
Anti-Intellectualism in a Society of Eggheads

Author(s): Donald Clark Hodges

Source: *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Oct., 1966, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 1966), pp. 427-437

Published by: American Journal of Economics and Sociology, Inc.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3485782>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*

Anti-Intellectualism in a Society of Eggheads

By DONALD CLARK HODGES

IT IS WORTH NOTING that the attack upon eggheads during the '50's has only partly abated in this country and that anti-intellectualism has instead taken on the posture of intelligence. After all, there is more than one kind of antipathy for the man of ideas. Besides the popular-rooted and populist resentment by know-nothings for the sophistication that only comes with higher education, there is also a movement within the intelligentsia to demote its ivory-tower phalanstery. Intellectual job holders and functionaries of red tape are, indeed, members of the intelligentsia, but they are intellectuals only in a loose and somewhat misleading sense. Although far less impatient than formerly of the time lag between pure research and its practical applications, they have little use for those liberal arts which turn out culture for its own sake.

While anti-intellectualism underlies the tendency of the elite to deflate ideas and ideologies in particular, a countertendency toward educational superstition and ideological inflation has appeared within the ranks of the working class. The new realism of the intelligentsia has been culturally matched and countervailed only by the unintellectual idealism of the masses. Anti-intellectualism of the populist variety is itself an ideology and to that extent symptomatic of idealism. Although in underdeveloped countries the propensity for ideologies finds a quite different expression than in the affluent society, common to the ideologies of the East and anti-ideologies of the West is the true believer and the need for a secular religion to give meaning to human existence. For the affluent masses of the North Atlantic community no less than for ruling elites in the new nations and undeveloped areas of the South, the now fashionable dictum is that man does not live by bread alone. His belly full, the worker now faces the rising expectation of filling his mind as well.

We have seen that, far from waning, ideology goes on extending its sway over the lives and minds of men. The problem is how to explain its continued vitality in the light of current predictions of its end. What, for example, underlies the developing scope and influence of consensus in the contemporary world? As I have already intimated, this ideology to end ideology can be explained, first, by the transformation of the intelligentsia into a potentially and, in some cases, actually new ruling class, and, second, by the increasing ideational propensity of the masses under

conditions of affluence and the spread of mass communications. So let us consider these two tendencies in turn, and in conclusion, some of the principal objections to our thesis of the increasing use of ideology by contemporary eggheads.

I

WITH THE ADVENT of industrialization and the increasing demand for college graduates to manage the new society, the intelligentsia has grown in power not only as an auxiliary of the major classes in society but also as a separate, coherent, and self-conscious economic class tied to the forces of production through the exercise of managerial, administrative, and ideocratic functions. With the separation of ownership and control, it has acquired *de facto*, if not *de jure*, ownership of the economy in the form of increasingly higher shares in the GNP. Contrary to Marx's predictions, the salariat has emerged from the proletariat as a new economic class, yet one that is historically tied to the workers and consequently more concerned with, as well as capable of ministering to, their needs and wishes. The following terms have become more than ever interchangeable: intelligentsia, meritocracy, collegiates or class of degree holders, experts, professionals, new middle class, salariat, natural aristocracy, and functional elite.

Formerly the intelligentsia was a collection of occupational groups having more in common with the classes they represented than with each other. Owing to its diverse origins and splintering into rival and hostile sections, intellectuals spoke and wrote and worked as members of other classes, championing interests other than those of intellectuals per se. Contrary to Mannheim (*Ideology and Utopia*, 1936), the new-style intellectual has become self-aware of his occupation and group interests qua intellectual. The intelligentsia has separated from the rest of the proletariat to become a distinct and independent entity in the West, actually an auxiliary, intermediate, or new middle class, while in the East it has become a new ruling class. That the new intelligentsia constitutes an independent class, and in some areas even a ruling class, is a comparatively recent thesis in the West. Yet rule by an intelligentsia is not just a twentieth-century phenomenon but can be traced to earlier revolutionary periods, to such leaders as Calvin, Cromwell, the Jacobins, and the Puritan founders of Massachusetts.

