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AMERICA IN OUR TIME (1976)

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*The Ideology of the Liberal Consensus*

"On the reefs of roast beef and apple pie, socialistic utopias of every society are sent to their doom."

-Werner Sombart, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?"

It is always *risky* to try to draw the portrait of the ideas and beliefs of a society at any point in its evolution. Contradictions and crosscurrents defy generalization. Too much survives from the past, and too much anticipates the future. Usually, perhaps, the attempt is doomed to end either in superficiality or in intellectual dishonesty. But the period from the middle of the 1950s in the United States up to the impact of the crisis of the 1960s was not usual in this respect. It was an age of consensus. Whether you look at the writings of intellectuals or at the positions taken by practicing politicians or at the data on public opinion, it is impossible not to be struck by the degree to which the majority of Americans in those years accepted the same system of assumptions. Official and semiofficial attempts were even made to codify these assumptions in such works as the report of President Eisenhower's Commission on National Goals or in the Rockefeller Brothers Fund panel reports. The crisis of the late 1960s was caused partly by the mistakes and shortcomings of this system of assumptions and partly by a series of attacks upon it.

In the late 1950s Professor Hadley Cantril of Princeton, one of the pioneers of the statistical study of public opinion, conducted a survey of thousands of individuals in ten countries. The results were published in 1965 in a book called *The Pattern of Human Concerns*. Cantril showed that the subject, and the intensity, of human concerns varied widely from one society to another. People in poorer countries, he found, worried

more, and about a wider range of possible personal catastrophes, than did people in richer countries.

The American pattern, Cantril discovered on the basis of survey work done in 1959, was the most distinctive of all. Americans were the most confident people in the world:

The total volume of concerns of the American people was relatively low, especially those related to their hopes and fears for the nation, except for the single overriding concern that war be avoided. On the personal side there was an unusual emphasis on good health. . . . Americans appeared to be chiefly concerned with the two major threats they felt were most beyond their control, war and illness.

Professor Cantril attributed this mood of confidence not to any peculiarity of American culture but to prosperity. As other countries became similarly prosperous, he expected their people also to feel "a general satisfaction with a way of life which promises continued development" And he made an interesting prediction: Confidence and satisfaction would remain the prevailing mood in a prosperous, developed country

until some major event or crisis transpires which creates major and wide-spread frustrations. Only then are people likely to become awakened to the inadequacy of the assumptions they have come to take for granted

All cross bearings confirm the essential accuracy of this picture. At the end of the 1950s, Americans worried about their own personal lives about health and status. At the other end of the scale of immediacy, they worried about the danger of nuclear war. But few of them doubted the essential goodness and strength of American society.

Four times between 1959 and 1961, the Gallup poll asked its sample what they regarded as the "most important problem" facing the nation. Each time, the most frequent answer (given in each case by at least close to half of the respondents and sometimes by far more than half) was "keeping the peace," sometimes glossed as "dealing with Russia." No domestic issue came anywhere close to challenging that outstanding concern.

In the presidential campaign of 1960, only two types of domestic issues were rated as critical by either candidate or by his advisers: on the one hand, atavistic ethnic issues—the Catholic vote, or Martin Luther King's arrest—and on the other hand, the behavior of the economy. And the latter, to Kennedy, at least, seemed important mainly as a prerequisite of foreign policy.

Kennedy built his appeal around the call to get the country moving again. He left a strong impression that his main reason for doing so was in order to recover lost prestige in the competition with the Soviet Union.

Summing up his campaign, in Hartford, Connecticut, on the eve of polling, Senator Kennedy listed three major differences between his opponent and himself:

first a different view of the present state of the American economy; secondly a different view of our prestige in the world, and therefore, our ability to lead the free world; and thirdly, whether the balance of power in the world is shifting in our direction or that of our adversaries.

Nixon, too, had three themes. First, that Kennedy was running America down; second, that the Democrats would cause inflation; and third, that he, Richard Nixon, could speak better for America in confrontation with the Soviet leader.

When it came to sensing the issues that had a gut appeal to the electorate as a whole, that is, each candidate chose to stress foreign dangers (and glories) over domestic problems in the proportion of two to one.

The various American elites took more complicated views. A good deal of concern was expressed by intellectuals in the late 1950s about the lack of excellence in American education (especially in the context of an alleged inferiority to Soviet achievements in space science and missile technology), about the (temporarily) lagging growth rate of the economy, and in diffuse and cloudy jeremiads about the materialism of mass culture. But in the most ambitious contemporary analyses, the same dualism was the recurrent major theme: never so much hope in America, never so much danger abroad.

It was in 1956 that the Rockefeller brothers organized their special studies project to "meet and examine the most critical problems facing the nation over the next ten to fifteen years." Never before had such a prestigious team of diagnosticians gathered at the national bedside. Bipartisan and interdisciplinary, it was a roster of those men who had expounded the conventional wisdom since World War II and would remain its champions until the bitter end of the 1960s: Adolf Berle of the New Deal and John Gardner of Common Cause, Chester Bowles and Charles Percy, Edward Teller and David Sarnoff, Lucius Clay and Dean Rusk, Henry Luce and Henry Kissinger.

