

Zald, M. N. *Organizational Change: The Political Economy of the YMCA*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970. Pp. xvii, 260. Index, notes, figures, tables.

The author really tries to do three things: (1) argue for and evaluate the efficacy of a "political economy" framework for understanding the problematics of organizational change and structuration; (2) present a brief (48 page) history of the YMCA in America, and (3) provide a more detailed, mainly contemporary, case study of organizational change in the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago. I presume, since I possess no privileged or extensive knowledge of the YMCA and its history, that it is because of the author's framework that I was requested to review this thirteen year old book. Accordingly, I shall focus my attention on the value of the author's "political economy" framework to social historians interested in the formation and transformation of complex organizations.

In Chapters I and 12, Mayer Zald engages himself in what might best be described as framework legitimating discourse. Beginning with the premise that, in the case of the YMCA, "one is forced . . . to examine the interaction between environment, internal organization, and political life" (p. 8), Mayer Zald introduces and evaluates several approaches to the study of complex organizations. Here, leadership models are found to be lacking because their intrasystemic focus cannot address how goals and policy choices are shaped "through interlinked national and local policies constituting power systems of various shapes, with contending groups holding different values and conceptions of the YMCA" (p. 8). Mayer Zald essentially levies the same criticism at existing social psychological approaches: "[T]hey select inappropriate [e.g., microsystemic] dependent variables" (p. 11). Historical approaches, states Zald, "are inadequate because they are relatively atheoretic" (p. 11). Zald is not much happier with his own discipline's (i.e. sociology's) contributions. They are, he says, "too closely focused on internal structure-with 'scant attention being paid to external pressures toward change. . .'" (p. 12). Moreover, they are reductionistic (p. 13). Finally, analytic economics (especially microeconomics) and political science are criticized by Zald. The former is inadequate because it ignores the internal processes, problems, and structures of organizations that bring about variations in organizational decisions or choices; whereas, the latter, because of its tendency to focus principally on decision theory, neglects more structural determinations. Although Zald does not use the term, it seems decision-theories have been too voluntaristic for his taste.

While I agree with many of Mayer Zald's evaluations, I must say that a social historian with little background in organizational theory ought to treat Chapter 1 with a great deal of circumspection. It is much too short to be seen as a theoretical contribution in a critical vein. For a reader unfamiliar with organizational theory, Zald's recipe-book style will be elliptical. One might more profitably read Stewart Clegg's *The Theory of Power and Organization* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

In place of the aforementioned approaches, Mayer Zald proposes a “political economy” framework. For Zald, the political economy framework is a “middle-range conceptual scheme” (p. 9) which directs our attention to the relation between “the major political and economic factors in an organization” (p. 19, emphasis mine). At least this is, for Zald, what political economy means “in its more general sense” (p. 17). Thus, at the outset, we must be aware that Zald’s definition, by his own admission, differs from the classical. And, I must admit that I find Zald’s redefinition of political economy troublesome. It glosses over how and why American scholars have replaced political economy with the sub-specializations of political science and economics and, thereby, evaded questions concerned with the form and quality of human life within the dominant commodity capitalist economy. Indeed, many of my criticisms of Zald’s work center precisely on the silences which stem from this evasion. For me, then, Zald’s political economy framework is a two-dimensional, functionalist approach to the study of a complex organization and represents an ideological departure from the idea that political economy (national economy) expresses the basic social-economic forms which characterize various types of production relations among people (see Isaak Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, Chs. 4 and 8). The latter expressions rarely conform to Merton’s prescriptions for a theory of the middle-range! Here, I suggest that Zald’s book should have been titled, *Organizational Change: A Political and Economic Analysis of a YMCA*. He would not be guilty, then, of mixing grammars.