The new intelligentsia differs from the old in its internal structure. As a class of degree holders where the degree functions as the title to a generous share in the GNP, the intelligentsia can be divided into two

principal groups: intellectuals and professionals. The intellectuals consist of scholars, artists, philosophers, authors, composers, scientists, theologians—the segment of the intelligentsia for whom ideas and culture are ends rather than means. They are the creators of culture for whom the life of contemplation or ideation is the goal of human existence. For them culture is a form of leisure, even of play, with little regard for its practical consequences. Their motto: culture for culture's sake. The professionals, on the other hand, constitute the practical intelligentsia whose job is to apply and to disseminate culture. They include brain workers in industry, government, and the military; performers in the various arts, teachers, editors, and journalists; and independent professionals such as lawyers, physicians, accountants, consultant engineers, etc. For them culture is valued primarily for its applications and contributions to social welfare, with careers taking the place of play in the development and exercise of intellectual talents. The essay by William Stokes on "The 'Pensadores' of Latin America" in Huszar's anthology on *The Intellectuals* (1960) underlines the tendency of traditional intellectuals to theorize about the world of practice without becoming actively involved in it. On the other hand, Czeslaw Milosz' and Golo Mann's pieces on the new Polish and German intelligentsia point to the increasing role of professionals in the actual management of public and private bureaucracies in the West.

The professional man, according to Richard Hofstadter (*Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 1963), lives off ideas, not for them. Consequently his intellectual skills do not make him an intellectual in the strict sense. Intellectualism designates the critical, creative, and contemplative activities of the mind; intelligence signifies the power to calculate, manipulate, and adjust. Whereas the role of the intellectual is inherited from the office of the priesthood, the role of the professional is tied to the secular arm or legal administration of the State. Intellectuals may have dignity, but they have less power than professionals. And, in the long run, it is power rather than dignity that gains the upper hand.

As Spengler was one of the first to note (*The Decline of the West*, 1918), the age of intellectual system-building has been superseded by an age in which practical intelligence in the form of money-making and, more recently, administration has become the order of the day. Because of the increasing preponderance in both numbers and influence of the professionals, the intellectuals now play second fiddle to the journeymen of ideas, most of whom have been organized and integrated into the bureaucracy in one way or another. This tendency has not resulted in a

decline of ideology because the intellectuals of ideas have themselves become increasingly numerous and influential. When the intelligentsia was a comparatively small group led by the intellectuals, the intellectuals tended to become spokesmen and thinkers for other classes. Now that they constitute a distinct class, intellectuals have preferred to serve their own kind despite the fact that they are no longer the acknowledged leaders.

A leading prophet of the rise of the intelligentsia is the sociologist, Michael Young. His fictional *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870–2033* (1958) projects the long-run results of the increasing tendency of specialists to rise to controlling positions in government and the economy. Increased spending on education and the development of brain power tends toward the triumph of the university and its way of life over all other social institutions. The current hope for social balance will be realized with a vengeance as teachers and school buildings replace defense spending as the first charge upon the national income. In time one may expect the equalization of opportunities typical of the schools to extend over society as a whole. The result, however, may well be unlike the anticipations of egalitarians. As Young notes, equality of opportunity leads to a new hierarchy of merit that is even more absolute and unyielding than the old hierarchies of heritage and money.

Within each sovereign State one ideology tends to squeeze out all others. As one segment of the new intelligentsia, the ideocrats increase in numbers and influence alongside their fellow bureaucrats and technocrats. Corresponding to the concentration and centralization of ownership and control is a concentration and centralization of the power over ideas. The last fortress to fall of modern laissez-faire liberalism was the anarchy and free-for-all existing in the realm of ideas. The new consensus is largely a result of the State monopoly in mass education and State regulation of mass media—the State itself having become increasingly representative of the interests of the ideocrats or controllers of public opinion. Thus the rise of the intelligentsia shows a concomitant increase in the power of ideocracy as well as of modern technology and administration. Ideocracy, technocracy, and bureaucracy have become the three major forces reshaping the old, while ushering in the new society.

With increasing conformism, the language of radical protest becomes relegated to the archives of social history. Words like "exploitation," "proletariat," and "proletarian revolution" are ruled as subversive when applied to domestic politics in the U.S.S.R. as well as in the United States. The consensual suppression of the language of the radical intelligentsia

is symptomatic of more than verbal defeat. Verbal victories of this sort have resulted in a linguistic imperialism and corresponding political demise. At the same time the term ideology has been increasingly used to include the quite different notion of utopia. Ideology has become synonymous with all modes of thought that function as masks and rationalizations of special interest, that present a challenge to social reality as well as a distorted image of it. The question is what this semantic change indicates if not the overcoming of utopian thinking by ideologies supporting the *status quo*.

In the past there were as many different grammars and lexicons as there were competing ideologies. That was because the intelligentsia was divided, its members identifying themselves with the old social classes founded upon wealth and kinship. However, as functional strata based upon intelligence differentials make available an increasing share of wealth, status, and power to its new upper crust of high IQ's, the intelligentsia is no longer divided. There is increasingly less rationale for a dissident ideology, not to mention opposition to the unquestioned rule of superior talent. Thus the consensus of a brave new world is in the making that will legitimize to everyone's satisfaction new differentials in wealth and status in place of those that once were a major source of social discontent.

