

Intellectuals, Experts, and the Classless Society

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1. *The Class-less Society*

SOCIETY, ENGELS AND LENIN promised their followers, some day will be “class-less.” Collective ownership of the means of production, they insisted, will cause classes to disappear; and it will cause the state, always an instrument of class-rule, to “wither away.”

A glance at the society Engels’ and Lenin’s followers have created will show them to have been completely wrong. A new social structure has indeed emerged there, but in it classes are at least as much in evidence as elsewhere, and the state flourishes—seeing to it, among other things, that the professionals of the intellect and red tape, the new privileged class, have a clear advantage over their compatriots. Even among Communists, the classless society has become an empty slogan. Only a few credulous Western intellectuals still take it seriously.

In the liberal-democratic West, things have gone otherwise—and Engels and Lenin look a little better as prophets. The state has not, of course, withered away. But the West’s prosperity has been achieved less by compulsion than by social compromise, and less by imposition on the part of one group than by social discipline and self-restraint on the part of all groups: parliaments, parties, labor unions and consumers. Social mobility, based on free choice and laissez-faire economic doctrine, has worn down class distinction inherited from the past, and renders improbable rigid stratification in the future. And tax and wage policies have influenced matters in the same direction: everywhere in the western world the tendency has been for some time to tax heavily people in high income brackets;

while, in the United States for example, the workers have tripled and the professionals doubled their incomes. Everything tends to press the classes closer together, and to level standards of living.

Significantly, the two socio-economists whose teaching has most affected the thinking of recent generations both foresaw these developments. Spencer and Marx started, of course, from very different premises; but they both concluded that the class struggle would generate frictions that would reduce and finally eliminate antagonism among groups. Society, says Spencer, will pass from a barbarous, militant phase into an industrial phase; relations among groups will become stable and harmonious; and the final result will be “the greatest perfection and the most complete happiness.” Nor can the forces that drive mankind in this direction be arrested; the “fit ones” who survive will do so, in large part, by mastering the mechanisms of cooperation.

Marx puts it a little differently: for him the “unfit” are not the economically powerless, the paupers, but the bourgeois capitalists, who are in hopeless disagreement with the indications of history. But Marx and Spencer insist equally on the *necessity* of the process; conflict between classes *must* produce a levelled, cooperating community, which is the indispensable precondition of economic prosperity and universal brotherhood.

Spencer and Marx both drew upon—and were inspired by—the utopian optimism of Saint-Simon. “As the whole of mankind has a common purpose and common interests,” Saint-Simon had written, “each man ought to regard himself in his social relations as engaged in a company of workers”; and all problems pertaining to social functions

ought to, and will, be entrusted to those "who are most capable of exercising them in conformity with the general aims of the community." The community, in other words, will be uniform in its goals and aspirations, for the final destiny of mankind is a state in which all antagonism between men will have disappeared. Society will be characterized by the joint action of its members upon nature, and the discipline imposed by cooperative action will render cohesive associations increasingly imperative.

The stream of Saint-Simonism did not, let us note, empty into the river of socialism and then disappear—as we may see from its impact upon, for example, the highly cultured Renan. Renan summarized his scientific credo in the year of enthusiasm, 1848, as follows: "By every way open to us we begin to proclaim the right of human reason to reform society by means of rational science. We can state without exaggeration that science holds the future of humanity. Science alone can explain human destiny and teach the way of attaining it. The scientific organization of mankind is the final word of modern science, its bold but legitimate pretension." And his view of the future role of science determined his conception of future society. Life, he once told Romain Rolland in effect, is good, and infinite progress awaits an industrious mankind; for while moral conscience is on the decline, the rules of duty will remain the basis of any community made up of human beings. The public philosophy, he added, is turning into a scientific philosophy; if other beliefs and thoughts are needed, they will be personal and private to each individual.

Romain Rolland, an exceptionally sensitive man, was seized with alarm before this dreary prospect, and asked the Master what, in his opinion, the weaker souls will do once they are deprived of religion. Renan replied: "So much the worse for them! They are weak and overwhelmed by science! Why did they have to search for truth in the first place?"

Renan meant by science not the exact and detailed work going on in laboratories, but the ideology that scientism was spreading during his own lifetime in the minds of men. His ideal, which he apparently shared with Saint-Simon, Comte, Spencer, and Marx, was less a technological society than a society centrally organized, in which—as the geographer Letronne put it—"reforms changing the whole social structure can be put through in the twinkling of an eye." Even as late as 1848, we may note in passing, French socialism remained authoritarian and anti-democratic. Saint-Simon himself threatens to treat his recalcitrant opponents "as cattle."

