

*The low estate of the "common man" in the philosophy of the left.*

## *On Equality and Inequality*

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THE DOCTRINE OF natural law that inspired the 18th century declarations of the rights of man did not imply the obviously fallacious proposition that all men are biologically equal. It proclaimed that all men are born equal in rights and that this equality cannot be abrogated by any man-made law, that it is inalienable or, more precisely, imprescriptible. Only the deadly foes of individual liberty and self-determination, the champions of totalitarianism,

interpreted the principle of equality before the law as derived from an alleged psychical and physiological equality of all men. The French declaration of the rights of the man and the citizen of November 3, 1789, had pronounced that all men are born and remain equal in rights. But, on the eve of the inauguration of the régime of terror, the new declaration that preceded the Constitution of June 24, 1793, proclaimed that all men are equal "*par la*

nature." From then on this thesis, although manifestly contradicting biological experience, remained one of the dogmas of "leftism." Thus we read in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* that "at birth human infants, regardless of their heredity, are as equal as Fords."<sup>1</sup>

However, the fact that men are born unequal in regard to physical and mental capacities cannot be argued away. Some surpass their fellow men in health and vigor, in brain and aptitudes, in energy and resolution and are therefore better fitted for the pursuit of earthly affairs than the rest of mankind—a fact that has also been admitted by Marx. He spoke of "the inequality of individual endowment and therefore productive capacity (*Leistungsfähigkeit*)" as "natural privileges" and of "the unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal)."<sup>2</sup> In terms of popular psychological teaching we can say that some have the ability to adjust themselves better than others to the conditions of the struggle for survival. We may therefore—without indulging in any judgment of value—distinguish from this point of view between superior men and inferior men.

History shows that from time immemorial superior men took advantage of their superiority by seizing power and subjugating the masses of inferior men. In the status society there is a hierarchy of castes. On the one hand are the lords who have appropriated to themselves all the land and on the other hand their servants, the liegemen, serfs, and slaves, landless and penniless underlings. The inferiors' duty is to drudge for their masters. The institutions of the society aim at the sole benefit of the ruling minority, the princes, and their retinue, the aristocrats.

Such was by and large the state of affairs in all parts of the world before, as both Marxians and conservatives tell us,

"the acquisitiveness of the bourgeoisie," in a process that went on for centuries and is still going on in many parts of the world, undermined the political, social, and economic system of the "good old days." The market economy—capitalism—radically transformed the economic and political organization of mankind.

Permit me to recapitulate some well-known facts. While under precapitalistic conditions superior men were the masters on whom the masses of the inferior had to attend, under capitalism the more gifted and more able have no means to profit from their superiority other than to serve to the best of their abilities the wishes of the majority of the less gifted. In the market economic power is vested in the consumers. They ultimately determine, by their buying or abstention from buying, what should be produced, by whom and how, of what quality and in what quantity. The entrepreneurs, capitalists, and landowners who fail to satisfy in the best possible and cheapest way the most urgent of the not yet satisfied wishes of the consumers are forced to go out of business and forfeit their preferred position. In business offices and in laboratories the keenest minds are busy fructifying the most complex achievements of scientific research for the production of ever better implements and gadgets for people who have no inkling of the theories that make the fabrication of such things possible. The bigger an enterprise is, the more is it forced to adjust its production to the changing whims and fancies of the masses, its masters. The fundamental principle of capitalism is mass production to supply the masses. It is the patronage of the masses that make enterprises grow big. The common man is supreme in the market economy. He is the customer who "is always right."

In the political sphere, representative

government is the corollary of the supremacy of the consumers in the market. Office-holders depend on the voters as entrepreneurs and investors depend on the consumers. The same historical process that substituted the capitalistic mode of production for precapitalistic methods substituted popular government—democracy—for royal absolutism and other forms of government by the few. And wherever the market economy is superseded by socialism, autocracy makes a comeback. It does not matter whether the socialist or communist despotism is camouflaged by the use of aliases like “dictatorship of the proletariat” or “people’s democracy” or “*Führer* principle.” It always amounts to a subjection of the many to the few.

It is hardly possible to misconstrue more thoroughly the state of affairs prevailing in capitalistic society than by calling the capitalists and entrepreneurs a “ruling” class intent upon “exploiting” the masses of decent men. We will not raise the question of how the men who under capitalism are in business would have tried to take advantage of their superior talents in any other thinkable organization of production. Under capitalism they are vying with one another in serving the masses of less gifted man. All their thoughts aim at perfecting the methods of supplying the consumers. Every year, every month, every week something unheard of before appears on the market and is soon made accessible to the many.