The differences between my understanding of “political economy” and that of Zald can be exemplified by focusing initially on the contents of Chapters 2 and 3. Here, to use Zald’s own words, we become “equipped with some of the historical material as background” (p. 70). I have several comments to make about his “political economy” approach to history. With C. Wright Mills (*The Sociological Imagination*, Ch. 8). I adhere to the view that “. . . every social science—or better, every well-considered social study—requires an historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials.” That is, “all sociology worthy of the name is ‘historical sociology’”. (See also, Philip Abrams, *Historical Sociology*, Preface and Ch. 1). And with C. Wright Mills, I am skeptical about the kind of historical explanations that occur in the “dull little padding known as ‘sketching in the historical background.’” What C. Wright Mills was attempting to eliminate in both micro and macro analysis was the diachrony-synchrony distinction and the disciplinary boundary maintenance that has arisen from it. In short, a genuine political economy requires the re-fusion of specialized knowledge (see Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, p. 7) around a concern for the process of structuration in time. In addition, a genuine theory of political economy involves the problematic of power in social relations and how its use can turn objectively determined groups into self-consciously determined social formations. In Chapters 2 and 3, Mayer Zald’s “political economy” framework for “historical sociology” falls short in these respects.

So in Chapter 2, Mayer Zald relates how the YMCA has been transformed from an ecumenical agency into a client-oriented, general service agency. The key determinants are located in the changing age and sex composition of the clientele, and in the need of the YMCA to secure a more stable economic base than that which could be provided by membership dues and philanthropic contributions. Class composition is also addressed but is not viewed as a significant contributor to the transformation. The changing composition of the clientele and the opportunities for economic diversification are interpreted somewhat vaguely in terms of a theory of industrial society. Here, and throughout the book, the YMCA is treated as something which, with some internal reorganizations, is a persistence from the past. Thus, the key question of a genuinely historical sociology—why has the YMCA persisted at all?—is never really addressed. By this I am suggesting that the existence of a somewhat religiously oriented organization in what many feel is a secularized society ought to be treated as a problematic. Also I am suggesting that the popularity of the YMCA's user-fee service programs (e.g., swimming classes, aerobics, etc.) may tell us more about the use of power and ideology in allocating public funds for public welfare than it does about the YMCA's success in finding niches in which to flourish (see Part Two of the book). In short it is the existence of these niches—or perhaps one can say defaults on the part of local, state, and federal governments to actualize the claim that liberal democratic society maximizes each individual's ability to use and develop his/her essentially human attributes or capacities (see C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory*, pp. 10-16)—which a genuine political economy analysis ought to address. Here I would refer you to my previous comments concerning silences born from evasion.

Chapter Four, titled "Polity", is particularly silent on the question of class. Basically, the chapter describes the social composition and policy making functions of the various levels of the YMCA governmental structure. Mayer Zald is precise and detailed in these descriptions. Indeed for someone as ignorant as I am about the regulatory structure of the Chicago YMCA, this chapter is a gold mine of information. Yet, Zald's empiricism needs some theorization. Let me just draw attention to the question of class. Throughout the book, class is generally treated as a category (i.e., a socioeconomic status based on occupation), sometimes it is treated as a rank (i.e., relative social position), but rarely as a formation (i.e., a social, political and cultural "organization" which makes itself out of the shared, recursive experiences of individuals vis-a-vis the production relation). Thus, by treating class primarily as a category, Zald evades the problematic of class as relation. So, early in the book, we are told that the YMCA originated in 1844 with a few young men led by George Williams (later Sir George). George's knighthood is inserted parenthetically, but let us consider the facts that in 1883, William Alexander Smith (later Sir William) founded the Boys's Brigade and in 1907-8, Robert Baden-Powell (later Sir Robert, later Lord Robert) founded the Boy Scouts. Since such titles are proposed by those in political power and conferred by the monarch, surely

one must ask what these individuals were viewed to be doing by those with the power to confer indicators of social rank. Were they shielding young men from the vices of temptation (see John Gillis, *Youth and History*, p. 111)? Were they conducting a “civilizing mission” to the poor (see Helen Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City*, Ch. 6)? Were they disciplining working-class minds into the nonconformist version of bourgeois virtue (see Gillis, *Youth and Society*, p. 145)? Were they promoting “social imperialism an omnipresent social darwinism and the Edwardian cult of national efficiency (see J.O. Springhall, *International Review of Social History*, 1972)? If so, were they rewarded for their efforts to preserve social order in the capitalist State?