All this envisages, off at the end, a society without conflicting groups or organized opposition. Conflicting groups will not do because they put forward their particular "truths" as absolutes; those truths, according to Rousseau and Hegel, are—because particular—lies, and deserve no place under the sun. Society, then, must eliminate the damage they might produce—by elaborating a collective philosophy based on social cohesion. Renan, more tolerant and easy-going than the others, generously adds (as we have seen): if "other beliefs and thoughts are needed," they can be "personal and private to each individual." They must, in other words, be socially meaningless and inefficient, which means keeping them outside the realm of those forces that shape the public philosophy.

II. The Intellectuals

Such are the ideological foundations of the predictions of a class-less society for the western world. But they leave open the question: How will rapport between groups actually develop—even given a powerful public philosophy, based on the scientific concept of man, that establishes widespread confidence in the social body as a whole?

Political conflicts in the western world, writes Raymond Aron, are becoming less and less ideological, less and less political; what people care about, he thinks, is a system that increases the "volume of collective

resources”—and “reduces the disparity of status between groups”—with a minimum of delay. Naturally enough, he adds, countries like the United States and France are governed by “governments of the working population.” Samuel Lubell thinks so too: American voters, he believes, are turning their backs on extremists and ideologists in both parties; votes are determined by mercantile interests rather than by party philosophies and slogans. He speaks, therefore, of a “revolt of the moderates,” leading to the “triumph of the middle class”; but his middle class, be it noted, includes almost the whole population. And Miss Barbara Ward, with England in mind, writes as follows: “. . . the ideological barriers between Left and Right are beginning to come down. . . . The disputes of the Fifties seem like shadow-boxing compared with the bitter struggles of the Twenties and Thirties.”

Is there a causal connection between the declining vehemence of ideological commitments on the one hand, and material prosperity on the other? Some writers think so. When people are “experiencing . . . increasing and uninterrupted material contentment,” writes C. Wright Mills, they are “not likely to develop economic resentments that would turn their political institutions into means of ideological conflict.” Karl Mannheim put the point even more strongly; class struggles, he insisted, have their origin in economic scarcity; one class seizes the limited wealth that exists within a nation, and the depossessed strata make repeated attempts to wrest it away.

Well, the central issue may be economic to begin with; but it does not remain purely economic. Material dissatisfaction is inseparably connected with other grievances, resentments, and aspirations; and the longer conflict lasts, the greater the necessity for the contending sides to elaborate ideologies to justify their respective positions. Ideological debate subsequently turns these positions into all-embracing systems and philosophies; and as whole classes become involved with ideals, preferences, tastes, and ways of life, an intellectual leadership crys-

tallizes within each class. Now the intellectual possesses the weapons needed in ideological conflict—in inexhaustible quantities and infinite variety. His, therefore, is the ultimate task of vindicating the class philosophy, of criticizing, denouncing, and ridiculing those of competing classes, and of expressing the aspirations of his class in propositions, in color and stone, and in verse and music.

The intellectual, certainly, has often been a partisan fighter, so that the charges directed against him by Julien Benda are by no means groundless. Benda’s “treason” of the intellectuals consists, above all, in their having abandoned the cherished criteria of objectivity and moderation, of reasoned conclusions based on dispassionate analysis, and of neutrality and aloofness from the market-place.

Many thinkers, of course, have denied Benda’s charges, pointing out, among other things, that the interests of many scholars never impinge upon political issues at all. But the balance of the evidence seems to suggest that when the liberal-democratic mentality took over at the dawn of modern times, it asserted itself through a new type of intellectual. Montesquieu, and, before him, Francis Bacon and even some Renaissance philosophers, challenged first religious authority, then royal authority, and thereby became the intellectual vanguard of the small middle classes that were bent on undermining both. Two hundred years later the proletariat has enlisted the systematic help of thinkers, writers, and artists. In both cases, the disequilibrium of power has been such that, at least in the initial phases, the intellectuals could not be reproached for their lack of objectivity—for all that their scholarship was often biased, their conclusions unwarranted, and their manner of writing partisan or outright violent. They thought, as Toynbee says, in “patterns”; though in the heat of battle, and in the context of increasing relativism, they rarely realized they were doing so.

