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**CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM**

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## INTRODUCTION

"Conflict Resolution as a Political System" was the first of the Institute's series of Working Papers to be published, and when it came out in 1988 both the author and the then Director regarded the series as a vehicle for timely "think pieces" or reports of research in progress at the Institute, then only a small Center. John Burton's original paper was introduced as extending the boundaries of conflict resolution and offering "...a view of what the field's fundamental philosophy should be..."

Over the last five years, however, it has become more and more evident that one of the fundamental problems facing the so-called "Post Cold War World" is the intellectual and practical construction of innovative forms of political systems, to replace the dominant model of the unitary, "national", territorial state which, in the real world, has increasingly been shown to be non-unitary, multi-national, and inconveniently unwilling to remain confined to assigned chunks of state territory. Without new thinking about possible and appropriate forms of political organisation, that contain within themselves means of resolving inevitable conflicts, the "Post Cold War World" seems likely to become the "Small Shooting War World", and to be filled with Bosnias, Somalias, Ngorno Karabakhs, or Afghanistans.

Hence, the Institute's decision to republish John Burton's piece is both a timely response to the need to rethink the fundamentals of political organisation and a reminder of the liveliness of Burton's original work, which still has much to say about the world of the mid-1990s.

C. R. Mitchell  
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Fairfax, Virginia  
August, 1993

## JOHN W. BURTON: BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John W. Burton, B.A., Ph.D., D.Sc., began his career in the Australian public service, becoming Permanent Head of the Australian Foreign Office in 1947 and High Commissioner for Ceylon in 1951. After his retirement from government service, he pursued a distinguished career in research, writing, and teaching at the University of London (1963-1978), in the course of which he became Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict in Canterbury. Dr. Burton was professor at the University of Kent from 1979 until 1982, and then served as Director of the Conflict Resolution Project of the Center for International Development at the University of Maryland. He joined the faculty of the Center for Conflict Resolution at George Mason University in 1985 and retired to his home in Australia in 1992.

John Burton's career has combined scholarship with practice in unusual degree. As a practitioner of conflict resolution, he has participated in numerous problem-solving workshops and international facilitations, including efforts to resolve conflicts in Ceylon, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Falklands-Malvinas Islands, and Lebanon. As a theoretician, he has written some fifteen books, the best known of which are Systems, States, Diplomacy and Rules (1968), Conflict and Communication (1969), World Society (1972), Deviance, Terrorism and War (1972), Dear Survivors (1982), Global Conflict (1983), and Conflict Resolution, Theory and Practice (1986, with E. Azar). He wrote a guide to practical problem solving in 1987, entitled Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict: A Handbook and, three years later, together with Dr. Frank Dukes, published his four volume survey of conflict theory, the Conflict Series [St. Martins Press]. This work, completed while Dr. Burton was a Visiting Fellow at the United States Institute of Peace, consists of two books written by Burton and Dukes, and two sets of readings edited by the same authors. The whole set makes an admirable summation of John Burton's work and ideas in the field.

Dr. Burton's pathfinding work in the theory of international relations has been recognized by a book of essays written in his honor, Conflict in World Society, edited by Michael Banks (1984). He is widely considered to be one of the principal founders of the emerging field of conflict resolution. As Professor Herbert C. Kelman of Harvard has written, "John continues to innovate at all levels, challenging old assumptions, modes of thinking, and decision-making models, and proposing new paradigms, methods, and institutional arrangements. In doing so, he has established a unique place for himself among scholars concerned with the understanding and improvement of international relations. His work is a living organism -- an open system -- which allows others to draw on, to build on, and indeed to criticise the novel insights and imaginative formulations it contains."

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University has as its principal mission to advance the understanding and resolution of significant and persistent human conflicts among individuals, groups, communities, identity groups, and nations. To fulfill this mission, the Institute works in four areas: academic programs, consisting of a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and a Master of Science (M.S.) in Conflict Analysis and Resolution; research and publication; a clinical and consultancy service offered through the Applied Practice and Theory Program and by individual Institute faculty and senior associates; and public education.

The Applied Practice and Theory (APT) Program draws on faculty, practitioners, and students to form teams to analyze broad areas of conflict and its resolution. These three-to-five-year projects currently address such topics as crime and conflict, jurisdictional conflicts within governments, conflict resolution in deeply divided communities (Northern Ireland, Beirut and Mount Pleasant), and conflict in school systems.

Associated with the Institute are a number of organizations that promote and apply conflict resolution principles. These include the Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development (COPRED), a networking organization; the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution (NCPCR), offering a biannual conference for conflict resolution practitioners; Northern Virginia Mediation Service (NVMS), offering mediation services to Northern Virginia residents involved in civil or minor criminal disputes; and Starting Small, teaching conflict resolution and problem-solving skills to children.