What has multiplied the “productivity of labor” is not some degree of effort on the part of manual workers, but the accumulation of capital by the savers and its reasonable employment by the entrepreneurs. Technological inventions would have remained useless trivia if the capital required for their utilization had not been previously accumulated by thrift. Man could not survive as a human being without manual

labor. However, what elevates him above the beasts is not manual labor and the performance of routine jobs, but speculation, foresight that provides for the needs of the—always uncertain—future. The characteristic mark of production is that it is behavior directed by the mind. This fact cannot be conjured away by a semantics for which the word “labor” signifies only manual labor.

## II

TO ACQUIESCE in a philosophy stressing the inborn inequality of men runs counter to many people’s feelings. More or less reluctantly, people admit that they do not equal the celebrities of art, literature, and science, at least in their specialties, and that they are no match for athletic champions. But they are not prepared to concede their own inferiority in other human matters and concerns. As they see it, those who outstripped them in the market, the successful entrepreneurs and businessmen, owe their ascendancy exclusively to villainy. They themselves are, thank God, too honest and conscientious to resort to those dishonest methods of conduct that, as they say, alone make a man prosper in a capitalistic environment.

Yet, there is a daily growing branch of literature that blatantly depicts the common man as an inferior type: the books on the behavior of consumers and the alleged evils of advertising. Of course, neither the authors nor the public that acclaims their writings openly state or believe that that is the real meaning of the facts they report.

As these books tell us, the typical American is constitutionally unfit for the performance of the simplest tasks of a householder’s daily life. He or she does not buy what is needed for the appropriate conduct of the family’s affairs. In their inwrought stupidity they are easily induced by the

tricks and wiles of business to buy useless or quite worthless things. For the main concern of business is not to profit by providing the customers with the goods they need, but by unloading on them merchandise they would never take if they could resist the psychological artifices of "Madison Avenue." The innate incurable weakness of the average man's will and intellect makes the shoppers behave like "babes."<sup>3</sup> They are easy prey to the knavery of the hucksters.

Neither the authors nor the readers of these passionate diatribes are aware that their doctrine implies that the majority of the nation are morons, unfit to take care of their own affairs and badly in need of a paternal guardian. They are preoccupied to such an extent with their envy and hatred of successful businessmen that they fail to see how their description of consumers' behavior contradicts all that the "classical" socialist literature used to say about the eminence of the proletarians. These older socialists ascribed to the "people," to the "working and toiling masses," to the "manual workers" all the perfections of intellect and character. In their eyes, the people were not "babes" but the originators of what is great and good in the world, and the builders of a better future for mankind.

It is certainly true that the average common man is in many regards inferior to the average businessman. But this inferiority manifests itself first of all in his limited ability to think, to work, and thereby to contribute more to the joint productive effort of mankind. Most people who satisfactorily operate in routine jobs would be found wanting in any performance requiring a modicum of initiative and reflection. But they are not too dull to manage their family affairs properly. The husbands who are sent by their wives to the supermarket "for a loaf of bread and depart

with their arms loaded with their favorite snack items"<sup>4</sup> are certainly not typical. Neither is the housewife who buys regardless of content, because she "likes the package."<sup>5</sup>

It is generally admitted that the average man displays poor taste. Consequently business, entirely dependent on the patronage of the masses of such men, is forced to bring to the market inferior literature and art. (One of the great problems of capitalistic civilization is how to make high-quality achievements possible in a social environment in which the "regular fellow" is supreme.) It is furthermore well known that many people indulge in habits that result in undesired effects. As the instigators of the great anticapitalistic campaign see it, the bad taste and the unsafe consumption habits of people and the other evils of our age are simply generated by the public relations or sales activities of the various branches of "capital"—wars are made by the munitions industries, the "merchants of death;" dipsomania by alcohol capital, the fabulous "whisky trust," and the breweries.