During the struggle against feudalism, and, later, that against absolute monarchy,

these patterns were circumscribed by the goals of the bourgeoisie. The latter had to do primarily with liberalizing production, trade, and transportation from the fetters of feudal exactions, and with the winning of political rights that would reflect the actual power-relationship between the bourgeoisie and the nobility. The natural goals of the intellectuals, clearly, were of a different character: their books and works of art were censored, banned, or burned, their travels were curtailed, their outspokenness was punished with jail or with the rod; the abuse of authority weighed on their mind, conscience, and convictions. But in the circumstances of the time it was difficult to see that intellectual and spiritual freedom do not necessarily accompany the material and psychological advantages after which the bourgeoisie yearned. The gap between the goals of the intellectuals and those of the bourgeoisie was, therefore, overlooked—or, more precisely, believed to be bridgeable.

III. *The Experts*

The situation of the intellectuals is always difficult when, as Mannheim puts it, “the group with which they identify themselves arrives at a position of power.” For at that moment, and in order to organize what we may call the second-zone intellectuals—the bureaucrats, experts, and social engineers—take over to organize the victory.

In our new, smoothly-operating societies, therefore, the intellectuals disappear from sight—or at least no longer serve as champions of classes in conflict and articulators of their ideologies. Their vacated positions are occupied by the trained engineers of cooperation, who invariably emerge in societies that are becoming level, classless, because such societies, organized as they are on the widest possible basis, feel the need to maintain and increase the level of production as the condition of prosperity, and to strengthen the social cohesion between producers, distributors, and consumers. These fundamental *groups*, be it noted, perform in contemporary western society

functions that correspond less and less to those of the *classes* of medieval Europe (artisans, peasants, merchants, and nobility); and the relationship that obtains among them is not the traditional class-relationship. They no longer constitute, in Tawney’s phrase, “the hands, the feet, and the head of a corporate body.” Rather, each shares in, and performs, the others’ functions, and has a stake equal to that of the others in the order and welfare resulting from this interplay. The social engineers are not to be confused, therefore, with Mr. Burnham’s “managers,” since their functions are not purely economic. Their task, again, is not that of exerting ideological influence, or assuming leadership of a class, but that of channeling the activities of their fellow-citizens who, as social equals, have analogous—therefore conflicting—interests and ambitions. Concretely, they preserve equilibrium by making use of, and further developing, existing mechanisms of adjustment, but without disturbing basic social relations or antagonizing any particular group. Social and economic transformations, which used to be accompanied by seemingly inevitable upheavals, now mostly take place, therefore, almost automatically—with the precision of laboratory operation. This, of course, does not mean that difficulties do not exist in classless societies, or that beneath the harmony there are no hidden antagonisms. But the intensive drive for power of divided societies is absent, and the political climate carries no charges of electricity.

Is the distinction I draw between the intellectual and the expert or social engineer valid? Let us think about it a moment. The “intellectual” was unknown as a social type before the sixteenth century, and will probably return to oblivion after the twentieth. During the Middle Ages and in ancient times, it was taken for granted that the intellectually prominent man would accept the *status quo* imposed from above (as, according to every indication, his post-twentieth-century descendant will accept the *status quo* imposed by his social peers).

Our question must be asked, then, against the background of three or four centuries, when the intellectuals served first the middle class and then the proletariat, elaborating their respective ideologies and calling into question the symbols and taboos of their reigning opponents. These tasks were essentially *destructive*, and I give it as my opinion, in passing, that our philosophical confusion today is due partly to the one-sidedness of their efforts. The contemporary social engineer, by contrast, is essentially a conservative organizer: far from questioning or criticizing the values his society holds, he endeavors to preserve them or adjust to them—or, if modifications seem necessary, to set into motion orderly mechanism of change. The social engineers are both a new aristocracy and a new elite: an aristocracy, because they are equipped with titles, diplomas, and other symbols of knowledge, and because their authority to dictate standards of taste, behavior, and success is more persuasive with every passing day. An elite, because they hold together, give shape to, and articulate the ideals of society that has produced them, and provides the background that makes their own lives intelligible.

There is, however, this great difference between the social engineers and the aristocracies of the past: the latter deemed their rights and privileges as God-given and sacred, thus not open to criticism on pragmatic grounds. The social engineers, on the contrary, well know that these rights ultimately depend upon the number of their satisfied clients, and on the latter's orderly circulation within the "open society." Planning and manipulation are, therefore, essential to them; they cannot afford to be fancy-free. They must work out a serious and precise technique all complete with code, jargon, trade-secrets and scientific support. There is, to be sure, still an air of romantic adventure attaching to their activities. But that is because classless societies have nowhere been completely established, and power-relationships within them are not yet settled. Yet power and controlling devices

continue to accumulate in their minds, making it increasingly necessary for them to study and understand the nature and exigencies of their position with an eye to developing adequate techniques to manipulation. They clearly intend that the *milieu* shall ultimately conform to the *mechanism of control*, instead of the other way around. And their chances of realizing that intention are excellent, because the classless society, unlike previous societies, has no serious inner opposition to fear.