Major research interests include the study of deep-rooted conflict and its resolution; the exploration of conditions attracting parties to the negotiation table; the role of third parties in dispute resolution; and the testing of a variety of conflict intervention methods in a range of community, national, and international settings.

Outreach to the community is accomplished through the publication of books and articles, public lectures, conferences, and special briefings on the theory and practice of conflict resolution. As part of this effort, the Institute's Working and Occasional Papers offer both the public at large and professionals in the field access to critical thinking flowing from faculty, staff, and students at the Institute. These papers are presented to stimulate critical consideration of important questions in the study of human conflict.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS A POLITICAL SYSTEM

John W. Burton

Conflict resolution, which is analytical and problem solving, is in the longer term a process of change in political, social, and economic systems. This is because it is a process that takes into account individual and group needs, such as identity and recognition, and the institutional changes which are required to satisfy these needs. The rationale for conflict resolution, as distinct from settlement processes within existing systems, is not idealism or value-orientation. It is political realism. The accomodation of individual and group needs in political, social, and economic institutions is a requirement of political stability and survival.

The institutionalization of conflict resolution as a norm would tend to bring different societies toward a common system, one that is individual-need based, thus reducing tensions between different systems.

### Conflict Resolution: What Does It Mean?

Conflict resolution means very different things to different people. To the military strategist it may mean the most sophisticated means of deterrence, even a first strike against a potential enemy if this seems necessary to prevent a more protracted confrontation. Resolving conflict may include for the lawyer a court determination made on the basis of legal norms and legal argument; even the death penalty may be seen as resolution in some circumstances. For the industrial negotiator, resolution implies some settlement arrived at through bargaining, even if it involves the loss of jobs. For the traditional mediator it may mean pressing for some compromise that seems reasonable, despite

a possible sense of injustice by weaker parties.

For our purposes, conflict resolution means terminating conflict by methods that are analytical and that get to the root of the problem. Conflict resolution, as opposed to mere management or "settlement," points to an outcome that, in the view of the parties involved, is a permanent solution to the problem.

Because it seeks to get at the source of problems, conflict resolution aims not merely to resolve the immediate social conflict, the immediate family or ethnic dispute, but also to provide insights into the generic nature of the problem and thus to contribute to the elimination of its sources and the prevention of other instances. It is, in short, analytical problem solving.

#### The Focus on Process.

For the strategist, the lawyer, the industrial consultant and others who have sought to prevent or to deal with conflict situations, conflict resolution has meant process. The strategist employs deterrence; the lawyer has access to court procedures together with negotiation; the industrial consultant is concerned with bargaining and perhaps arbitration or mediation. Those concerned with environmental, community and other types of disputes similarly focus on process.

Recently there have been developed, as an alternative to the

traditional processes of courts and arbitrators, what are termed "alternative dispute resolution" processes, and other forms of interaction in which parties to a dispute are helped to communicate, to make choices and to arrive at some outcome agreed by all concerned (Moore, 1986). While there are different styles, the role of the intervenor or 'third party' is, in these cases, mainly directed toward the accommodation of conflicting interests as defined by the parties. The assumption is that the parties themselves have sufficient insights into the nature of their conflict, and of most possible options, to find an agreed outcome that will be lasting. What is required and provided is a process which helps them communicate, and which suggests options they may not have considered.

Whether traditional or innovative, these different processes seldom arise out of or reflect any broad understanding of conflict. In law, for example, "alternative dispute resolution" has been a response to overload of the court system, not to some breakthrough in conflict theory. Similarly, in other settings, the nature and origins of conflict generally, or of the particular type of dispute being dealt with, have not been of major concern. The 'theory' of conflict resolution, in so far as there has been one, consists of theories about processes, about communication, perception, and interaction.

In the approach we adopt, process is derived from an analy-



sis of the nature of conflict. It is a significant subsidiary, yet a subsidiary still, the main component of conflict resolution being a prior understanding by intervenors and those dealing with it of the nature of conflict and its sources: institutional, human, cultural and other.

#### Pragmatism.

The conflict management processes that fall within the traditional or alternative dispute resolution categories are, at present, themselves treated as distinct and separate phenomena. The focus is on the pragmatic ways in which each type of dispute -- interpersonal, industrial, communal, international and others -- may be tackled. This particularism reflects a view that human conflicts and their management differ fundamentally according to the environmental setting of the human relationships they involve.

