

unequal, we are back where we started—wondering why so many people have become convinced that inequality of income is now a problem. Is it perhaps because some new, morally compelling standard has been formulated which spells out, in keeping with the sympathies of our more enlightened age, what should constitute a just distribution of income? If someone has drawn up such a standard, I have been unable to locate it. Kristol states that the *Public Interest* (which he edits) has been trying for some time to get one of the critics of income distribution in America to write an article attempting to define a "just" distribution of income. Kristol further states that no one will write this article for him. One begins to suspect that the people who are so critical of the existing distribution of income in this country really have little idea of what they would like to see in its place. And one begins to suspect as well that their dissatisfaction must reflect something other than mere disapproval of the way income statistics read in U.S. Census reports.

What it does reflect is quite fascinating. Kristol argues persuasively that those who are most critical of income distribution in the United States—whom one could broadly and loosely categorize as intellectuals—are in reality engaged in a class struggle with the business community for status and power. But this struggle does not reflect mere power lust; rather, it expresses a

genuine dislike for bourgeois, commercial society, with its belief that personal security, personal liberty, and the opportunity for steadily increasing material prosperity constitute the essential elements of the common good. To the American liberal intellectual, such a crass, mundane, self-centered formulation of the philosophic basis of a society will never appear morally sufficient or be personally satisfying. A society founded on such a basis will accordingly be viewed as illegitimate. And if such is one's view of a society, he will see everywhere the signs of that illegitimacy.

It follows, then, that almost no conceivable redistribution of income will satisfy those who criticize America most severely in this area. For the problem is not really income at all. On the contrary, income seems to be getting more equal, and those who criticize the current distribution are unable to formulate what *would* constitute a just distribution in any event. The problem is rooted instead in a basic disagreement over the philosophical basis of a good society.

No doubt, America's most vocal social critics would prefer a more heroic, selfless, inspiring vision of the common good than that which prevails in western bourgeois democracies. Such visions, one might point out, are precisely what is venerated in the worker's paradises of Russia, China, and Eastern Europe.

And not surprisingly, a number of American academics have returned from visits to these countries with glowing reports of happiness and collective progress.

I suppose this concern for heroics and inspiration is fine if one wants to indulge it. But most of us are considerably more impressed with the fact that the "crass, mundane, and self-centered" bourgeois society of America has yielded the highest and the most equally distributed standard of living in history. Some of us would even go so far as to argue that the equally unique degree of personal freedom in this country is actually a rather heroic thing for a society to achieve.

Granted, improvements can be made. Few would argue that opportunity is completely equal, and few would quarrel with some redistribution of income as prerequisite to assisting the most needy elements of our society. But to argue, as did many supporters of the sage from South Dakota, that the current distribution of income in America is somehow "evil" is patently absurd. In truth, as we have seen, this is an indictment less of income distribution than of the philosophical basis of American society. There is a perfect right to make such accusations (though one might hope for more intellectual honesty on the part of the accusers). But public policy, unless it is suicidal, has an equal right (and indeed, an obligation) to dismiss them. □

Thomas Molnar

The Inarticulate Society of the Future

Even while they protest every aspect of the industrial-consumer society, the new scientists of futurology imperceptibly describe the society of the twenty-first century in ways not essentially different from ours today. Although they call for boldness of imagination, futurologues usually do not think beyond the known and the familiar; they merely enlarge the size and swell the statistics of the present. The "bigger" and the "better" seem to form the horizon of their predictions.

Concrete observation ought to come, I think, to the aid of imagination when we speak of the future. And, of course, no cause is served when we speak of the entire planet as having one kind of future, that is, when we are carried away by the contemporary yet provincial thinking of the West. It may be forgivable when western futurologues try gently to impose their own vision on the rest of mankind, but it is obvious that the rest of the world has its own traditions, and that the passing of years and decades will remove rather than thicken the recently added layer of western usages and institutions.