This philosophy is not only based on the doctrine depicting the common people as guileless suckers who can easily be taken in by the ruses of a race of crafty hucksters. It implies in addition the nonsensical theorem that the sale of articles which the consumer really needs and would buy if not hypnotized by the wiles of the sellers is unprofitable for business and that on the other hand only the sale of articles which are of little or no use for the buyer or are even downright detrimental to him yields large profits. For if one were not to assume this, there would be no reason to conclude that in the competition of the market the sellers of bad articles outstrip those of better articles. The same sophisticated tricks by means of which slick traders are said to convince the buying public can

also be used by those offering good and valuable merchandise on the market. But then good and poor articles compete under equal conditions and there is no reason to make a pessimistic judgment on the chances of the better merchandise. While both articles—the good and the bad—would be equally aided by the alleged trickery of the sellers, only the better one enjoys the advantage of being better.

We need not consider all the problems raised by the ample literature on the alleged stupidity of the consumers and their need for protection by a paternal government. What is important here is the fact that, notwithstanding the popular dogma of the equality of all men, the thesis that the common man is unfit to handle the ordinary affairs of his daily life is supported by a great part of popular “leftist” literature.

### III

THE DOCTRINE of the inborn physiological and mental equality of men logically explains differences between human beings as caused by postnatal influences. It emphasizes especially the role played by education. In the capitalistic society, it is said, higher education is a privilege accessible only to the children of the “bourgeoisie.” What is needed is to grant every child access to every school and thus educate everyone.

Guided by this principle, the United States embarked upon the noble experiment of making every boy and girl an educated person. All young men and women were to spend the years from six to eighteen in school, and as many as possible of them were to enter college. Then the intellectual and social division between an educated minority and a majority of people whose education was insufficient was to disappear.

Education would no longer be a privilege; it would be the heritage of every citizen.

Statistics show that this program has been put into practice. The number of high schools, of teachers and students multiplied. If the present trend goes on for a few years more, the goal of the reform will be fully attained; every American will graduate from high school.

But the success of this plan is merely apparent. It was made possible only by a policy that, while retaining the name “high school,” has entirely destroyed its scholarly and scientific value. The old high school conferred its diplomas only on students who had at least acquired a definite minimum of knowledge in some disciplines considered as basic. It eliminated in the lower grades those who lacked the abilities and the disposition to comply with these requirements. But in the new régime of the high school the opportunity to choose the subjects he wished to study was badly misused by stupid or lazy pupils. Not only are fundamental subjects such as elementary arithmetic, geometry, physics, history, and foreign languages avoided by the majority of high school students, but every year boys and girls receive high school diplomas who are deficient in reading and spelling English. It is a very characteristic fact that some universities found it necessary to provide special courses to improve the reading skill of their students. The often passionate debates concerning the high school curriculum that have now been going on for several years prove clearly that only a limited number of teenagers are intellectually and morally fit to profit from school attendance. For the rest of the high school population the years spent in classrooms are simply wasted. If one lowers the scholastic standard of high schools and colleges in order to make it possible for the majority of less gifted and less industrious youths to get diplomas, one merely hurts

the minority of those who have the capacity to make use of the teaching.

The experience of the last decades in American education bears out the fact that there are inborn differences in man's intellectual capacities that cannot be eradicated by any effort of education.

#### IV

THE DESPERATE, BUT HOPELESS ATTEMPTS to salvage, in spite of indisputable proofs to the contrary, the thesis of the inborn equality of all men are motivated by a faulty and untenable doctrine concerning popular government and majority rule.

This doctrine tries to justify popular government by referring to the supposed natural equality of all men. Since all men are equal, every individual participates in the genius that enlightened and stimulated the greatest heroes of mankind's intellectual, artistic, and political history. Only adverse postnatal influences prevented the proletarians from equaling the brilliance and the exploits of the greatest men. Therefore, as Trotsky told us,<sup>6</sup> once this abominable system of capitalism will have given way to socialism, "the average human being will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx." The voice of the people is the voice of God, it is always right. If dissent arises among men, one must, of course, assume that some of them are mistaken. It is difficult to avoid the inference that it is more likely that the minority errs than the majority. The majority is right, because it is the majority and as such is borne by the "wave of the future."