Not even, the reader may ask, on the part of the intellectuals themselves? What with their memories of past associations with ideologies, do they not pose a danger of a certain magnitude? One can only answer that the intellectuals as such never formed a class: they have, rather, always been the mouthpiece of other classes: auxiliaries, not the main force. And this is confirmed by the fact that, now their contribution is no longer needed in order to bring about social transformations, numerous intellectuals are rediscovering the wisdom of tradition and the stabilizing influence of hierarchical institutions like the Catholic Church. It would be a mistake to consider this a symptom of instinctive conservatism; rather, it is the expression of the intellectuals' nostalgia for their lost status as traveling salesmen in the values market.

Might the intellectual reconquer his former status? He today lacks, as we have pointed out, ideological allies who will listen to, interpret, and apply his words, and adversaries to reject or refute them. His words fly through an atmosphere of distraction and indifference—or, at best, through a climate of opinion oppressed by an artificially cautious and vacant intellectualism. Social and technological problems, even the problems of mass psychology, are now removed from under the intellectual's care; they have become the fief of the expert, and further progress with them depends on the availability of natural resources on the one hand, and the efficient organization of society for production on the other.

The rise of the classless society is thus accompanied by an exodus of the intellectuals, who are only moderately interested in a largely productive "progress" along mechanical and material lines, and even moderately interested insofar as the march of that progress depends upon fuel provided by ideology. In nations only now emerging from colonial or quasi-colonial servitude, therefore, the intellectual still helps, with voice and hands alike, in the struggle for "emancipation." Sooner or later, however, even in states founded on ideology, or states born of youthful enthusiasm, statecraft becomes serious business; such states copy each other's most successful methods, and tricks that enable them to carry on without resort to drama and myth. National welfare and international relations are handled, increasingly, under a well worked-out and hardly changeable set of rules. Diplomacy and propaganda, for the most part, are conducted openly amidst the cheers, murmurs, applause, and encouragement of a gallery of two and one-half billion people. Little room is left, in consequence, for the adventure of the mind. "Whatever the forces at work in the modern situation may eventually bring to pass, the outcome must touch all communities in the same way and in approximately the same degree," Veblen wrote fifty years ago. This state of affairs, moreover, is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Technology begets more technology; and the controlling mental devices, from psychological tests to party-discipline, will continue spreading both uniformity and, for millions of human beings in their collective niches, a feeling of security.

The question now is whether the loss of ideology—and the consequent loss of a "heroic" role—will demoralize the intellectuals (after having scattered them over the social landscape). It will, certainly, discredit their free efforts in search of higher values. Society, to apply Tocqueville's phrase, finds itself in a state of "virtuous materialism which does not corrupt but enervates the soul." The cycle of social

struggles, in other words, is practically closed, since (as Gunnar Myrdal puts it), "the dreamers, planners, and fighters of earlier generations are finally getting almost all they asked for."

In one sense, this turn of events is beneficial to the intellectuals: the loosening of ideological ties liberates them from a commitment which indeed gave them a title to glory, but also kept them in servitude. As means of interpreting the world, ideologies are original and fertile; as means of shaping it, they are risky and treacherous. Speaking generally, the intellectual is free for the first time since the wars of religion to use his conscience independently, without submitting it to the dictates and censorship of ideologies and partisan interests. He may now explore the human condition and the future without donning the distorting lenses of a class, and without "ulterior motives." His political and social views will profit by this change of optics. For he now has the possibility of a personal choice; instead of asserting himself by denying others, as Marxist dialectics obliged him to do, he may appraise the value of openness and charity toward his fellow man.

Secondly, he has gained in mobility what he has lost in status: he may fight his battles unselfishly, wherever he is needed. There will always be some to denounce him for not confining himself behind the bars of an intellectual zoo. But he need not mind. Enriched as he is by his experience of past loyalties, commitments, and alliances, and placed at last beyond their limitations, the intellectual may study and evaluate man's destiny as a whole, and the structure of the forces that compose and oppose it. His objective, I need hardly say, should not be to elaborate a positive science that he would put at the disposal of the social apparatus; rather it should be to open, in the teeth of the apparatus, avenues of transcendence, and deepen them in proportion as the apparatus becomes more extended and more nearly perfected.