In America, Zald states (p. 38), the YMCA was begun by members of the white collar and commercial occupations for work among their own kind. By 1890, local YMCAs were quite consciously directing their programs at “pre-occupying and preventive work among the better classes” (p. 39). And between 1890 and the present, the comparative statistics suggest that “. . .the YMCA has not altered significantly the socioeconomic composition of its membership” (p. 40). In Part II, we find that, in the 1950s-60s, the Board of Regents were drawn from leading real estate, banking, and investment insurance firms; the Board of Managers were drawn from corporations, law firms, banks, the professional and business community; local Boards of Directors were recruited from among the businessman and professionals who worked or lived in the community, and so on. Yet, throughout Part II of the book, we are led to believe that the YMCA has escaped entanglement with real politics and ideology. It is a service rather than a change agency; hence, the YMCA’s dilemma of opening up programs for deviant youth. By focusing upon class as a category, then, Mayer Zald has little to say about what kind of character the YMCA is intent on developing and how this character development relates to the middle class’s conception of itself as a social formation. Marx’s problematic of a class in itself versus a class for itself is not entertained. The YMCA’s internal moral order and the bourgeois conception of moral guardianship are never really linked. Why does the middle class choose respectability over wealth and social solidarity as a self-defined virtue? (For an answer see Stuart Hall et al. *Policing the Crisis*.) What would be the stance of YMCA members on the issue of Law and Order? Would it invoke an Old Testament or New Testament version of crime and punishment? In short, what are the ideological contents of “preventive and preoccupying work” and how might they differ from the contents of “assimilative work”?

With regard to class and ideology, Chapters 8 and 9, are by far, the best chapters in the book. For it is in these chapters that Mayer Zald confronts the problems of process and change that occurred in the 1950s and 60s and, in particular, the impact of the inner-city on YMCA programs and policies. But it really is a pity that instead of theorizing about the changing demographics of Chicago, the emerging interlocks between the YMCA and local political processes, the new emphasis upon YMCA social work amongst the disenfranchised, etc., Mayer Zald returns to a theoretical framework he had previ-

ously eschewed; namely, leadership and leadership succession. This is not to say that Zald's blow by blow account of "the politics of choosing a successor" is uninteresting. It is very interesting as an account of intra-organizational power conflicts and the process of leadership transition.

Overall, I am impressed by Mayer Zald's detailed descriptions but do not concur with his conclusion that "the political-economy approach is *efficient* because it concentrates investigation on two key processes and structures their interrelation; a general social-system approach would not have pinpointed the dynamics of change as easily." Zald's political economy approach is efficient and easy but a genuine political economy approach is neither. It's damned hard work. It requires a much more holistic perspective. It requires that organizations be located in context and time. In the case of voluntary organizations, it requires that significant emphasis be placed on their function as, what Althusser (*Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*) calls, "Ideological State Apparatuses." It requires that classes be viewed in terms of relations rather than categories, as having periods of formation and deformation. It requires that voluntary organizations not be "bracketed" from the broader problems of commodity capitalist economies and viewed as susceptible to the forces of valorization indigenous to such economies. It requires that the administrative apparatuses of voluntary organizations be analyzed not as flow charts but as regulatory structures that can be transformed into bureaucracies as relations between human beings are transformed into relations mediated by things (i.e., human relations as commodity relations). Zald touches on these issues but leaves them underdeveloped and that is why I contend that his work, like so much of American social science, is an exercise in evasion.

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