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The Leadership of an Industrial Society

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I

Human Action in an Industrial Society

THERE IS NOT A SINGLE AREA of modern society which does not have its clinics. But even if one were alone in pointing to the danger spots of our civilization, the very sensing of a drift in human values in a particular direction should have a bearing upon the reactions of thinking people. For the enduring power of any society is after all in its human values: whatever happens to them is the key to the future of every other aspect of the culture. The ubiquitous clinics of our society point to a problem of action, a problem which has to do with nothing less than the permanence of the industrial culture.

This statement of issues differs, of course, in many important ways from that of a number of writers on industrialism. One would expect it to contrast sharply with that of the fanatics of industrialism who think in terms of continuing technological expansion, or of stream-lined markets, or of human ingenuity, or of some other phrase which belongs to the golden days of classic industrialism. One would not expect this statement to diverge widely, however, from that of the socialist movement. For socialists of all fifty-seven varieties speak ominously of the collapse of "the system" and of its replacement by a "new order." But their "new order," whether communist, nationalist or gradualist, involves little change in the basic structure of massed mechanization; in fact, that structure is assumed: the changes, if any, are political and imposed upon it. Thus, Marxian socialism states its case very largely in terms of individual income distribution,

and national socialism in terms of national income distribution; in neither instance are the centralization of production and the concentration, to mention only two matters, considered. In other respects, the whole pattern of industrial motivations and the machinery of industrial community life are left intact.

However, the socialists have put us in their debt on one important score: their insight that the future of industrial society is bound up with the processes and fortunes of politics. Classic industrialism boycotted government and sought its neutralization; even the early socialists, not uninfluenced by the anarchist tradition, were unimpressed by the political order. But there is an inevitability about politics which even the most determined classical economist and Marxist is unable to deny or resist. For politics is the process of public decision, and it emerges when the changing tempos and tensions of a society upset and re-direct the balance of interest and power: a new equilibrium of social forces must be found. Industrial technology is a set of vastly disequilibrating forces and the political process becomes the technic of social compromise and social decision. In consequence, the sharp demarcation between the economic and the political is a fiction of the myth-minded. As a matter of fact, it is altogether likely that the failure to establish a working relationship between these two facts of our existence underlies what most of us rather casually call the social problems of our times.

But the political process is not a patent of the State. Every human situation in which the settlement of social issues and the provision and control of social functions become necessary is a political situation. The family, the church, the school, the club are units of political action, in much the same sense and certainly for some of the same reasons that the State is. The difference between these associations on the one hand,

and the State on the other, seems to be this. Whenever social ends and means transcend the sphere of action of any single group and become "affected with public interest," as the phrase has it, the processes of political action which are the specialty of the State are initiated. Increasingly the problems of means and meanings in modern living become "public," so that the growth of the State has paralleled the development of industrialism. Business collectivism, for example, has had its counterpart in "public" collectivism. It is no historical accident that both liberal and totalitarian countries in the last generation have experienced a rapid assumption of social and economic functions by the State: the evolution of industrialism itself is the most natural explanation.

However, these same evolutionary processes also explain the mounting tension and feeling which surround the expanding power of the State in our day. Recourse to the State as the arbiter of conflict and the channel of action spells the surrender of personal and group autonomy, or at least of a good share of it. In the name of public interest, demands can be made and sacrifices exacted which less dynamic societies might not experience. A contracting industrialism, it seems, requires an expanding State.

Yet the loss of autonomy is hardly the complete story behind the resentments, misgivings, and conflicts over the enlargement of State power. Perhaps even more important is the fact that as the State itself becomes an enterpriser in an industrial sense, the struggle to control its policies and activities becomes intense and acrimonious. There spring up ideologies which rationalize motives, attract support, state issues, and press for well selected though not always publicly avowed objectives. The lines of struggle are fluid, the forces sometimes latent, the partners changing (as manifest issues change), the slogans and sentiments artfully chosen and care-

fully phrased. The strategy is war-like, the tactics brutal; for the stakes are high: the life or death of systems of property, codes of behavior, patterns of expectations, particular group controls. The ideologies may have no relationship whatever to the underlying objectives, and the organizations which direct maneuvers may be composed of a heterogeneous membership brought together by miscellaneous but big promises of spoils of war. Nevertheless, a whole society can be embroiled in conflict, and even revolutionary re-direction of that society can be achieved: for proof one needs to cite the record of Europe in the last two decades.