II

IS THERE EVIDENCE for a new working class in the West alongside the new intelligentsia? As Young notes, there is no doubt concerning the functional dependence of the workers upon the corresponding prerogatives of intelligence in a scientifically planned society. Under the new dispensation the status and income division between wage and salary earners may be expected to be even sharper than it was under conventional and dysfunctional forms of aristocracy. Although nobody will be poor—poverty is itself dysfunctional—increasing wage-salary differentials will constitute new grounds for antagonism. As the intellectuals are pushed upward, however, the proletariat will be left without either champions or spokesmen capable of comprehending its situation. A new order will preclude an ideology in conflict with the consensus propagated by the meritocracy. Having too little wit to protest against society, the lower classes can only turn their uncomprehending resentment against themselves. Although this situation harbors new elements of disorder, it can be saved through the artificial creation by the intelligentsia of an ideology of muscularity especially suited to the plebs.

In brief, one has to rule out altogether the likelihood of a revolt of the

masses in response to the inequalities resulting from unequal intelligence and equality of opportunity. With the discrepancy between income and intelligence under the old dispensation finally corrected, those who had once been enemies of the established order become its strongest defenders. Such is the long-range significance of the increasing tendency in present-day society for merit to become the governing principle of economic and political as well as educational life. Contrary to the views of liberals, socialists and communists alike, the rise of the intelligentsia signifies the decline of the proletariat.

As the more urgent wants are satisfied, such as the basic physiological needs and the need for security, the sociable wants and a concern for ideas acquire increasing importance in the worker's hierarchy of values. Just as the tendency for ideology to wane does not apply to the elite of underdeveloped countries, so neither does it apply to the undeveloped class within the affluent society. Every affluent society is in reality two nations in one: an affluent society represented by the new intelligentsia, and a developing society represented by the new working class. Since the latter is now going through a transformation similar to the intelligentsia in underdeveloped countries, it experiences an increased instead of a decreasing need for ideology. At the same time there are not enough ideologies to meet the demand; hence the overconsumption of the only ideology available, namely, the ideational consensus of the social engineers. Alongside the process of ideological devaluation—the critique of ideology as cognitively worthless or at least misleading—we find a countertendency toward ideological inflation consequent upon the monopoly of ideas by the intelligentsia. On the one hand, ideologies are cheapened and denied the usefulness once accorded them; on the other hand, they are now more scarce than ever as a result of the rising expectations of the workers.

Never before have ideas functioned so effectively as social levers. Evidence for the increasing sway of ideas can be seen in the increasing ideological concerns of American workers and their mass organizations (AFL-CIO). Although the welfare State and the affluent personality are the special work of the new intelligentsia, the emergence of a scientifically organized and planned society has given rise to a corresponding transformation in the interests and outlook of the working class. Anti-Communism as well as economic security has become a paramount concern of the American labor movement, if we are to believe its official spokesmen. As Riesman remarks in his introduction to *Abundance for What? and Other Essays* (1964), the Cold War reflects not only Communist provocation but also the domestic search for a new frontier where arduous

work is no longer necessary and life becomes geared to defending ideas instead of making a living. The adventure of ideas has increasingly taken precedence over other exploits even for the unintellectual. Although idealism used to function as an incentive to social change, it now provides support for self-cultivation under conditions acceptable to the *status quo*.

Anti-intellectualism on the part of workers is now largely a matter of the past. There was a period, of course, in which anti-intellectualism tended to become more instead of less vociferous with the increasing role of intellectuals in public life. After 1890, as Hofstadter shows, the intellectuals came increasingly under attack by the representatives of popular culture. This was the period in which they first detached themselves from the patrician class and exhibited increasingly the inner cohesion of an independent and aspiring elite in this country. More recently, however, under the impact of the Cold War, anti-intellectualism of the populist variety has come under fire because of its indiscriminate attack upon the intelligentsia as a whole. Obviously the Cold War cannot be effectively waged without the cooperation of intellectuals. Consequently anti-intellectualism is itself increasingly suspect for its lack of patriotism.

Although educators, especially, still remember with misgivings the populist anti-intellectualism of the '50's, their continuing preoccupation with their own self-alienation and social isolation qua intellectuals is unrealistic in view of their integration into the mainstream of world events. As Lipset notes in *Political Man* (1960), the self-image of intellectuals, their sense of estrangement and homelessness in contemporary society, is belied by their increasing numbers and influence and by their increasing share in the collective wealth. Furthermore, the anti-intellectualism of the '50's was in part an intellectual phenomenon bred and fostered by discontented intellectuals on the margins of society. Although founded upon democratic and egalitarian sentiments, it was indissolubly associated with the Cold War and the mass propagation of anti-Communist ideologies.

