

# A working functionalism? – a review<sup>1</sup>

David Mitrany, *A Working Peace System*

Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1966. Pp. 221. \$2.25 (paperback).

James P. Sewell, *Functionalism and World Politics*

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966. Pp. 359. \$6.50.

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Functionalists . . . are interested in identifying those aspects of human needs and desires that exist and clamor for attention outside the realm of the political. They believe in the possibility of specifying technical and 'non-controversial' aspects of governmental conduct, and of weaving an ever-spreading web of international institutional relationships on the basis of meeting such needs [Haas, 1964, p. 6].

The stimulating collection of papers by David Mitrany and the coherent statement by James Sewell make an important contribution to the development of a tentative theory of functionalism. Mitrany's papers are organized into three chapters: "A Working Peace System;" "Political Theory and International Political Development;" "The Functional Approach and Federalism." Chapter I contains the paper entitled "A Working Peace System," dated 1943. Three papers on equality, representation and administration are in Chapter II. These papers are: "The Problem of Equality in Historical Perspective" (1955), "An Advance in Democratic Representation" (1954), and "Problems in International Administration" (1945).

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"The Functional Approach to World Organization" (1948), "Functional Federalism" (1950), and "The Prospect of Integration: Federal or Functional" (1965), comprise Chapter III.

The first paper, "A Working Peace System," is the principal work. It presents a pointed critique of federation and the constitutional approach to international order. The paper suggests the functional alternative to achieve international society. With remarkable insight, Mitrany anticipates the growth of functional organization, e.g., the economic, social, and technical agencies of the United Nations family. As James Sewell points out, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and its affiliate, the International Development Association (IDA), are active in providing economic development assistance to developing nations. The development of transportation and electricity are historically the backbone of the bank's business; IDA, in addition to sharing these interests, shows a strong tendency toward agricultural development as well. Furthermore, the growth in programs of such agencies as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the formation

of the UN Development Program from the Special Fund and the Expanded Program of Technical Assistance (EPTA) are illustrative of the increase in functional tasks in the social and technical areas. Thus, "A Working Peace System" contains a theoretical basis for the growth in these functional sectors; such foresight is an indication of the value of Mitrany's work.

Sewell's excellent book is also divided into three parts: "Functional Approach, Functionalist Argument;" "Financing Economic Development through the United Nations System;" "The Functionalist Thesis Reexamined." Part One lays the functionalist thesis out for examination. What are its basic assumptions and weaknesses in logical statement? Part Two provides a challenge for the functionalist argument by juxtaposing alongside it the financing programs of the IBRD, IDA, the International Finance Corporation, and the UN Special Fund. Sewell asks here whether the functionalist thesis holds up against the evidence provided by the growth of these functional activities. The answer to this question forms a basis for Part Three. Here the main focus is on the interpretive capacity of the functionalist argument as illustrated in the study of the UN financing programs. Does functionalism provide insights as to why these programs developed and operate as they do? He finally concludes that "Some elements within the functionalist prophecy are validated in the case of the financing program, yet in certain important respects—notably with respect to problem solving—the functionalist prediction seems to have gone badly astray" (Sewell, 1966, p. 245).

These two authors address themselves to two important ideas in the functionalist thesis: the benefits and durability of community formed as a basis of functional activity. One such benefit claimed is peace.

Durability of functional communities is contrasted with those deriving from federation as an approach. Mitrany, the persuasive advocate, contrasts with Sewell, the scholarly critic, in his approach to peace. Mitrany fervently hopes that functionalism will yield ". . . a new sense of peace: not a peace that would keep the nations quietly apart but a peace that would bring them actively together, not the old static and strategic view but a social view of peace. Or one might say that we must put our faith not in a protected peace but in a working peace" (Mitrany, 1966, p. 92).

Sewell carefully considers Mitrany's claims and his hopes for a working peace. Sewell initially notes that "the forecast of peace as a consequence of the functional approach exacts as its proviso the continuation of many functional programs over an extended period—a condition manifestly not satisfied at present" (Sewell, 1966, p. 53). He concludes that the functionalist argument bases its contention as regards peace upon a claim that functional activity creates peace-bearing community. Sewell goes on to discover that the burgeoning community of international financing agencies gives some credence to this argument. Although Sewell qualifies his assessment, it appears that his final critique gives a favorable mark to the thesis regarding functional programs and the growth of peace-bearing community.