In practice, a condition of arbitrariness also prevails within any one pragmatic approach. While one third party might help to resolve an industrial dispute by caucussing with each of the parties, another might regard this as preventing opportunities for each party accurately to understand the position of the other. Without a viable theory of conflict, the conflict resolution "profession" is incapable of developing a theory of resolution; hence, it lacks accepted rules of practice.

In our perspective, conflict and conflict resolution are

universal phenomena. The hypothesis is that there are generic explanations of human behavior, leading to means of resolving problems which have an application at all social levels and in all societies. Developing such explanations is the key to eliminating pragmatic arbitrariness and to generating accepted standards of professional practice.

### Hidden Failures.

Insofar as process-oriented practitioners give their clients satisfaction, this is largely because their practice may be adequate for many relatively superficial disputes, such as organizational management problems and some environmental disputes. Their failures, when such seemingly straightforward problems turn out to have more deep-rooted sources, are not usually recorded. When they are brought to attention, as when a strike is not settled, or a communal or international conflict escalates into violence and persists, failure is attributed not to any inadequacy in theory or practice, but to the inherent complexities of the situation or the parties' alleged irrational preferences for conflict. Like diplomacy, conflict resolution has been treated as the "art of the possible," with failure attributed to the impossibilities of the situation rather than to the inadequacies of the processes employed.

In our view, conflict resolution has an ethical dimension. Intervention in human relationships at any level carries with it

responsibilities for the consequences. Failure is evidence of inadequacy of theory and process; it ought not be excused by reference to complexity or an assumed preference for conflict on the part of those involved.

The Limitations of Traditional and Alternative Processes.

Those who have an interest in recently developed alternative dispute resolution and collaborative processes have tended to concentrate on particular types of disputes -- organizational, industrial, communal, and environmental -- which usually do not involve widespread violence, confrontations with authorities or defiance of legal norms. These latter are still treated as being within the traditional and more directly coercive framework of judicial systems and of power bargaining or authoritative relations. In other words, neither traditional processes nor these more recent innovations have made an impact on those types of conflict which are now the major concern of most nations and of the world society.

From our perspective, however, conflict resolution implies a capability to deal with all forms of conflict at all social levels from the interpersonal to the international. This capability extends to conflicts which are complex, intense and violent. It is in this arena, in fact, that conflict resolution demonstrates its unique usefulness.

### Serious and Deep-Rooted Conflict.

It is helpful in this connection to distinguish two features of a conflict, its degree of seriousness and its deep-rootedness.

'Seriousness' refers to the impact of conflict on the individual or society. A conflict which is not serious can be handled by unsophisticated means without a great deal of harm even if there is failure. But a conflict which is serious in its consequences, for example, one that may lead to widespread violence, perhaps even mass destruction, should not be tackled by pragmatic and untested processes.

'Deep-rooted' refers both to the causes and the nature of the conflict. A conflict over some negotiable interest can be handled without severe consequences by a bargaining process that may leave one side or both disappointed. But a deep-rooted conflict, in which there are issues at stake that are not negotiable, requires more sophisticated means of resolution.

Attention is drawn to serious and deep-rooted conflicts, as distinct from superficial ones, to sound a note of caution. Until an analysis is made there is no way of knowing whether an apparently superficial conflict may turn out to have serious consequences and/or deep-rooted origins. For this reason conflict resolution professionals at all levels require rigorous theoretical training. Conflict resolution processes and skills should be such that even those disputes that appear to be relatively super-

ficial are handled with a full awareness of the nature of human conflict.

### Interpersonal and Interrepresentative Problem Solving

The vast majority of alternative dispute resolution and mediation efforts relate to persons directly in dispute, as in the case of matrimonial, organizational, environmental and community disputes. In such a direct personal interaction, there is a temptation for third parties to try to reduce tensions by finding points of agreement, by using language that smooths over differences, and by trying to alter perceptions and relationships so as to promote harmony and a spirit of agreement. This practice creates a danger that the sources of tension and dispute will be pushed aside while the parties are together, only to emerge at a later stage. When this occurs, the outcome differs little from the outcome of a power bargaining situation in which one party accepts an outcome of necessity, only to contest it when opportunities permit.

Resolving deep-rooted conflict frequently requires a form of facilitation that provokes escalation in dialogue between the parties. The escalation of verbal conflict is designed to bring to the surface the strongly felt issues, rather than attempting to reduce tensions by moderating language and promoting improved relationships. In practice, it is often only at the point of seeming impasse that the analysis reveals the underlying issues

generating the conflict. Focussing on areas of agreement and smoothing over differences can be a serious obstacle to achieving a lasting agreement.