The counterpart of the new realism of the intelligentsia is the increasing idealism of the masses. The spread of fascism at the expense of Marxism during the interwar years, and the increasing revulsion against materialism in the West since then, suggests that principles and ideals now exert a greater influence than ever over the lives of common men. Education is not an unmixed blessing when we consider that the economic well-being of the masses and their increasing use of leisure has resulted in a pseudo-educated public that is now more readily victimized than ever by mass media. At least ignorance breeds suspicion and skepticism of the

world of ideas. In contrast, a condition of quasi-education has resulted in mass persuasion, manipulation, and corresponding irrationalism. More than ever the masses are ready and willing to sacrifice their vital interests on behalf of some alien ideal. Just as one man's egoism benefits by another's altruism, so the material interests of the intelligentsia are well served by the workers' commitment to empty ideals, whether of Freedom or Communism.

In the effort to win and consolidate its power over society, the intelligentsia has had to present its own sectional interests in the form of the general interest. With increasing wage-salary differentials to the advantage chiefly of the managerial elite, manual workers require an ever greater tour de force to persuade them of the justice of this dispensation. As the problem of masking social reality in the form of ideologies becomes increasingly difficult, censorship of the mass media becomes more and more necessary together with increasing inroads upon civil liberties. Precisely because much more is possible in the form of welfare under modern than under ancient technologies, much more has to be claimed for the new society. The gap between aspirations and achievements being greater than formerly, the gap between ideology and social reality must also grow apace. In the U.S.S.R. there is a greater gulf between socialist claptrap about the transition to Communism and the facts of State capitalism than in any economically undeveloped or developing country including China. Similarly, in the United States there is a greater gap between the ideology and the facts about so-called free enterprise than in any other highly industrialized society. In the United States, as in the U.S.S.R., the public pronouncements of organized labor involve ideological efforts to mask the actual conditions of the workers. In neither of these countries are the workers actually exploited according to the official spokesmen of the labor movement. Unlike the old business unions, the new social unions are committed to the propagation of socialism and anti-capitalism in the U.S.S.R. and to Americanism and anti-Communism in the United States.

With the declining marginal returns from affluence in the affluent society, there has been a corresponding decline in economic motivation and a greater premium placed upon moral principles and the socially accepted way of life. Spokesmen for socialism in the West have increasingly noted the need for a redefinition of socialism in noneconomic terms. Thus in both the United States and the Soviet Union they have disseminated a new image of the future of socialism in which overcoming self-alienation and educating for leisure are the new goals of the labor movement.

III

WE MAY NOW CONSIDER briefly some of the objections to our thesis that anti-intellectualism is increasing along with the role of ideology in the contemporary world. One objection is that anti-intellectualism is on the wane in the more affluent societies of the West. According to this argument, anti-intellectualism is a variant of populism associated with the early stages of industrialization. With the rise of the modern labor movement, it tends to be eclipsed by the increasing demand by the leaders of organized labor for the professional services of the intelligentsia. During the initial stages of industrialization it was at least plausible that the workers should try to take over the management of industry themselves. Today it is altogether ridiculous to suppose that the organizations of the workers could dispense with the intelligentsia in the management of business and government, not to mention their own internal affairs. And it is just as silly to propose that the intelligentsia, who actually run society, should take orders from those dependent upon their superior know-how. Consequently, with increasing respect for the role of the intelligentsia within the ranks of labor itself, one can reasonably forecast a withering away of anti-intellectualism in the old sense.

However, this argument fails to consider that there are at least two distinct forms of anti-intellectualism, that of the social engineers and that of the marginal intellectuals who articulate and give form to the inchoate anti-intellectualism of the masses. For the most part, both varieties have been directed against the traditional intellectual or lover of culture for its own sake. The professionals have challenged his aptitude to rule; marginal and unemployed intellectuals have resented the prerogatives of wealth and leisure indispensable to a high degree of mental cultivation; and the masses have had their own characteristic distrust of book learning and the fine arts. Under the old order of society the populist anti-intellectualism of the marginal intellectuals and the masses was, of course, the dominant variety. Under the new order the anti-intellectualism of ruling segments within the intelligentsia has carried the day. If anything, the masses have acquired an exaggerated respect for education and the world of ideas, *e.g.*, the workingman's ambition to provide a college education for his children. Thus the roles have been reversed: the workers are now the leading consumers of intellectual opiates, whereas the intelligentsia has taken up the mantle of contemporary anti-intellectualism.