Neither Sewell nor Mitrany inquire into the actual link between the growth of functional programs and the supposed decrease in conflict behavior among the nations involved. There are studies on the increase in functional organization. For example, Robert Angell observes that there were about 1,065 international organizations in 1956–57 as contrasted with approximately 1,747 during 1962–63—an increase of 64 percent (Angell, 1966, pp. 185–95). Paul Smoker,

in addition, relates growth in international organizations to defense budgets. He tentatively concludes that the increase in organizations may provide an additional integrative mechanism preventing contemporary arms races from escalating to the point of war (cf. Smoker, 1967). Obviously, more evidence of this nature is necessary to assess the validity of the functionalist claim for peace as a consequence of its program.

In addition to their claims of peace-bearing community, functionalists sometimes assert that their program yields communities which are preferable to those produced by federal arrangements. Mitrany concedes that ". . . federation has indeed merely created a new and larger political unit which in the process did bring peace within the group, but it has not been proved that its creation necessarily contributed also to peace between it and other groups. The prospects of two powerful federations. . . , facing each other across Europe, is not a comforting one" (Mitrany, 1966, pp. 152-53).

While Sewell compares functionalism to federation he offers no evidence by which to select between the two approaches (Sewell, 1966, pp. 24-27). Karl W. Deutsch and his associates do provide evidence regarding functionalism and federalism. Their definition of functionalism, however, goes beyond Mitrany's and Sewell's to include merging of one or more governmental functions among two or more political units. Deutsch and his colleagues find that functionalism succeeds under less favorable conditions than are required for the success of federations. Moreover, functional communities survive more unfavorable processes which might destroy federations. They conclude that "the pluralistic (functional) type was easier to achieve and also, because of its stability, seemed just about as effective as the amalgamated (union or federation)

type in performing the main function of a security community—keeping the peace" (Deutsch *et al.*, 1957, pp. 79 and 122).

The Deutsch study finds that the functional alternative, though overrated, is easier to achieve and lasts longer than federation. This supports Mitrany's forecast that the functional program best builds a living and lasting international peace. Though stronger evidence in favor of functionalism versus federation is not available yet, consider some recent examples of federations. Amitai Etzioni studied the United Arab Republic, 1958-1961, and the Federation of the West Indies, 1962-1965. As regards the UAR, he concludes that "The union was born prematurely and the integrating power was in constant decline, especially in the last year of the union. Strenuous efforts to bring Syria under Egyptian control and to radically change its social and economic structure combined to alienate practically all the politically effective groups in Syria, including the army, landlords, socialists, and business circles." Furthermore, with respect to the Federation of the West Indies, Etzioni suggests that its failure derived from the attempt by an external power (Britain) to make the idea of federation more acceptable to a greater number of islands in the region by reducing the scope of the proposed federation. Etzioni holds that this curtailed the integrating power needed for the initiation of federation and did not leave the new federation with a broad enough base on which to grow, extend its scope, and serve important interests of its leading members (Etzioni, 1965, p. 97). The failure of the West Indies federation is the kind Mitrany has in mind when he says that "Nothing would be more fatal to the growth of a true international society than a federal system with a high sounding title but with a central authority severely restricted in its powers

and functions and with its progress checked by a rigid federal constitution" (Mitrany, 1966, p. 173).

In contrast to both the UAR and the West Indies federation, the relations among Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden appear to be based more upon the idea of functional association than upon federation. In fact, the countries in the Nordic Council explicitly avoid commitments regarding the federation of the area. For example, the Danish Foreign Office points out: It is characteristic of Nordic cooperative endeavors that they avoid all political abstractions and all speculations regarding final goals. Rather, they aim at the solving of concrete, practical problems, advancing step by step and accepting gladly every conquest, no matter how small" (*Danish Foreign Office Periodical*, March 2, 1956, as quoted in Mitrany, 1966, p. 210).

The contrast of functionalism and federalism underscores their differing approaches to the fragmentation of authority in contemporary international politics. This fragmentation manifests itself in a new nationalism. While federation assumes a strong nationalism, functionalism tries to limit nationalism. Hans Morgenthau, indeed, holds that functionalism is the rational reply to the challenge of nationalism. He thinks that there will be a gradual takeover of national functions by international organization if functionalism succeeds over nationalism (Morgenthau in Mitrany, 1966, pp. 10-14). As Sewell and Haas warn, however, the multilateral

effort to achieve economic development of Third World countries may have an unintended effect of strengthening nationalism as development succeeds (Sewell, 1966, p. 303).

On the other hand, the success of economic development may unleash violent political participation from formerly docile peasants. Thus, unintended consequences of international development assistance might be to sow the seeds of domestic disorder which may be followed by a repressive backlash by the central government. (Pakistan?) Thus, while participation in development financing may produce a peace-bearing community of cooperating donors, the effects on the recipients might be (temporarily?) destabilizing. Since greater social justice *may* result ultimately from such domestic conflict, this reviewer would take the chance and continue the assistance. The message for a working functionalism? *Know Thy Unintended Consequences!*

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