When those who are brought together are representatives of factions, communities or nations, this consensus-manufacturing approach can have serious consequences. Cases of deaths and suicides of representatives are recorded in the research literature dealing with ethnicity and community conflicts. The reasons are obvious. If a facilitated interaction results in altered perceptions and values by those who are participating, their 'reentry' problem when they return to those whom they represent can become acute.

There can be no resolution of a conflict unless it takes into account as political realities the perceptions and values of those who are represented in facilitated discussions. Either representatives must be provided with evidence of false perceptions and the need to alter attitudes that they can convincingly communicate back to their constituents, or the options offered must meet the original demands made by the constituency concerned.

These two situations, the interpersonal and the interrepresentative, are closely analogous. The obvious dangers inherent in attitude changes when representatives of parties have a reentry problem mirror the less obvious realities of the

interpersonal situation. The participants in an interpersonal relationship have a similar reentry problem: once away from the facilitated environment, they have to face the realities of the issues that have not been addressed. As persons subject to social pressures, they tend to enact one role in one environment and another in the other. The task of the facilitator is to ensure that this dissonance does not undermine a lasting resolution.

In ordinary social relationships, where we seek compromise and improved personal relationships, we tend to use polite and accommodating language. But ordinary social relationships, despite their difficulties and misunderstandings, do not involve the perceived levels of hostility and conflict which require third party intervention. When a problem in relationships emerges, the glossing-over techniques of social behavior -- compromise, accommodating language and appeals to social norms -- can be dysfunctional. Conflict avoidance is not what we mean by conflict resolution.

#### The Notion of 'Conflict'.

It will be seen that I wish to give the term 'conflict resolution' a distinctive meaning which separates the concept from the earlier emphasis on pragmatic processes.

But first let us be clear about the nature of conflict, for the way in which a conflict is handled is determined by what is

believed to be its nature, that is, by one's theory of conflict. If conflict is believed to be caused, for example, by individual greed or by personal aggressiveness, it may seem appropriate and effective to employ repressive techniques against a party or parties. By contrast, if conflict is caused by some frustration of irrepressible human drives, the appropriate response would be to analyze the nature of the problem and adjust the institutional and normative environment accordingly.

The theory of analytical, problem-solving conflict resolution is derived from a conception of conflict as a normal and universal human phenomenon. Conflict describes a relationship in which each party perceives the other's goals, values, interests, or behavior as antithetical to its own. Conflict embraces, first, the relationships between parties to a dispute, their perceptions and misperceptions, their shared and separate values, and their goals and motivations; and second, the political, social, economic, and institutional environment in which the dispute takes place.

It follows that the analysis of conflict requires the study of the totality of human relationships, whether conflictual or not, for it is human motivations and values that are involved, conditioned by the totality of the environment -- economic, political, social and ecological -- in which these relationships are enacted.



## The Underlying Theory of Conflict Resolution

One etiology of conflict which has long been thought to be universally applicable is the notion that conflict originates in the "natural aggressiveness" of humans. This "natural aggressiveness" however, is little more than a label. It is less a theory than an attitude that attributes conflict to instinct, immorality or deliberate anti-social behavior, thus justifying its repression. The label cannot explain historically how persons become anti-social. It cannot, therefore, suggest remedies other than containment.

Another view, no less simplistic, maintains that conflict is inevitable not because of human frailties, but because of the need to compete for inevitably scarce resources. This Malthusian notion presupposes an incurably acquisitive person little different from the "naturally aggressive" individual of the instinctualists. It grossly underestimates both society's productive capacity and the individual's ability to share. And it precludes remediation.

Jails are now full and arms escalation has become too costly even for the wealthiest societies. We now require remedies for problems of conflict based on adequate explanation, not just intuitive or ideological remedies dictated by immediate expediency.

Problem-solving conflict resolution is based on an

analytical explanatory theory which suggests quite different explanations of behavior and, therefore, quite different means of dealing with conflict. We believe that the human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling in their respective institutional environments at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs, needs such as security, identity, recognition and development. They strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs. This struggle cannot be curbed; it is primordial. It is a struggle, therefore, that raises implicit demands for institutional re-organization rather than for altered attitudes and enforced conformity with given norms of behavior.

It is not my purpose here to set out the behavioral theories from which problem-solving conflict resolution is derived. I have done this elsewhere (Burton, 1979). Reference, however, to some discoveries that have been made about human behavior, partially as a result of the application of problem-solving conflict resolution processes (Burton 1969), will help clarify the theory of conflict resolution.

When representatives of parties to a deep-rooted conflict are brought together in an interactive and analytical setting, a qualitative shift takes place in their understanding of the nature of the conflict. While the particular conflict has ordinarily been defined at first as interest-based (that is, relating to wages, territory, roles, or other negotiable issues),

it soon becomes clear that it is value- and needs- based (that is, relating to defense of a culture, of identity, or to claims for equality of treatment).