A maturing industrialism, then, is a besieged city, and the processes of its decision-making and decision-enforcement are ineradicably colored by ideological pre-commitments and entrenched group interests. This clash of forces is a normal phase of politics in an expanding industrialism, as any industrial history of the United States shows, and it is likely to be constructive and wholesome, as a long record of social legislation indicates. But it loses its character as mere politics in a contracting or maturing industrial economy: it becomes revolutionary, violent. The reason is simple: continuous compromise cuts away the margins of concessions; sooner or later it becames clear to a given "interest" that further concessions will only extend the power of its opponent and menace its own position in the social equilibrium. And so the word goes down to hold the line.

A new kind of civil war, of which the Spanish Civil War during the Thirties was a still somewhat old-fashioned herald, has been in the making and has been climaxed perhaps by the recent World War. It is possible that this war has resolved some of the contradictions and confusions, conflicts and resistances which obstruct the normal processes of politics in our technological world. However that may be, one thing

is clear. There is no reason to believe that the kind of tensions and unsettlement which industrialism seems now to induce can ever again be handled by the neutralization of government. Nor can they be handled by the spirit of political planlessness and postponement which characterized the problem-solving of classic industrialism. The society of massed mechanization in these days of its maturity has reached a new age, a plan age, and its leadership has problems which the leadership of classic industrialism neither recognized nor was prepared to solve.

II

Liberalism: Culture Focus of Industrialism

GONE ARE THE DAYS when the "time for decision" is an occasion of individual human action. The forces of industrial society are collective, institutional forces working within giant frames of thought and action: "business," "industry," "labor," "agriculture," "markets," "nation," "class," "ideologies," and so on. If this point of view be true, then the future of industrialism, partly because it is tied to these mass patterns of life, is likely to be more emotional, less rational, less a matter of cold, calculating determination than the industrialism of the past. For this reason the thoughtful person is disturbed by the growing power of "propaganda," "class ideology," "nationalism," "militarism," and other mass communication patterns. The center of gravity of these symbolic substitutes for intelligence is not the self-interested and thoughtful human being but the impassioned, aroused society swayed by mass strategies on the scale of world-wide competitions and conflicts.

To be sure, there is in this prospect little aid and comfort to the apologists of a planned future. One thing can be said with some certainty: if the record of the last twenty-five years makes possible any generalization at all, it is that the

affairs of the society of massed mechanization have become subject to the hegemony of "politics." The twentieth century human being tends to be not an economic but a political man!

Early liberalism tried to give politics, in the sense of a State-dominated process of decision-making, a final interment. Liberals then had no place for politics. Their society, so they thought, was a "natural" order of "naturally" harmonious human beings whose common self-interested enlightenment could be relied upon to fashion a just social organization. Whether that philosophy of politics was ever valid, historically or logically, is beside the point: industrial people at this stage of industrialization gave it reality. It became the center of their way of life: their "culture focus," the arbiter of their political destinies, the mirror of their social expectations, the frame of their economic reference. This faith, as the *leitmotif* of industrialism, becomes the sanction for their neutralized State, their urbanized community, their centralized business, their impersonalized contacts, and their rationalized poverty.

Of course, this faith was not an easy one, nor a happy one, despite the vigor of its optimism. Christian socialists fought it for the decadence of its "economism," and the anarchists assailed it for its massiveness. The nationalists condemned it for its atomism, and the religionists for its rationalism. The poor (at least some of them) hated it for its acceptance of economic inequalities, and the rich (again, some of them) for its populism. The Leftists attacked it for its middle-class rule, the Fascists for its anti-State phobias, the Nazis for its humanitarianism. As might have been expected, these challenges to the liberal pattern of industrial life, cumulative and repetitive, have grown in power, and liberalism has conceded to them a little here and a little there. Today the fate of

liberalism as the culture focus of industrialism is less certain than at any time in its chequered career.

Yet no thoughtful student of modern man can contemplate the débâcle of liberalism with composure. For this focus of the industrial culture has at the center of its field the noblest of all human values, the free man: the free producer, the free thinker, the free citizen, the free religionist: the free human being and the free human group. For the first time in human history a whole culture structure has under the aegis of liberalism been built up around the conviction and the custom of human integrity: the dignity and worth of the human personality through whose free exercise of rights and powers both the stability and the expansion of a balanced culture take place. Such a conception of civilized human behavior, however imperfectly realized, a technological age dare not lose.

