" is in the modernist tradition of political thought, and it is strikingly different from the classical and medieval traditions that are the sources of most contemporary American conservatism. In the pre-modern tradition-that of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas, and Hooker-man is a sociable being and associates with others in a harmonious, consensual union (e.g., the *polis*) in pursuit of the ethical realization of his nature. The role of force and power in pre-modern political thought is minimal, and the ideal ruler is one who uses power to protect the natural and spontaneous order of society, not one who uses power for his own interest.

To Machiavelli and his heirs the human appetite for power and man's physical inability to live alone are the causes of human society-not the natural sociability of man. Society is not harmonious or consensual but is in constant conflict, instability, and flux because of the insatiable nature of the desire for power. A legislator or a body of citizens (Machiavelli) or a ruling class (Burnham and the Machiavellians) imposes order and consensus on society through force and fraud (deception, ideology, myth, or political formula) and uses power for his or its own interests as perceived through the formulas and ideologies that the rulers accept.

Yet conflict is the basis of liberty and the security of society. The

struggle for power within the ruling class or elite and between the elite and the majority outside it creates a balance of forces that restrains the power of each group. The participation of a multiplicity of forces in the struggle for power increases the range of resources on which the society can draw. The balance of forces thus raises the level of civilization and creates a variety of responses to societal threats through increasing the variety of skills, talents, institutions, ideas, or inventions that are socially useful. The belief-systems that the elite uses to justify its power and behavior are also useful in restraining power and in generating a unifying and legitimizing consensus in society. These belief-systems are generally not consciously fabricated by the elite but are more typically reflections of commonly accepted values, ideas, and experiences characteristic of a particular historic society. The rulers as well as the ruled generally believe in these systems, but they are not necessarily expressions of truth. Rather, they are socially useful myths that serve psychic, political, or social ends.

Conflict is therefore not a disease but the health of political society. It is when there is no internal conflict, when a single social force monopolizes power, that tyranny, cultural stagnation, contraction, and decline develop. The unification of power, its centralization in a single body, person, or group, is therefore the worst possible regime, just as the dispersion, multiplicity, conflict, and balancing of power represent the best possible regime.

In the Machiavellian-Burnhamite view of society, the purpose or goal of society is not the ethical realization of man's nature but the security and survival of society. Men can have no verifiable knowledge of a transcendent purpose, although they may organize their societies around doctrines that claim a transcendent base. The particular interests of each component social force will also assert themselves as the real purpose or interest of a society, but no particular interest has any more of an objective claim to being the real interest than any other. Hence, all particular interests must agree on and unite around the security and survival of their society. "For a nation," Burnham wrote in 1960, "the supreme moral task and responsibility is to make the right use of power,"<sup>47</sup> and in 1976 he discussed the concept of "national interest" in more detail.

47. James Burnham, "Ideology and Common Sense," *National Review*, October 8, 1960, p. 208.

It is hard to separate the nation's interest from the interests of this or that subgroup of its people or even from my own particular interest. It is, however, agreed that the minimal content of "national interest" is the nation's security: the defense of the integrity of its territory and the lives of its citizens. This much at least must be included in the "national interest" because without security in that elementary sense the nation could not exist.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, as Burnham acknowledged, this "minimal content" of security has implications for the internal organization of society, its psychic and moral qualities, its beliefs and institutions, and its distribution and limitation of power. Without a healthy and balanced elite, a unifying and motivating set of beliefs, a high level of civilization, and an equilibrium of power that protects liberty, the security of society will be reduced. Moreover, in the contemporary world (and not infrequently in the past as well) external security requires territorial expansion and empire: the only way to remove some threats to the security of a society (including the Soviet-Communist threat) is by the destruction of the threatening force and eventual occupation of its territory." As Machiavelli put it, a "people cannot make themselves secure except by being powerful."<sup>49</sup>