There is an evident danger in such an enterprise; that of prescribing the necessary

course of transcendence while insisting on its freedom from inertia. There are authors who would help build a utopia simply by subtracting, from the present world and its institutions and functions and creeds, those contents that irritate their own sensibilities and convictions. Thus Mr. Lewis Mumford speaks of de-nationalized governments, de-theologized religions, and of world-citizens turned policemen to extirpate what he calls "outbreaks of private and collective criminality." Governments, religions, and citizens may become, at some future date, what Mr. Mumford expects and wishes them to be; but at present they are, respectively, national, theological, and non-custodial, and to speak of them otherwise is to build a utopia: that is, a counter-apparatus.

The tension between ideology—that is, partial truth—and the ideal of the whole truth is, I think, an extraordinarily fertile component of the human condition. This is not to say that similar tensions cannot be found in non-ideological conflicts. One of the central issues, perhaps the most vital issue, in our contemporary world is that of how to restore the tensions that seem to be an essential ingredient in any civilization. Karl Mannheim has called attention "to the increasing regression of the ideological and utopian elements from the mentality of the strata which are coming to dominate the present situation." He even goes so far as to ask whether the resulting diminution of all tension may not also mean the "diminution of political activity, scientific zeal—in fact of the very content of life itself?"

Mannheim's alarm would be justified if man's vital energies and mental and spiritual orientation were governed by the laws

of physics. As this is not true, the future may not be so gloomy. Mannheim's views, after all, are prompted by his socialist convictions, according to which social classes are the real protagonists of history and individuals only pawns on its chess-board. This is ideological blindness: the truth is that the individual, the intellectual, only appears to be voiceless because in this period of transition he is in search of listeners. He may find them, it is true, only among scattered individuals and small groups, and in institutions that are committed to ideas which have passed the test of time. Such alliances, to be sure, would be meaningless, save that human existence is inseparably bound up with the life of symbols. But ideas, attitudes, and philosophies are not ghosts: they are, in the first place, historical realities and, as such, possess an influence that far outlives the generation that sees their first flowering. They are, in the second place, rooted in human nature, and when translated into current language and behavior may regain much of their primitive significance. This explains why the intellectuals are today committed to history, tradition, and the organic life of societies. It also explains why, alongside with the concept of progress, the intellectuals propose the concept of heritage and conservation, point to the eternal ideal of justice, and confer upon old religions new life and new intellectual respectability. This preoccupation with history—and through history with the permanence of values and the value of permanence—explains the revival of political conservatism, flirtation with "elitism", and the demand for cultural non-conformism as a condition of diversity.

Intellectuals, Catholics, and the Intellectual Life

JOHN A. LUKACS

I

OUR NATIONAL concern with the position of American intellectuals now is in its fifth year. More than five years, of course—indeed, five generations—separate us from Emerson's exhortation "The American Scholar". Yet I think it is reasonable to say that since 1953, since the appearance of "Egghead" as an epithet, there has been among us such a widespread concern with the problems of intellectuals and with the prospects of American intellectual power as this Republic—or, indeed, few nations in history—have known. It is obvious that in an age dominated by social democracy and by technology, the position of "intellectuals" is bound to be problematic. Therefore, instead of adding yet another survey to the sociological analyses of what is called the "wave of anti-intellectualism", I mean here to concentrate on the contributions to this debate that have come forth recently.

They are significant because they mark the thoughts of three distinctly different and, perhaps, prototypical attitudes toward what is often called "the American intellectual problem." They are also significant because two of the proponents whose theses I shall examine here are Catholics: for, by 1956, the intellectual debate arose within the circles of American Catholics too. And it is because of the Catholic intellectual tradition that claims to have descended direct and unbroken from European medieval sources that my examination may be of importance right now, when the whole civilized tradition of Western Christendom is endangered by destruction, dispersal, or dissolution.

II

Professor Merle Curti, president of the American Historical Association in 1954, has addressed himself to the intellectual theme several times, including the impressive occasion of his 1955 Presidential Address. His propositions now stand expanded in the so-called Brown and Haley Lectures, which he delivered at the College of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, published in turn in a book by Rutgers University Press. The title reads: *American Paradox—The Conflict of Thought and Action*.

It would be false to deny the disturbing and symptomatic impression of Professor Curti's disputation. It is symptomatic because it reveals the continued domination of a philosophic approach which, at the risk of some imprecision, could be termed the absolute-secularist or the positivist-pragmatist approach that has been widespread, I am sorry to say, among the American professional intelligentsia for the past two generations. It is disturbing because it reveals how some powerful misconceptions, the fallacies of which by now are evident, still continue to prevail. I shall name them here:

First, the (positivist) confusion of education with intelligence,

Second, the (pragmatist) separation of thought from action,

Third, the (democratist) separation of the European from the American tradition,

Fourth, the (secularist) confusion of intellectuality with scholarship.

Now I think that of these four misconceptions, the last three began to develop