Interest-based disputes are negotiable. They are not deep-rooted by definition. No one wishes to die in a fight over wages as such. Most of the legal, arbitration and alternative techniques of dispute resolution can deal with interest-based disputes if, in fact, they prove to be of this relatively superficial nature.

Value or needs-based disputes, on the other hand, reflect demands that are not negotiable. Values and human needs of an ontological or primordial character are not for trading. Sufficient coercion on the one side and lack of bargaining power on the other can sometimes lead to suppression, at least temporarily, of such demands and to what is known as the "settlement" of the dispute, but not to its resolution.

The relationship between unsatisfied basic needs and human conflict is a recent discovery made primarily by sociologists studying deviant behavior, but also by some lawyers, counsellors and others concerned with relations between the individual and society. It is an important discovery. It undermines the basic assumptions in Western political philosophy that the individual, while aggressive or scarcity-ridden, can be socialized into behaviors required by elite norms, and that the social self is

the only self which is important. It undermines, therefore, the notion of law and order as traditionally conceived. It suggests that deep-rooted conflict cannot be dealt with by conventional mediation, arbitration, and other implicitly coercive and non-analytical processes.

A corollary of this discovery is particularly challenging. If interests are not the sources of deep-rooted conflict, then scarcity is not its basic condition. Therefore, the outcome of conflict need not be win-lose in nature, provided that the means of satisfying values and needs are also not in scarce supply.

In fact they are not. The more security, identity, and development one party experiences, the more and not the less are the opportunities for the satisfaction of these same needs by others. Scarcity, as a present fact, relates to the means of achieving these goals, but does not make them unachievable; that is, it is not an inevitable source of conflict. For example, in the struggle for security, scarcity is relevant only to the traditional means of achieving this goal, such as control of territory or of other scarce resources. Conflict resolution arises out of the failure of such means to achieve their true ends. By offering alternative means of achieving them, it demonstrates that the problem is not scarcity of identity, recognition, and other developmental needs, but the selection of the means employed in their pursuit. Quantitative issues remain

relevant but only in the context of satisfying basic qualitative needs.

### Utopianism and Realism

This perspective on conflict resolution is not "utopian." A current example of utopianism is the campaign to provide "human rights" as a means of offsetting some of the consequences of social injustice. This reflects the conscious idealism of persons who accept the so-called political realism of power and its consequent inequalities. It is an attempt to temper power politics. The political reality is, however, that the sop of human rights is an ineffective, paternalistic attempt to compensate for the denial of recognition and other human values and needs. The political reality is that unless these needs are met, no system, no matter what coercion is exercised in its defense, can be stable. It is not power politics that defines political reality, but the drive by individuals and identity groups for their independent development.

The idea that real political "power" resides in the individual or identity group that seeks to control its environment is no more acceptable at present than it was for philosophers of the past. Nevertheless, it is a fact. Any attempt to analyze the outcome of the Vietnam war, for example, in terms of traditional indices of power (military, economic, and the like) is doomed to failure. Even now it is difficult for the United States to accept

that the Vietnam war commenced as a post-colonial struggle for national independence, and that it was won by those seeking their national identity. The need for independence, which gives identity, recognition, and opportunities for indigenous development, is at the root of conflicts in Central America and the Middle East, and engenders hundreds of other violent disputes in world society, not to mention the vast number of smaller conflicts that are the everyday occurrence of every society. We shy away from such a perspective. It threatens our traditional philosophies, and we have no agreed alternatives to which we can move. But conflict resolution has the capacity to offer such alternatives.

#### Limitations on the Pursuit of Human Needs.

We should note some apparent limitations on the pursuit of human needs as an explanation of behavior.

When persons experience recognition as persons and have the opportunity to develop, then they experience no need to struggle for security by seeking an identity through some unusual behavior, or by seeking an identity group through which to exercise control of the environment. The practical reality, however, is that there are few persons other than members of elite groups so happily endowed. Most often, these privileged few remain unconscious of the gulf which separates them from the "needy," in the sense in which we define "need." The great

concern of political elites, for example, is role defense, which requires those representing a coercive system to justify their position by attributing crime and rebellion to the personal failings of "anti-social" persons. They assume, without warrant, that this is all that separates authorities from subjects.

For peoples who lack not only recognition, but even the raw essentials of existence, the opportunity to pursue such human needs is severely constrained. Where such opportunity ceases to exist, as is the case at present in certain areas in Africa, a total apathy prevails. Environmental conditions can reduce human beings to a condition in which there is little scope for struggles for identity, let alone recognition as persons. The absence of evidence of the pursuit of these particular human needs in such conditions hardly demonstrates that they are not an ontological element in human behavior. It demonstrates merely that the environmental conditions for any form of normal development do not exist.