Another objection is the periodic upsurge of bohemian and irrationalist philosophies of action in recent times. In reaction to the spread of professional and scientific techniques throughout the entire realm of the

intellectual, there have been efforts to stem the advance of thought controls by an existentialist cult of freedom. However, these efforts may be expected to fail as the New Leviathan grows in wealth and influence and eventually buys off its intellectual dissidents through the creation of new jobs and privileges.

A major objection to our thesis derives from the theorists of an end of ideology in the West. Raymond Aron's *The Opium of the Intellectuals* (1955) and Daniel Bell's *The End of Ideology* (1960) both argue that the increasing influence of the intelligentsia in the contemporary world has been attended by an end of ideological controversy pointing to a post-politics era of general consensus. One result of this increasing realism is a tendency for contemporary theories of the social universe to converge upon the facts. As the traditional gulf between theory and practice becomes bridged one may expect a similar *rapprochement* between ideology and reality. However noxious and objectionable one may find the contemporary ideology of Communism, it is far closer to the actual world than is the metaphysical doctrine of natural rights presupposed by the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence.

But the moral and metaphysical character of these earlier doctrines was openly admitted. In our times ideological commitment is justified less as a matter of faith than of knowledge, which is actually less realistic when we consider what currently passes for learning. The ideologue's hopes for a messianic kingdom was a matter of personal belief, whereas the Stalin Constitution of 1936 affirms as fact that exploitation no longer exists in the U.S.S.R. Traditional ideologies did not have to distort the facts of political rule to the extent that modern political ideologies must do to make themselves palatable to popular taste. The moral hypocrisy of the ruling class, as Nietzsche noted, is a comparatively recent phenomenon in response to popular suffrage. Compare, for example, the ideology of the English Glorious Revolution as enunciated by Locke—the right to the protection of life, health, liberty, and estate—with the call of the French Revolutionaries of 1789 for Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and this in turn with the ideology of a proletarian revolution that would abolish forever the exploitation of man by man. Is it not evident that each subsequent revolution has increasingly approached the messianic norm of a secular kingdom of heaven in which oppression shall be no more and the lion shall lie down with the lamb?

A final objection to our thesis comes from the critics of an end of ideology. I especially have in mind Kenneth Winetrout's essay, "Mills and the Intellectual Default," and "American Politics and the End of

Ideology'' by Stephen W. Rouseas and James Farganis, included in Irving L. Horowitz' edition of *The New Sociology* (1964). Although I agree with them that the end of ideology is itself an ideology, I hesitate to impute the blame for it either to the intellectual's failure of nerve or to his satisfaction with the *status quo*. Neither cowardice nor complacency take us very far, since the imputation underlying both is that somehow intellectuals have an effective choice in the matter. Of greater help in accounting for the ideological consensus of our times is the increasing number and influence of the new intelligentsia predicated upon a developing technology of affluence. What C. Wright Mills and the new sociology seem to have missed is the tendency toward convergence of the white-collar elite and the power elite. Thus a major defect of the new sociology can be traced to a failure to correlate the end of both radicalism and liberalism with the ideological ascendancy instead of retreat of the new intelligentsia. And in this light the critics' efforts to resurrect the corpse of a radical or new Left in America can hardly be more than ceremonial.

The critics make a special point of underlining the danger zones, cyclical instabilities, and other sources of unrest in contemporary economies of affluence, not the least of which is the rising role of unemployment from one cyclical peak to another in response to automation. The end of ideology, they contend, presents an unrealistic climax to the historical dialectic, a veritable neo-Hegelian philosophy of history coming to a halt in the final synthesis of a nonideological welfare State. Again, I agree with their criticism of the sociologists of consensus. However, the brave new world of the contemporary intelligentsia is far more congenial to the average worker than the age of ideology he has left behind. Increasing unemployment takes on a quite different significance under conditions of affluence than it did during the Great Depression. For the economy can now afford unemployment, even pay for it generously in the form of guaranteed annual wages with or without work, compulsory vacations with pay, etc. The displacement of ideological by technical and professional considerations contributes to raising the GNP and the average standard of living. Although the welfare State may be a far cry from the Marxist classless society, at least it testifies to the superior knowledge and power of social engineering. Like the ideology of consensus which is linked to the elite's ability to pacify the masses, continued rule by an intellectual class depends upon its capacity to serve as well as to exploit the economic conditions of the workers.

*Florida State University,
Tallahassee*