The supporters of this doctrine must consider any doubt of the intellectual and

moral eminence of the masses as an attempt to substitute despotism for representative government. /

However, the arguments advanced in favor of representative government by the liberals of the 19th century—the much maligned Manchesterism and champions of *laissez faire*—have nothing in common with the doctrines of the natural inborn equality of men and the superhuman inspiration of majorities. They are based upon the fact, most lucidly exposed by David Hume, that those at the helm are always a small minority as against the vast majority of those subject to their orders. In this sense every system of government is minority rule and as such can last only as long as it is supported by the belief of those ruled that it is better for themselves to be loyal to the men in office than to try to supplant them by others ready to apply different methods of administration. If this opinion vanishes, the many will rise in rebellion and replace by force the unpopular office-holders and their system by other men and another system. But the complicated industrial apparatus of modern society could not be preserved under a state of affairs in which the majority's only means of enforcing its will is revolution. The objective of representative government is to avoid the reappearance of such a violent disturbance of the peace and its detrimental effects upon morale, culture, and material well-being. Government by the people, i.e., by elected representatives, makes peaceful change possible. It warrants the agreement of public opinion and the principles according to which the affairs of state are conducted. Majority rule is for those who believe in liberty not a metaphysical principle, derived from an untenable distortion of biological facts, but a means of securing the uninterrupted peaceful development of mankind's civilizing effort.

## V

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INBORN BIOLOGICAL EQUALITY of all men begot in the nineteenth century a quasi-religious mysticism of the "people" that finally converted it into the dogma of the "common man's" superiority. All men are born equal. But the members of the upper classes have unfortunately been corrupted by the temptation of power and by indulgence in the luxuries they secured for themselves. The evils plaguing mankind are caused by the misdeeds of this foul minority. Once these mischief-makers are dispossessed, the inbred nobility of the common man will control human affairs. It will be a delight to live in a world in which the infinite goodness and the congenital genius of the people will be supreme. Never-dreamt-of happiness for everyone is in store for mankind.

For the Russian Social-Revolutionaries this mystique was a substitute for the devotional practices of Russian Orthodoxy. The Marxians felt uneasy about the enthusiastic vagaries of their most dangerous rivals. But Marx's own description of the blissful conditions of the "higher phase of Communist Society"<sup>7</sup> was even more sanguine. After the extermination of the Social-Revolutionaries the Bolsheviks themselves adopted the cult of the common man as the main ideological disguise of their unlimited despotism of a small clique of party bosses.

The characteristic difference between socialism (communism, planning, state capitalism, or whatever other synonym one may prefer) and the market economy (capitalism, private enterprise system, economic freedom) is this: in the market

economy the individuals *qua* consumers are supreme and determine by their buying or not-buying what should be produced, while in the socialist economy these matters are fixed by the government. Under capitalism the customer is the man for whose patronage the suppliers are striving and to whom after the sale they say "thank you" and "please come again." Under socialism the "comrade" gets what "big brother" deigns to give him and he is to be thankful for whatever he got. In the capitalistic West the average standard of living is incomparably higher than in the communistic East. But it is a fact that a daily increasing number of people in the capitalistic countries—among them also most of the so-called intellectuals—long for the alleged blessings of government control.

It is vain to explain to these men what the condition of the common man both in his capacity as a producer and in that of a consumer is under a socialist system. An intellectual inferiority of the masses would manifest itself most evidently in their aiming at the abolition of the system in which they themselves are supreme and are served by the elite of the most talented men and in their yearning for the return to a system in which the elite would tread them down.

Let us not fool ourselves. It is not the progress of socialism among the backward nations, those that never surpassed the stage of primitive barbarism and those whose civilizations were arrested many centuries ago, that shows the triumphant advance of the totalitarian creed. It is in our Western circuit that socialism makes the greatest strides. Every project to narrow down what is called the "private sector" of the economic organization is considered as highly beneficial, as progress, and is, if at all, only timidly and bashfully opposed for a short time. We are marching "forward" to the realization of socialism.

## VI

THE CLASSICAL LIBERALS of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries based their optimistic appreciation of mankind's future upon the assumption that the minority of eminent and honest men would always be able to guide by persuasion the majority of inferior people along the way leading to peace and prosperity. They were confident that the elite would always be in a position to prevent the masses from following the pied pipers and demagogues and adopting policies that must end in disaster. We may leave it undecided whether the error of these optimists consisted in overrating the elite or the masses or both. At any rate it is a fact that the immense majority of our contemporaries is fanatically committed to policies that ultimately aim at abolishing the social order in which the most ingenious citizens are impelled to serve the masses in the best possible way. The masses—including those called the intellectuals—passionately advocate a system in which they no longer will be the customers who give the orders but wards of an omnipotent authority. It does not matter that this economic system is sold to the common man under the label "to each according to his needs" and its political and constitutional corollary, unlimited autocracy of self-appointed office-holders, under the label "people's democracy."