The structure of industrial culture was raised by men who had won for themselves the rights and powers of a free society. Their language at first was one of "liberty," because their need was the removal of restraints upon action. Later, their speech became positive, filled with the words of "freedom," because their need had changed to one oriented around the mobilization of resources for action. "Liberty" and "freedom": the absence of restriction and the capacity to act: the rights and powers of free men: such was the stuff of the technological expansion which produced industrialism. It was not a thin, watery stuff: it was a revolutionary faith, and it burned high in revolts against the Church, in revolutions against the State, in protest movements even against its own society. From it came a free market, a free labor, a free enterprise, a free conscience, a free science. Liberalism was a revolutionary creed because it had to be. But it was never simply one great revolution, won once and for all time.

Wherever modern culture penetrated, the liberal revolutions in the Church, the market-place, and the State had to follow. There is no pristine pattern, no primitive liberalism. The liberal man is a creature not of letter but of spirit: he is born wherever and whenever a man or group can say, "On this road there is a blockage which needs removing," or "here there ought to be a road." For the free man, or the free society, is concerned with the power to act, the power to act in such a way that the deepest demands and the highest insights of his being can be known and fulfilled.

III

The Stratigraphy of Liberalism

LIBERALISM, THEN, is a geological formation: there are strata of human freedom. Each stratum is an historical fact, a phase in the evolution of human experience; nor is there a final layer of freedom to which free men can turn with pride and complacency: the "top" layer is only the most recent rupture of "the cake of custom." For liberalism is a continuing revolution, the original one, happening long before Lenin's and Trotsky's. Obviously, then, an understanding and use of liberalism call for a kind of stratigraphy, a knowledge of the record, not of rocks but of revolutions.

Stratum One is the phase of "the free mind." An old formation, filled with ancients bearing Egyptian, Greek, Roman names, it approached its climax in an historic renascence of the human spirit, in religious revolts, in free-spirited political inquiries, in laboratory experimentation, in a free press, a free assembly, a free speech, a free religion. This stratum still comes to the surface of contemporaneity in "old" countries and "new." Its vocabulary is one of "natural rights," through which the free man is again and again declared an original datum, with authority historically and logically prior to the State or Church or Business or Industry.

Stratum Two is the phase of "the free market." Eighteenth century in origin but twentieth century by extension, it is a complex, almost contradictory formation still undergoing change. It started with the transformation of the "natural law" of human beings into a "natural law" of human production: equilibrating exchanges of goods, harmonious and just in the long run because a creation of harmonious and just human beings: a natural order of reasonable prices as the work of the natural order of reasonable men. It is a liberal conception so long as the main conditions were strictly kept: a society in which all men as producers and consumers had the power to act in such a way as to realize their own reasoned actions without injury or blockage to such capacity in any other men.

The Third Stratum has its beginnings in the conflicts of the Second. Nineteenth century at the start but twentieth century by inheritance, this formation is the phase of "the free sociey." It is part of the deeply felt necessity of such collective action as would enforce the principles of the free market and the free mind: the provision of real and unrestricted opportunity for all men to produce and buy, to live and let live, to say and listen without prejudice or injury to any man. This social freedom, sought in many different ways by anarchists and communists, by socialists and capitalists, has yet to evolve a common speech, though all are dedicated to that measure of the free society—the common good. It is a stratum in process, yet its direction is clear: the discovery of ways and means of liberating modern industrial man and society through the technics and techniques of social organization. Sometimes called humanism, optimism, humanitarianism, social politics, social planning, it is the revolution of our times. Its turning point is the human power to act, its essence is the mobilization of social resources to be

put at the disposal of such power, and its obstacles are all those vested claimants who have laid through law and custom a death hold on those self-same resources. Thus far, the enemies of this third liberal revolution have established an unenviable record of successes through violence: the violence of fascist and communist centralized might, the violence of economic monopolists within the liberal fold, the violence of mass society wielded as a bludgeon against self-realizing human beings of all groups and classes. But liberalism is not unaccustomed to violence; it has come through other revolutions—and counter-revolutions—and the end is not in sight.

This most recent stratum is not yet finished; its historic task is incomplete. For neither economic nor political monopolists, by whatever name known, have been able to show that the strategies of mass organization can freely release the powers of all men. So long as Nazis can kill Jews, and Communists can destroy "nationalists," and economic monopolists can eliminate opposition, the liberation of human society through positive collective action has not yet been achieved. Perhaps it will never be achieved. For in the free society all men have the power to act; that is the genius, the troubled genius, and the eternal heritage of liberalism. Yet if there is leadership remaining anywhere in industrial culture, it lies within this focus of idea and ideal.

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