

## The Industrial Future and the Conflict of Ideologies

By PAUL MEADOWS

### I

#### The Emergence of Conflict

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN business man or laborer is suspicious of "ideological" discussions. To him there is something "un-American" about them. The ideologist, on the other hand, is contemptuous of such attitudes, tagging them as "provincial," or "nativistic," or as smacking of "vested ignorance." In a sense, the average American business man or laborer is far closer to the truth of the matter than perhaps he realizes. Of course, the dichotomy "American" versus "European" in and of itself is no great help in clarifying the situation. But he is dead right in his almost casual assumption that industrial society and liberal thinking and action have a common unity. Nor is their common ground purely historical in nature: it is no coincidence that they grew together. Liberalism has voiced the essential longing of industrial man: not more machines nor bigger ones, nor goods alone, but the opportunity for full living: the power to act as a human being.

The United States as an industrial country has probably formulated this conception of the significance of liberalism to industrial culture more clearly than any other people. New, undeveloped, populated with groups having some vital need for "the power to act," America has been content to pay homage to liberal ideas as the pattern for their industrial future. In America "the leader" has not been a person; many persons have become leaders of State, for example, only because they have personified or dramatized a set of ideas. It

is the idea that leads, and in America the idea is the set of supreme values whose collective name Americans know as liberalism—at least this is the name they use whenever they find it necessary to use a name at all.

All of this has a tremendous relevance for the future of industrial culture. It is very widely argued today that whatever future industrialism may have depends largely on planning. Planning in modern, complex, impersonal industrialism hinges on the technics and techniques of social agreement. A planning society, more so than a planless one, has need of a "public will." Liberalism has functioned to a great extent as a "mind-set," often unexamined, of industrial peoples. It has been a general, rather than a particular, "way" of regarding industrial realities. It seldom produces blue prints and messiahs. Its plan has been an inward conviction of individual liberals as to the rightness or wrongness of a given course of action, and this has been its leadership. The community of liberals is a community of inward authority: the individual counts for one, and he must always be counted. Democracy, then, has been the technic of liberalism: the course of social action must be the joint responsibility of participating persons sharing their experiences, whether in panels or polls, in radio forums or neighborhood gatherings, in labor-management councils or producers' co-operatives. Liberalism has won and it maintains its vitality only as a philosophy of the people.

But the people do not think alike. The individual is biologically unique, and his social experience is also unique. Whether the business man or laborer likes it or not, when people share their thinking, their differences and their similarities emerge, and groups form: ideological groups, so to speak. Ultimately, every industrial society becomes "ideological": it becomes beset by conflicts of "patterns of ideas" (that is, "ideologies"). Europe since 1918 has only hastened

this process, in America and elsewhere. The result is not only competition within the liberal pattern, but its utter denial by oppressed or suppressed ideologies. Industrial peoples find their paths laid out for them, "pre-judged" and pre-selected, as it were, and a host of voices crying "lo, here is the way!"

Leadership in industrial society becomes, therefore, a confusion of tongues. *Interest* groups, composed of people who have arrived economically or are in the process of doing so or think they are, and *ideological* groups, embracing those who have no vested interest to protect or promote but who conceivably would like to have, appear, are differentiated, become opposed, and fight. Interest groups fight interest groups: farmers versus laborers, rural versus urban, employers versus employees. Ideological groups join battle: liberals versus conservatives, reactionaries versus radicals, nativists versus foreigners, propertied versus non-propertied, nationalists versus internationalists.

In the early phase of liberal industrialism the struggle for leadership occurred mainly among interest groups; ideologies were thin and diffused, counting for only a minority in the field of social action. But the successive stages of industrialization changed the economic position and rôles of interest groups, submerging some (employees, for example), elevating others (employers), threatening and taking advantage of a third (farmers). Ideology then became a life-and-death weapon of defense and attack. Marginality had to be overcome, status had to be protected, interests promoted.

Ideology was turned to as a systematic rationalization, an apology for the faith, a philosophy of property—or the lack of it. Today all interest associations have become ideological groups. Liberal society has become a warring camp of competitive and conflicting groups, segmentalized by the processes of division of labor and separated by the forces which build up mass patterns of action. The province of

agreement becomes the province of the skilled, diplomatic service of compromise technics as sanctioned by the Church, taught by the schools, enforced by interest groups for their own salvation, and set in motion by the State. Liberal society survives only by ingenious formulation of compromises between interests which have become not only "differentiated" by ideologies but resolutely opposed. The tragic problem underlying the whole, it cannot be forgotten, has become one of maintaining sufficient margins for concession which can keep alive one group interest without destroying another.