Security and survival do not therefore mean the continuance of mere animal existence. A society that is truly secure will be a free, expanding, healthy, and dynamic one. For this it is essential to have an elite that is capable of leadership, believes in its ability and its right to power, and has a variety of styles of leadership and resources of power at its disposal. Burnham many times described the necessary qualities of a dynamic elite as well as the sad reality of the increasingly decadent and ideologically obsessed elite of contemporary Western society. In *The Machiavellians* Burnham approvingly noted Mosca's description of the qualities appropriate to a ruling class: "These qualities—a capacity for hard work, ambition (Machiavelli's *virtu*), a certain callousness, luck in birth and circumstances—are those that help toward membership in any ruling class at any time in history," (MDF, 97) and in his reply to Peter Berger nearly thirty years later he remarked on the importance of

48. James Burnham, "Angola: The National Disinterest," *National Review*, February 6, 1976, p. 80.

49. For Burnham's concept of America as an empire and the moral and psychological qualities required by empire, see James Burnham, "Joys and Sorrows of Empire," *National Review*, July 13, 1971, p. 749.

50. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I, 1, p. 108.

"Courage, duty, discipline and especially self-discipline, loyalty, endurance...patriotism" among "those virtues indispensable to organized human society."<sup>51</sup> In 1971 he wrote,

Now it is obvious, as well as confirmed by historical experience, that carrying out the imperial responsibilities requires certain characteristics in the imperial citizens, or at least in the leading strata: confidence in both their right and their ability to perform the imperial task; resoluteness; perseverance; a willingness to assure the strength—that is, the military force—to fulfill the task; and finally (it must be added) a willingness to kill people, now and then, without collapsing into a paroxysm of guilt.

The qualities that Burnham emphasized as necessary to a healthy elite are all associated with Machiavelli's *virtu* and with the cultivation of the will. Burnham, like Machiavelli, criticized the educational institutions of his society for failing to develop, inform, and encourage an ethos of *virtu* and will in the elite. Yet it is the will of those who hold power that, more than any idea or moral code, determines the capacity of a society to survive and prosper. Like Machiavelli also, Burnham allowed for the role of fortune—the imponderable and uncontrollable elements of the universe that are not subject to and which thwart the human will—but fortune, to at least some extent, can be overcome by volitional efforts.

Men's use of power therefore ultimately depends on their will and their psychological character. The presence of foxes or lions in the elite is a crucial determinant of the forms imposed on the inert matter of the submissive masses and of the response of the elite to internal and external challenges. The theory of politics as a struggle for power and the psychology of this conflict have been succinctly stated by Brian Crozier, a leading exponent of Burnham's political thought:

All political action involves the assertion of power, and necessarily implies conflict between those asserting the power and those affected by it. The proper study of politics is therefore the study of the psychology of those who assert power and those who receive it, and the inevitable conflict between the twos'

51, "Selective, Yes; Humanism, Maybe," p. 516.

52. "Joys and Sorrows of Empire," p. 749.

53. Brian Crozier, *Conflict Studies*, no. 100 (October, 1978), p. 2; the philosophical presuppositions of the Machiavellian "conflict model" of society are discussed by Crozier in his *Theory of Conflict* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974) and by Neal Wood, "The Value of Asocial Sociability: Contributions of

The political thought of James Burnham, especially in its philosophical assumptions and its view of man and society, is not entirely consistent with the philosophically based conservatism that has developed in American intellectual life since 1945. Many exponents of this school of conservatism will find Burnham's presuppositions disconcerting, if not repellent. Burnham's thought, they might argue, is reductionist; it eliminates too much of the transcendent, the ethical, and the divine from human life to provide a reliable tool for understanding politics. The implicit relativism and his unwillingness or inability to affirm on a philosophical level the moral and metaphysical truths of the human condition are themselves subversive of any public orthodoxy that asserts a transcendent truth. Whittaker Chambers, in a letter to William F. Buckley, Jr., commented on this aspect of Burnham's thought. Chambers considered that there were dimensions of the human condition that remained invisible to "the prudent, practical thinking of the CCF [Committee for Cultural Freedom]." "The Fire Bird," wrote Chambers, "is glimpsed living, or not at all. In other words, realists have a way of missing truth, which is not invariably realistic."<sup>54</sup>