In the past, the fanatical propaganda of the socialists and their abettors, the interventionists of all shades of opinion, was still opposed by a few economists, statesmen and businessmen. But even this often lame and inept defense of the market economy has almost petered out. The strong-

holds of American snobbism and "patrianship," fashionable, lavishly endowed universities and rich foundations, are today nurseries of "social" radicalism. Millionaires, not "proletarians," were the most efficient instigators of the New Deal and the "progressive" policies it engendered. It is well known that the Russian dictator was welcomed on his first visit to the United States with more cordiality by bankers and presidents of big corporations than by other Americans.

The tenor of the arguments of such "progressive" businessmen runs this way: "I owe the eminent position I occupy in my branch of business to my own efficiency and application. My innate talents, my ardor in acquiring the knowledge needed for the conduct of a big enterprise, my diligence raised me to the top. These personal merits would have secured a leading position for me under any economic system. As the head of an important branch of production I would also have enjoyed an enviable position in a socialist commonwealth. But my daily job under socialism would be much less exhausting and irritating. I would no longer have to live under the fear that a competitor can supersede me by offering something better or cheaper on the market. I would no longer be forced to comply with the whimsical and unreasonable wishes of the consumers. I would give them what I—the expert—think they ought to get. I would exchange the hectic and nerve-wracking job of a business man for the dignified and smooth functioning of a public servant. The style of my life and work would resemble much more the seigniorial deportment of a grandee of the past than that of an ulcer-plagued executive of a modern corporation. Let philosophers bother about the true or alleged defects of socialism. I, from my personal point of view, cannot see any reason why I should oppose it. Administrators of na-

tionalized enterprises in all parts of the world and visiting Russian officials fully agree with my point of view."

There is, of course, no more sense in the self-deception of these capitalists and entrepreneurs than in the daydreams of the socialists and communists of all varieties.

## VII

AS IDEOLOGICAL TRENDS are today, one has to expect that in a few decades, perhaps even before the ominous year 1984, every country will have adopted the socialist system. The common man will be freed from the tedious job of directing the course of his own life. He will be told by the authorities what to do and what not to do, he will be fed, housed, clothed, educated and entertained by them. But, first of all, they will release him from the necessity of using his own brains. Everybody will receive "according to his needs." But what

the needs of an individual are, will be determined by the authority. As was the case in earlier periods, the superior men will no longer serve the masses, but dominate and rule them.

Yet, this outcome is not inevitable. It is the goal to which the prevailing trends in our contemporary world are leading. But trends can change and hitherto they always have changed. The trend toward socialism too may be replaced by a different one. To accomplish such a change is the task of the rising generation.

<sup>1</sup>H. Kallen, "Behaviorism," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. II, p. 498.

<sup>2</sup>Critique of the Social Democratic Program of Gotha (Letter to Bracke, May 5, 1875.)

<sup>3</sup>V. Packard, "Babes in Consumerland," *The Hidden Persuaders* (Cardinal Editions, 1957) pp. 90-97.

<sup>4</sup>Packard, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Packard, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>6</sup>L. Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, tr. by R. Strunsky (London, 1925) p. 256.

<sup>7</sup>Letter to Bracke, May 5, 1875, as referred to above.

### *Isaiah 9:6*

By way of the usual door he came  
Into the animal house while the clock  
On the jack-straw rafters was striking infinity,  
Neither the negative nor the positive hour—  
Came then in a spiral of mercy,  
Crusoe'd to creature, to the island where  
The footprints on the wave were not yet Friday;  
Beast-encircled, in the cage of the winds, Odysseus  
Of the nine-months' waters, lonely for Ithaca.  
In the cave of the four beasts he waited,  
While the criss-cross shadow of the rafters  
Bloodied the eclipse. At cock-crow morning  
He wept for the sky's shadow, for the pillow of a rock,  
For all beasts thorned and lost, dove-sought, armed  
By love, having no other. Phoenix-fire  
Of his fingers burned like Prometheus;  
He remembered eagles. Slept after manna, dreaming  
Bread like stones, and Lazarus dead. Woke to rain-  
Bow gold, a hard fire. Night, and a rolling stone,  
And the ball like a burning coal for his hands to hold.

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