



Review and Reflection

BY
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ANY WAY you look at it, America is going through a crisis—a crisis of economics, a crisis of politics, a crisis of conscience. Disappointment and even despair are growing. The “American Way” is greatly dishevelled.

One of the main ingredients in the American Way has been the goal of success, of getting rich quickly, of rags to riches. Much of the present uproar is about this, for there is deep frustration on the part of many that affluence has not really been attained despite all the struggles and gimmicks. And in some cases, there is open rebellion against this goal, especially by youth, who feel that cultural and spiritual values have been neglected.

Europeans frequently criticise Americans for being materialistic and culturally barbarous, but it should not be forgotten that Europeans started it all! Visions of great wealth spurred the voyage that discovered America. These visions kept luring Europeans to the New World in search of El Dorado, and are still doing so.

Americans have always longed for culture. But it seemed to them that the business at hand was “making a buck”—the culture could come later. It was a delay that kept being made; and whatever culture did emerge became part of the commercialism.

To this day, Europeans come to America and play the get-rich-quick game with a will that amazes materialistic Americans. These Europeans will justify themselves by saying “boodle now, culture later,” which is precisely the American syndrome. The American Way is the European Dream in action.

There are few ways of getting rich. One is to offer something that people will pay for handsomely, a product, a talent, or an invention, but this is not usually a quick way. Another is to gamble: either the respectable way of Wall Street (which has a river at one end and a graveyard at the other), or the less respectable way. Another way is to reap the unearned increases in land value. For the charmed circle that own choice land, this has been found to be a steady and almost foolproof method.

Those who feel they deserve a better break than they are now getting from society, hit out, often blindly, and often at the wrong targets. The frequent labour strikes we are getting exemplify this. Demands for government hand-outs are growing. Much of the fuss over Vietnam is a protest that instead of spending so much money on the

THE CRISIS AND THE MAFIA

war, the government should spend it on rebuilding slums, helping civic programmes, etc. Demonstrations and riots are becoming a way of life. And so we have a crisis.

Now comes that extraordinary phenomenon the Mafia. Originating on the small island of Sicily, this organisation has flourished unbelievably in America. Another European dream come true in the New World?

One of the keys to the success of the Mafia is gambling. For a person who has no great talent or who does not own land, one of the very few ways to get rich quickly is through gambling. This addiction is on the increase, and the Mafia serves it by offering loans at exorbitant rates and enforcing payment with rough tactics. The Mafia defeats the police because it is offering a service that people want and because its tentacles penetrate even the most respectable strata of society, including the banking, political and judiciary systems.

Mario Puzo in his best-selling novel *The Godfather* describes how the Mafia works on a long-term basis, through elaborate organisation and by carefully cultivating friendships. Mr. Puzo, in further explanation of the Mafia, was quoted in the press as follows:

“Never forget the Mafia came into existence and flourished in a land where the ruling class cared almost nothing for its ordinary people: Sicily. The Mafia is the pus from an infected wound, not the wound itself. The real villains are those in charge.

“The more indifferent the government is to the needs of its citizens the better the climate for a parallel criminal society. The Mafia has a vested interest in such an indifference and inefficiency. People who are afraid to fight for their rights come to them for help for a ‘fix,’ and so become their allies.”

Sicily has been subjected to many conquests, and different foreign rulers have succeeded one another with native Sicilians as the victims. For a long time Sicilians even regarded (some still do) the Rome government of modern unified Italy as foreign rule. Under such circumstances the natives evolved their own defences and protective devices. The Mafia was one of these, and this organisation was by no means regarded by the natives as a criminal element, but as their “own thing”—“Cosa Nostra.” Crime was just a by-product that came to fruition in America where the conditions were right.

Does this indicate that many people in America think of their own government as "foreign?" There is much to support this. Mr. Puzo says, "I think that now, more than ever, many people have lost faith in the ability of our legal structure to protect and care for them as individuals."

If this is so, then it is a dangerous factor in the crisis. Government is growing more obtrusive and intrusive. It keeps taking more taxes, proliferates more bureaux and functionaries, prints more forms to be filled and generally makes itself uncomfortably felt, while becoming less of a recourse to justice for the individual.

UNASKED QUESTIONS

A. J. Carter

ALL TOO OFTEN economists or others describing modern economic Britain plunge head first into the mixed economy, never troubling to expound coherently either the principles of the free market or those underlying state intervention. Dr. Musgrave* avoids this pitfall. He begins with a portrayal of the way the free market is supposed to work, and does not scruple to refer to it as the *laissez-faire* system. Having described that system, he is able to deal more clearly with the contemporary modifications to it and pursue his explanation of what he calls "controlled capitalism."

The first part of the book is about economic institutions; the second is about economic behaviour, about how people in their various economic roles—consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and workers—act within the structure by which they are conditioned. That people are greatly influenced by institutions and by the activities of other people surrounding them is a truism: the challenge is to find out how we are to avoid, or at least reduce, the forces of conformity and retain independence of mind when all the pressures are to eliminate it.

Although the author touches on the existing relationships among the participants in the economic process, he does not deal at all with the many interesting questions about the changes of the future. For instance, will there be increased use of computers, and if so what will be the consequences for consumers and workers? Will there be much more leisure time? If so, will involvement in work as a career continue to decline; will more men look on their work as just a job and seek their main satisfaction outside it? Might we even see the return of the dedicated craftsman, secure in his standard of living, practising a craft as a means of creative fulfilment that he no longer expects from his employment?

Will economic units always grow bigger or will there come a time when they will collapse with the failure of their own organization and internal communications? Is

The Mafia is one of the manifestations that is the "pus from an infected wound," in the words of Mr. Puzo, who looks forward to "a society in which economic murder will become as immoral as physical murder and so to a society where the Mafia and its 'Godfathers' cannot exist."

To attain such a society we must find the way to give the ordinary man an even break, stop confiscation and exploitation, both public and private, and make the production of goods and services a more rewarding proposition than gambling or the reaping of unearned gains at the expense of society generally.

the managerial class becoming more powerful than its nominal bosses? Are the experts becoming more powerful than either? Is the ultimate control of companies still with those who have put money into them? Will the law go on treating shareholders as owners or is that concept about to wither away? Are we perhaps on the verge of an altogether new legal concept comparable to that of limited liability?

Will entrepreneurs, inventors, innovators of all kinds, flourish under the economic system or will they be smothered by the Government's or their own technical advisers? Above all, will the sovereignty of consumers survive; will production be determined by what people want, think they want, or are persuaded to want, or will it be determined by what tycoon-bureaucrats think they want or think is best for them or by what they are compelled to want by subliminal advertising or similar horrors as yet unknown?

Students of the sociology of economic relationships should be ready to ask questions such as these, but if they are it will be in spite of, not because of, some of the books they read. Dr. Musgrave's book is a good and readable textbook: it does not set out to inspire its readers with new ideas or to stimulate their thinking but only to tell them facts. It is successful in this, not so much in acquainting us with new information as in talking explicitly about things we already know but take for granted. The danger of this approach is that too much concentration on what is, may make us shrug off consideration of what ought to be. The faculty for criticism and imagination is very easily lulled to sleep.

£24,000 AN ACRE

ONE of the highest figures achieved for residential building land in the Home Counties—£24,240 an acre—has been achieved for 16½ acres at Highfield Lane, Cox Green, Maidenhead. The land, sold by Maidenhead Corporation, carries consent for 161 homes.

Daily Telegraph, July 4.

**The Economic Structure*, \$3.75, Humanities Press Inc., New York.