There is surely some truth in Chambers' perception, but the criticism that Burnham tended to omit the spiritual and the super-rational from his portrayal of men in politics and to concentrate on the appetitive and subrational elements is true largely of his earlier writings, when the influence of Marxism still lingered in Burnham's mind. Yet he did not reduce men to amoral and power-seeking insects. His writings, especially as he matured and grew away from his youthful Marxism, reflect a profound awareness of the moral and social complexities of man, and this awareness developed precisely from his growing philosophical insistence on the concrete, the empirical, the "real meaning" of human affairs. Moreover, if his assumptions were relativist, he was careful not to dwell on their implications, and he chose to concentrate on the overriding need for a

---

Machiavelli, Sidney and Montesquieu" in Martin Fleisher, ed., *Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), pp. 282-307; see also Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, with an Introduction by Neal Wood (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, the Library of Liberal Arts, 1965), pp. xlvii-lxxix.

54. Whittaker Chambers, *Odyssey of a Friend: Whittaker Chambers' Letters to William F. Buckley, Jr., 1954-1961*, ed. and with notes by William F. Buckley, Jr. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), p. 155, January 23, 1957, Chambers to Buckley.

public commitment to a doctrine, a myth, a tradition that would order and humanize the voracious conflicts of the appetite for power.

Burnham was not a political philosopher, and the explication of his thought given here suggests that he did not believe political philosophy was possible or useful. Yet he affirmed the existence of truth and believed that men, through history and experience, could approach it. Burnham considered himself an analyst of politics and power, and it is in this role that his thought and work should be evaluated. The principal criterion for evaluating his analysis of power is his predictive accuracy and the capacity of his "science of power" to dissect the realities of power.

By this criterion there are surely few thinkers of this century who have so ruthlessly pursued the logic and dynamics of power to their conclusion as Burnham. The basic predictions of *The Managerial Revolution* have been confirmed by experience and by detailed scholarship. The totalitarian tendencies of the "new class" that Burnham predicted have been discussed by a new generation of intellectuals. The Caesarist implications of the modern Presidency have belatedly been discussed by a journalist who himself contributed to them, but three decades before Arthur Schlesinger, James Burnham explored them with more learning and penetration. The "death-wish" of liberalism has been discussed recently by a variety of writers to whom for many years the psychological and ideological implications of liberalism were invisible, and who themselves were among the most devoted exponents of liberalism. Burnham's dispassionate exposure of the suicidal impulse of this ideology was written long before it became apparent to others. His analysis of the aggressive and tyrannical nature of Communism is still current, although still disputed; but after Solzhenitsyn, after Vietnam and Cambodia, after Czechoslovakia, after Afghanistan and Poland, those who dispute it are perhaps fewer in number and stiller in tone.

On the whole, then, Burnham's predictions have been sound or remain arguable after a career of forty-five years. Moreover, his regular column in *National Review* carried forward the application of the science of power to other accurate predictions and analyses. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the Machiavellian tradition has something to be said for it, although its presuppositions about man and society may be offensive to those who view politics, not as a struggle for power, but as the manifestation of transcendent truths or of their verbal formulations of truth. Yet behind this tradition



and behind the political thought of James Burnham there lies a profound belief in and commitment to truth. It is precisely because of this commitment that Burnham and the Machiavellians so pitilessly exposed the masks of power and the realities that the masks disguise. Neither Burnham nor Machiavelli had any illusions that their exposure of the real face of power would attract a broad following, but this did not lessen their commitment to viewing men as they really are. Machiavelli himself had written,

For the great majority of mankind are satisfied with appearances, as though they were realities, and are often even more influenced by the things that seem than by those that are."

And his foremost disciple in this century had added, "only by renouncing all ideology can we begin to see the world and man" (MDF, viii) .

*U. S. Senate Staff*

SAMUEL T. FRANCIS