In comparison with third world societies, what was the nature of this "added

layer"? And more generally, what is specifically "western" (from the point of view of a phenomenological analysis of political life and institutions) in the West over against the societies of the third world and also the modern communist societies? A brief answer can only state that western ideas have created an *articulated* society, whereas the more traditional societies (archaic, tribal, sacral, the oriental despotisms, etc.) have been relatively *undifferentiated*. It is only in the West that one may speak of society as not coincident entirely with the state; of spiritual and temporal power; of government, institutions, and church; of governing and opposition parties; of distinct yet interconnecting social classes and so on. Let us call societies where several of these phenomena exist *articulated*, and let us note—here only very summarily—that most nonwestern societies, together with archaic ones, did not allow themselves to be so divided or internally differentiated; they did not allow, for example, the existence of a free intellectual community whose ideas and concepts would interact with the ideas and concepts of the spiritual and temporal power, thus influencing the structure of

institutions. Even in the culturally brilliant medieval Islamic world, the philosophers were limited to speculation within their profession, and the state never had recourse to their ideas. Nor did the official religious establishment.

Now the point I wish to raise after these few preliminaries is whether an intellectually honest futurology ought not to imagine our various societies as going towards new forms of inarticulateness? Let us distinguish three spheres in the world today which, it seems to me, are tending centrifugally away from the articulate (western) model of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The three spheres are the western world proper, the communist countries, and the third world. In other words, I do not wish to step out of the presently existing general frame of reference. And the reason why I speak of the nineteenth and twentieth century "model" is that these 200 years saw western concepts of politics and government penetrate the third world (colonialism) and the empires of Russia and China (Marxism). This period was the apogee of western influence, and when the futurologues show themselves so optimistic regarding the future world soci-

ety as modeled after the West, they seem to me narrowly tied to what has been familiar to them. I repeat, however, that we have every reason to think that the world is not tending *towards* a more complete imitation of the western model, but away from it. And so does the western world itself.

Let us begin our short analysis with the latter. The "articulate" institutional life is more than just contested today, it is simply not believed. Just as the foundation myths of some archaic societies suffer a kind of wear with the passing of time, the institutions and the principles on which they stand have withered away to a large extent in the West. After 1968 Raymond Aron summed it up by saying that the old authority is agonizing, the new authority has not emerged yet. Paul Ricoeur, of a different ideological persuasion from Aron, is also of the opinion that we witness an exhaustion of meaning (*épuisement de sens*), leading to two mutually supporting phenomena: an absence of any collective project and savage, uncontrollable social experimentation, too rapid and unorganized to bring about new institutions. Yet, Ricoeur does believe that future society will be even more complicated than today's, but whether it will find its "*médiateurs sociaux*" (Aron's "new authorities"), he cannot say.

It is obvious that if we were to list the half-dozen or so assumptions on which western political life has rested from Socrates to Cicero to Jesus and Augustine, we would see their "*épuisement*," which is translated into the way of life of the protesters. The latter are in fact the first to refuse to perform the ritual which perpetuates the political myth in any society, and society at large no longer believes the myth either and therefore fails to reaffirm its validity. Yet, it must be emphasized again that political life in the West has meant a vigorous institutional self-assertion, and this, in turn, means separation and harmonization of interests in a socio-political milieu where tension and conflict are recognized as parts of the human condition. As Ricoeur remarks, conflicts today are not allowed to ripen, conciliation at once is sought, so that on the one hand there remains a lot of unfinished business superficially papered over by slogans, and on the other hand a similarly impatient experimentation external to society and its institutions.

The western world is thus moving towards an increasingly complex social life which will be unable to express itself in institutions. Political life, consequently, may become increasingly rudimentary, not in the direction of a vanishing point desired by anarchists, but in the direction of brutalization. Aron's "new authority" may be totalitarian, once more invested with spiritual and temporal power and internalizing all the forces previously in creative tension.