Between these two extremes, that is, between those who have gained personal recognition and those whose struggle is for sheer survival, lie the vast majority of humans who, at various stages of human development, do pursue by all means at their disposal the basic human needs of security, identity, and development. It is this mass of persons, in their various cultures and stages of development, that are the source of most interpersonal and inter-societal conflict, and that are in endemic conflict with

authorities at all levels, from parents to national authoritative elites.

Traditional thinkers have been impressed with the inadequacies of the average human being, and the need, therefore, for elite systems of control, including coercive controls. An alternative view is that social harmony depends on the removal of barriers to individual development, and the provision of opportunities for such development. It is not a question of individuals being "naturally good" any more than of their being "naturally aggressive." They are naturally needy, and their basic needs can be satisfied in the real world of social and political relations.

#### The Practice of Conflict Resolution.

The practice of problem-solving conflict resolution is deduced from the theory of conflict as a universal response to frustrated needs. The practice involves providing opportunities for the parties: first, to analyze relationships so as to generate an accurate definition of the problem in terms of motivations and human needs; second, to cost their goals and policies once they are fully informed of all aspects of the dispute, including the motivations and values of the opposing side; and third, to discover the possible options that may be available once there has been a full analysis of the conflict in all its elements.



In summarizing this conception of conflict resolution, it is helpful to make a distinction between "resolution" and "settlement." The former denotes an outcome that is self-supporting and stable because it solves the problem to the long-term satisfaction of all parties. The latter describes an outcome that does not necessarily meet the needs of all concerned, but that is accepted for the time because of the jurisdiction of a court, the superior bargaining power of the opposing party, or some coercion that has been exercised by opponents or a third party.

This conception is analagous to the distinction between a "problem" and a "puzzle." A problem can be solved, if at all, only by taking into account all the variables no matter how complex, but it is possible to transform a problem into a puzzle, that is, a situation with a known answer, merely by ignoring significant variables. This sort of transformation occurs when police move in to prevent a riot: the source of the riot can be ignored temporarily if there is sufficient police coercion to control it. But this problem is not merely a puzzle. It therefore remains unresolved.

It follows that the practices or processes of analytical, problem-solving conflict resolution, like the theory of conflict resolution, have a universal character. They are relevant to all social levels, thus potentially giving some order to what is at

present a messy field of different approaches, most of them inadequate. Moreover, this broad conception of conflict and of problem-solving conflict resolution implies that a wide range of current social problems are potentially resolvable. Deviant behavior of all kinds, drug addictions and their related problems, street violence, spouse abuse, terrorism, arms control problems, and reconstruction planning to make arms control possible, are all problems within the range of conflict resolution.

We have made a mistake in treating conflict behavior as different in kind from any other behavior. Just as "deviant" behavior must be analyzed within the same analytical framework as ordinary behavior if we are to understand it (Box, 1971), so we must analyze so-called conflict behavior in the same framework as any other problem in human relationships.

#### Problem-solving Conflict Resolution as a Political Philosophy

We have had a process in the past that has cut across times and cultures -- the process of social control by power and elite rule. What we are witnessing in contemporary times is the breakdown of this system. For reasons we have given, elite power cannot control individual behaviors, with the result that conflict is increasing at all social levels from the family to the international.

This is historically what could be expected. The authoritative distribution of resources and coercive power has traditionally been regarded as the basis of social control and the primary function of political systems, whether they be free or planned (see Easton, 1963). Over time, however, there has been a continuing weakening of authoritative control. Indeed, the appearance of conflict resolution signals the decadence of formalistic and coercive rule by elites. It is in the context of this continuing trend that conflict resolution merges into political philosophy.

Conflict resolution processes have the potential to take the place of courts and power-based negotiation. Conceivably they could deal with many problems of distribution of roles and resources as well. Insofar as conflict resolution results in such alterations in institutions and norms as problem solving may require, insofar as it is a major influence for change, and also for adjustments to changing conditions, it becomes a system of decision making. When conflict resolution is substituted for authoritative decision making, it effectively becomes the basis of a political system in which analytical problem solving process are substituted for elite rule, legal norms and power politics. Conflict resolution has, therefore, to be treated conceptually as a political system.