## II

### A Renaissance of the Liberal Spirit

THIS PROBLEM has been aggravated by the collapse during the first postwar period of the European liberal tradition. Europe after the French Revolution lived and thrived under the dominion of the liberal idea. Successive triumphs of liberalism took place as industrialization and the democratic process moved into one nation after another. Years of peace, perhaps the longest, relatively non-violent period in modern history, graced this era. It was an epoch of expansion, economically, politically, culturally, geographically. The industrial machine, though frequently crippled, was quietly repaired and made to function. It was the golden age of the liberal tradition, made glorious by scientific discovery, technological innovation, and humanitarianism. The tight ideological lines were only beginning to be sketched in, and the margins of compromise between opposed interests were spacious. The propertied could afford to be generous, and there was living room for all.

But those margins began to disappear at the frontiers of the national States. The parcelling of the resources of the globe, the differential rate of industrial occupation and exploitation, the differences between rich and poor nations and between

the "old settlers" and the "Johnny-come-latelies" became causes of war: there was no easy formula in the liberal heritage which could cope with this situation. The pre-liberal adjustment technics, with war as their nucleus, became the ground for two vast attempts at settlement, the first and second World Wars.

The first World War served only to waste the margins of concession. Out of it a conquering ideology to the left of liberalism rode to power in one European nation and supposedly threatened the others; and the second World War has consolidated its hold on the frontiers of Europe. During the Twenties and Thirties leftist ideology set the pattern and the pace for a rightist ideology, and the latter dealt death blows to liberal democracy in one country after another, first in one semi-industrial national (Italy) and then in a recently industrialized State (Germany). This ideological war of attrition against liberalism came to a temporary stop when left and middle (communism and liberal democracy) found it wise to collaborate in order to save themselves. But the unresolved conflict between leftist and liberal ideologies has been left unsettled by the second war; it has indeed been aggravated by it, for communism is incalculably stronger now than ever before. Liberalism has lost its margins at a time when its economic gains, wasted by the first war, have been wiped out by the second. Liberals have always been able, up to now, to do business with extremists, but they now have much less to do business with. Institutionally and ideologically, the leftist ideologists have won an overpowering advantage.

So long as Europe occupied the center of the world stage, this ideological transformation and onslaught upon liberalism was able to resolve its conflicts in a relatively narrow area of industrial culture. Europe has been an experiment station, so to speak. But the world of the Forties has seen the passing of the European age. Russian hegemony over countries deso-

lated by war and bereft of leadership by fascism suggests that liberalism has run its course there. Liberals will find the issues of the industrial future considerably restricted: a communist or liberal industrialism.

Such a statement of the problem, if true, may be a net gain; in a sense, the most hopeful factor in the liberal situation is the decline of Europe. For Europe has not been a success, and its failure, while impoverishing the liberal heritage, has succeeded in clarifying it. For liberals know now the price of fascist industrialism, and they have come to understand the strength and spirit of a communist industrialism. This new insight may indeed be a net gain: it should turn liberals back to a re-consideration of their own traditions. Their traditions have nothing in common with contemporary Europe, and they have nothing in common with what seems probable as the Europe of the future. Perhaps here in America a genuine native liberalism, freed of the intellectualized European content and of its extremist masquerades, will have an opportunity to grow. The collapse of Europe, while confronting liberal industrialism with the severest test in its entire history, also stirs the soil for a vigorous renaissance of the liberal spirit.

The heart of that renaissance is to be found in the recovery of the belief in the free man. The political and social structure of a liberal industrialism is democratic. If the free man is the dynamic of a technological society, as liberals believe, a democratic State is its form. The genius of liberalism is its high evaluation of men as human beings, and its spiritual kinship has always been with a State whose bases and methods and purposes are the people. Europe has taught one enduring lesson: that only the people count. Liberals must go beyond Europe to a positive faith that only a public industrialism administered for, and by, and of the people can save the liberal culture.

Europe had a public industrialism, to be sure; but its two types breathed the fire of anti-liberalism. There was the fascist-nazi form which repudiated liberal government in favor of a non-parliamentary, centralized State, which was patterned after the giant corporation, which glorified the nation at the expense of the person, which prized non-economic motives at the cost of the economic ones, which *supplemented* and supervised autonomous groups in the operation and control of industrial concerns. There is also the communist form of industrialism which has collectivized all human relations under a centralized State, which had rejected "society" in favor of "class," which has preached a social philosophy of "economism" and materialistic justice, and which has *supplanted* autonomous groups in the operation and control of most property. Both forms represent a new serfdom, fixing the individual in impermeable social orders and pinning them to the past. The assembly line, hierarchy, authoritarian discipline of an antiquated factory system were built into the structure of both these remarkably similar State systems; indeed, both of them function as large corporations administering, in somewhat different methods, a collective property.

With these patterns of public industrialism liberal leadership has no commerce: they are neither democratic nor person-centered, and they forfeit the free man for the mass man, the free society for the strong State. There is a liberal industrialism, baptized by the war, which rejects the divisive hatreds, both national and class, of Europe and which organizes through the public instruments of democracy the resources of earth and society in the full faith that only the free man, having the power to act brought to him by such organization, can build an imperishable society.

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