This is the more possible, perhaps even probable, and models in extra-western societies will not be lacking. Let us bear in mind that unless we are adepts of historical evolutionism according to which the whole of mankind keeps ap-

proaching one universal form, we must be aware that the West has been an exception rather than the rule; there is no reason, indeed, to follow Hegel whose historical itinerary of freedom led from the Orient to the Occident (and stopped in Prussia), and not assume that history may again move from the West to the East or South. Indeed, what do we see? Communism, a western offshoot, has adjusted itself to the monolithism of oriental despotisms, has even strengthened it by its own repugnance for political articulateness. Communist societies have eliminated politics in its western definition, and are now stabilizing themselves on a low level: even the previously articulated societies of Eastern



Europe are today "proletarian states" where action is concentrated in a few hands, while the undifferentiated mass is allowed an extremely reduced nonpolitical sphere of activity. Thus Hegel is proved wrong twice: history is not a triumphant chariot leading by necessity to freedom, it simply has no unilinear direction. It seems even that the attraction of communism for western minds is not the specific charm of Marxist doctrine, but rather an invitation to disarticulate our institutional existence and concentrate responsibility in a few all-powerful hands. The most unpopular orator at the recent Semaine Sociale (held in Rennes) was the representative of the *patronnat*, M. de Calan, who spoke in favor of socially conflictive situations, always solved and always reappearing in new forms, testing in the process both the individual and the vigor of institutions. He was unpopular, one must assume, because his audience, although hostile to institutions which "repress freedom," are ready to endow one superorganism, a sort of Teilhardian totalized head, with the faculty of collective thinking and decision-making.

The third world too takes an unexpected revenge on Hegel who had "condemned" Asia to oblivion and Africa to slumber. Consisting mostly of archaic societies, the countries of the third world are today the scenes of what may well be regarded as a pseudo-conflict: between the traditional structure which is tribal and sacral, and the need of modernization. The more they promote the methods of modernization and with it urbanization, the more evident become the effects of a desacralized existence. The next step is, as we see in an increasing number of cases, military dictatorship, replacing the tribal potentate's authority, on the one hand, and on the other hand, promoting a brutal

nationalism as a substitute for the waning tribal cohesion. Here again, political power and action are concentrated in a few hands; the mass, even if it benefits by increased economic wellbeing, remains inert although usable as an occasional political tool.

As in the communist empire, the power in most third world countries also will be nonarticulated, not broken down into institutional forms, and therefore not promoting variety and plurality. The citizen's activity will consist in securing a higher standard of living and a modicum of freedom of criticism which, however, is not supposed to take public forms or endanger the regime. Thus he will remain essentially a private unit, without institutional modes of expression. This does not necessarily spell misery, and the private sphere may even be enlarged with time; but this minimum of contentment has nothing to do with centuries of western history during which the citizen was also a member of various units of power concentration and thus politically influential, free.

It is quite correct to call both what happened in communist societies and third world societies "revolution." A whole network of institutions has been abruptly eliminated or otherwise discredited, and all the underlying social myth with it. In the West the process is slower—precisely because of the previous articulation of political life, hence of a more varied, more plural resistance. In communist and third world countries the transition may be easier—because it is from one kind of quasi-monolithic society to another. The future form for both might perhaps be called *national communism* or *social nationalism*, a new label for a very ancient political reality which spread historically and geographically over the whole globe: from the Andes (Inca empire) to the Nile, from central Africa to China.

The line of the future is not necessarily running along these considerations, but one may be surprised that various futurologues have neglected these possibilities. As I said, they are adepts of some form of historical evolutionism, and are locked up in a speculative ghetto where certain forms of thought are regarded as tabu. Nevertheless, future historians may speak of western efforts to conquer ideologically the archaic societies and the various oriental despotisms—only to weaken themselves in the process, and eventually to succumb to a specific kind of loss of articulateness. If this were so—and symptoms are not lacking—then we would have to rethink historical speculation from G. Vico and Kant, Lessing, and Hegel, and see some validity in the various utopian societies from Thomas More to Sebastien Mercier and Marx which renounce individual freedom and institutional tension for the regulated, inarticulate society.

These considerations should not tempt us into believing that we have discovered new laws of historical development. If we reject the linear concept, we do not have to adopt the cyclical or, for that matter, the amorphous. We should only not exclude the unpopular possibilities. □