The institutionalization of conflict resolution would remove

authoritative controls, but at the same time push societies toward a means of non-authoritative social control. When we refer to a process of social control that is non-authoritative, we are no longer in the field of pragmatic, improvised, ad hoc first aid, or of culturally specific forms of mediation, conciliation, and arbitration. Given the universal decay of authoritative processes unable to satisfy basic human needs, conflict resolution processes can be institutionalized universally. In effect, they can control and condition all social behavior as legal processes now seek to do. But law is a method of control designed to suppress basic individual needs in the interests of preserving elite power. Conflict resolution is a method of control designed to satisfy these needs in the interests of accommodating all forms of government to the reality of individual power. While legal processes are coercive and prohibitive, conflict resolution processes are positive means of social control which seek to establish non-conflictual relationships.

### The Western Political Tradition

For a real understanding of problem-solving conflict resolution, therefore, it is necessary to adopt a perspective which enables us to perceive human conflict in its total institutional setting.

In fact, this is just what political philosophers have been

trying to do throughout the ages. They have, however, paid most attention to the institutional setting. Western political philosophy views the individual "subject" or "citizen" essentially as a naughty child. That is, it treats the aggressive individual as the problem while assuming at the same time that this person is malleable and subject to the conflict management processes of elite-controlled institutions.

Most accounts of the Western political tradition focus on dramatic changes in thought and in practice. We have moved from extreme autocracies, through a variety of more liberal systems, to attempts at communal life approximating an ideal state of anarchy. Nevertheless elitism in one form or another has been advocated and justified by Western political philosophy and behavioral science. Consistently the individual, especially the person not involved in political organization except as a subject, has been of secondary consideration. Thus, we still have high levels of domestic injustice leading to violence at all levels. Indeed, we presently confront thermo-nuclear conflict in the defense of failed systems of social control.

Now that we are at the end of this line we must ask whether we have been on the right track. The struggle has been to find the means of preserving societies by finding an institutional accommodation between the individual and society. Through a changes in philosophy and practice runs a consistent theme: the individual must be governed by elites who know best, such as

philosophers or priests, by elites with power, and by elites guided by an articulated ideology. In all cases these elites have attached more importance to the control than to the development of the individual.

Political philosophers and politicians have sought this accommodation between the individual and society in the limited framework of social-political evolution, a dominant feature of which has been the conscious self-preservation of elites. It has been their view that people can be classified into two groups: those who are capable of ruling and those who are not capable of taking responsibility for their own behavior or that of others, thus justifying elite controls. A human needs approach breaks down this fundamental categorization and leads to a different social philosophy.

Has the problem of conflict really been the aggressive individual from whom society must be defended? It is more likely that the problem has been the continuing threat to individual development posed by elites and associated interest groups throughout the evolution of modern societies. Conflict resolution locates the source of deep-rooted conflict in all societies and internationally in the irrepressible needs of individuals and attempts by elites of various kinds to repress them. The core assumption of this political philosophy and practice is that existing institutions are and should be the servants of

individuals.

Problem-solving Conflict Resolution as A Political System.

The evolved systems of free enterprise, socialism, communism and communalism are all running into problems that threaten their legitimacy. This is probably because all are ends in themselves, that is, systems to be preserved as such rather than adapted to the needs of those on whom their legitimacy finally depends. They are systems in which relationships between authorities and subjects, between the privileged and the underprivileged, and among persons and groups are determined institutionally, by coercion if necessary, not by the values and needs of their constituencies.

If this is the overall source of failure, the practical problem is how to deal with these problems in relationships immediately, within whatever system prevails, be it free enterprise, economic planning or some other. The immediate task is not to create the ideal political system. It is to discover processes of handling conflictual relationships regardless of the system in which they originate. It is to find that generic component which all social-political systems require, which relates decision making to those affected by decisions.

As power-based systems decay, problem solving processes which are more and more affecting communities, industrial relations and even international relations, are altering the norms of political

systems. When conflict resolution processes point to the costs of ignoring the nature of human relationships, they point also to the institutional changes that are required to ensure that institutions are the servants of citizens and not their masters. For example, conflict-resolving processes that reveal values and human needs as well as interests will, over time, alter institutional relationships in industry, whether in a private enterprise system or a communist system.

Whereas legal processes strongly tend to conserve existing norms and institutions, problem-solving conflict resolution processes are innovative by nature: they constantly promote change in the direction of satisfying the values and needs of all members of society. A problem-solving conflict resolution system is, therefore, one of constant adaptation to changing environmental conditions. It is conservative in the sense that it preserves those aspects of societies which promote human needs and social stability, and it is radical in the sense that it alters those which frustrate human needs and promote instability. No left-right or political party dichotomy is relevant to describe it. Problem solving conflict resolution is a functional system which allows members of a society to interact in harmony by constantly and continuously dealing with the totality of relationships in the totality of the environment, and adapting in whatever ways are appropriate.



It is in this sense that conflict resolution which reaches down to the motivations and values of those in dispute is a political philosophy. Because it may be a component of any system, and at the same time a means of change, conflict resolution has the potential of bringing otherwise competing systems into harmony. It has the potential to bridge or link person to person, group to group and system to system.

### The Institutionalization of Conflict Resolution

Failure of traditional means of social control, the costs of failure especially at the international level, additional insights into the nature of human behavior, and the spread of knowledge by modern technologies are all escalating at an exponential rate.

Perhaps as a reaction to failure, perhaps as a result of greater knowledge and understanding of human behavior and social relationships, analytical problem-solving conflict resolution is being institutionalized as part of day-by-day social processes in social systems. Alternative dispute resolution processes are being modified to take into account the realities of human dimensions (Moore, 1986); community problems are being dealt with by informal local procedures (Shonholtz, 1987); administrations are moving toward dispute resolution procedures (Administrative Conference of the United States, 1987); and there are new attempts at "second track diplomacy" (Foreign Service Institute,

1987) in the wider global society.

Knowledge of conflict resolution will be promoted further as its study as a new a-disciplinary discipline is developed. It is an a-disciplinary discipline because, unlike economics, law, sociology and other behavioral disciplines each of which its own abstract and partial model of the individual ("economic man," "legal man," and so forth), conflict resolution deals with the total human being, encompassing personality and cultural differences, and deals with this person in the total society, encompassing system differences.

To deal with deep-rooted conflict there is a need for more sophisticated processes than courts or court alternatives can provide. These processes can be learned in a short time. (Burton, 1987). What cannot be learned without extensive study are the many aspects of human behavior of which a third party must be aware if there is to be resolution, as distinct from settlement, of conflict.

These aspects of human behavior include, in addition to general theories of human needs and values, the main islands of social science theory, such as theories of decision making, role behavior, institutions, functionalism, change and the many others which are the essence of various disciplines. It has to be remembered, however, that all of these have evolved within the framework of traditional philosophy. All must be reconsidered in

the light of additional knowledge of human behavior and reinterpreted in accordance with a philosophy which does not treat the complex person as a simplified model for purposes of theory-building within a particular discipline.

### Professionalism and Ethics

This positive role of problem-solving conflict resolution, and such an optimistic prediction of the future, is wholly in line with long-term evolutionary trends toward less coercive relationships between institutions and individuals. However, no evolutionary trend is a smooth line. Advances in knowledge are frequently followed by reactions by those who consider that they might be affected adversely.

Conflict resolution processes are effective only because they include the costing of options as a major ingredient. Comprehensive analysis of their situations allows parties accurately to predict the consequences of their behaviors and those of the institutions they seek to preserve or change. Well-founded predictions can lead to realistic assessments of policies and their consequences.

There are two influences which lead to deviations from a smooth trend toward systems of greater harmony in relationships. First, even though analytical problem solving processes permit accurate prediction and assessment of the consequences of policies, there are short term interests, especially role

interests, which frequently lead to behaviors that run counter to longer-term rationality. We have many examples of political decisions that are made for some short term gain, even at great cost in lives and in social and economic stability. These decisions were not made subsequent to any problem solving process, but they do suggest the magnitude of the problem. Until political processes are diverted from short-term defensive interests toward longer-term social interests, conflict is inevitable. The question remains open as to whether conflict resolution processes can be acceptable within party- and interest- dominated political systems.

Second, there is always the danger that the process can be captured and used to advantage by elites that already control existing decision making processes. Already there is evidence that this is happening (Amy, 1987).

These two influences point to the need for professionalism in the conduct of conflict resolution processes. By this is meant an appropriate training for facilitators in conflict resolution -- not just in process, but in the adisciplinary study of conflict and conflict resolution, probably the most exacting and challenging training of any. This training must inculcate a rigid awareness of the ethical obligations imposed on any faciliator in conflict resolution. The purpose of facilitation is not only to avoid patent coercion but to avoid the latent

coercion of compromise, power bargaining and negotiation. Indeed, the analytical approach seeks to make irrelevant power in all its forms, substituting for it the costing of the consequences of the use of power in situations in which values and needs, which cannot be compromised or traded, are at stake.

### Concluding Comment

Decision-making bodies, such as local institutions, parliaments, and courts are the foundations of all modern systems of government. Both in developed and developing states they are failing to ensure social control internally and peaceful relations externally. Conflict, serious conflict, is almost universal, generating an increasing danger of catastrophe. Is conflict resolution a positive antidote to the negative processes of authoritative control? Is conflict resolution not just a means of dealing with a particular conflict, but a political philosophy in its own right, and a political system of social control which is democratic in a fundamental sense? We have reason to believe that this is the case.

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