The reports of the various panels were published separately between January 1958 and September 1960 and as a single volume, *Prospect for America*, in 1961. Together they form a handbook of the shared assumptions of the American governmental and business elite: the two had become hard to distinguish. These were the assumptions that governed the policies of the Kennedy administration, and no one can doubt that they would have guided the Republicans if they had won in 1960.

It would not be fair to call the tone of *Prospect for America* compla-

cent in any vulgar way. It has a muscular Christian strenuousness, rather reminiscent of Kipling's *if*, or of the sermons on the social question preached at expensive boarding schools:

The number and the depth of the problems we face suggests that the very life of our free society may be at stake, [the report began by saying]. We are concerned that there has not been . . . enough sense of urgency throughout our nation about the mortal struggle in which we are engaged.

Yet all may not yet be lost:

America has a notable record of responding to challenges and making the most of opportunities. With our growing population, our extraordinary record of rising productivity, the inherent dynamism in our free enterprise economy, there is every reason to face the future with all confidence.

The panel reports contained very able discussion of particular issues such as strategic policy or economic growth. But essentially they saw all the various challenges to America in terms of one big challenge: "the mortal struggle in which we are engaged," the "basic underlying Soviet danger."

The central dualism of the reports' philosophy was baldly, almost naively, spelled out right at the beginning in a preface signed by the Rockefellers themselves:

This project grew out of a belief that the United States in the middle of the twentieth century found itself in a critical situation.

As a nation we had progressed in our domestic development to an extent hardly imaginable a few short decades ago. . . .

Throughout this world alive with hope and change stalks the Communist challenge.

"Stalks" is a nice Manichaeian touch. It was this very feeling that the hosts of Midian were on the prowl, that the United States was wrestling with the Evil One, and therefore needed to match the messianic beliefs of the adversary with an equivalent dogma, that made it so fashionable in the late 1950s to define the grand purposes of America. The official report on the national goals produced by the Eisenhower administration in 1960 was strikingly similar in tone and conclusions to that of the Rockefeller brothers and their experts.

The extremely distinguished panel of economists, for example-it included Paul Samuelson and Milton Friedman, Herbert Stein and Charles L. Schultze-drew almost exactly the same picture of a perfectible America threatened from without by the Communist serpent. "The Amer

ican economy works well," they pronounced; "the system is highly responsive to the demands of the people." Yet, even in a discussion of the economy they felt it appropriate to add, "America and the civilization to which it belongs stand at an historic turning-point. They confront a critical danger and inspiring opportunities. The danger is indicated by the phrase 'Cold War.'"

The introduction to the National Goals report gave an official imprimatur to this same dualism. It was signed by, among others, the head of DuPont and the head of the AFL/CIO, the head of the University of California and the head of the First National City Bank of New York. At home, these Olympians thundered in unison, "We have achieved a standard of individual realization new to history." Abroad, "The nation is in grave danger, threatened by the rulers of one third of mankind."

One eminent historian was so carried away by this mood that he even projected it back into an indefinite past: "In this favored country," wrote Clinton Rossiter, "we have always found more things on which to agree than to disagree." Always? In the 1860s? Still, there could be no dissent from his next proposition: "The early 1960s appear to be a time of broad consensus on fundamentals." Looking back to the same period, the late Fred Freed, one of the most thoughtful of television producers, came to much the same conclusion (it was his habit never to use capital letters):

when I began doing my documentaries at nbc in 1961 we lived in a consensus society. those were the days of the cold war. there was an enemy outside, the communists, nikita khrushchev, the red chinese. . . . back then there was general agreement in the united states about what was right and what was wrong about the country. nobody really questioned the system. . . . we had a common set of beliefs and common values.

In political terms, the beginnings of consensus date back to 1954. That was the pudding time when moderation came back into fashion after the acerbities of the Korean War and the McCarthy era.

Stalin died in 1953. The Korean War ended four months later, at Panmunjom.

The Cold War was far from over. One historian considers it reached its zenith with John Foster Dulles's speech, in January 1954, in which he called for "the deterrent of massive retaliatory power . . . by means and at times of our own choosing." Still, the Geneva conference and the Indochina settlement in the summer of 1954 did bring a warmer international climate. The successors of Stalin had problems enough on their hands. They proclaimed coexistence as their goal, and if they never gave up on the attempt to turn the new atmosphere to their advantage, they did show genuine signs of tractability. In the spring of 1955 they unexpectedly

agreed to sign an Austrian peace treaty, and that summer Bulganin and Khrushchev met the American President at the summit. Peace was still a long way off, but war seemed farther away.

It was in June 1954 that a soft-spoken New England lawyer named Joseph Welch destroyed Senator McCarthy by asking him the question no one had dared ask him before: "Have you no sense of decency, sir, at last?" In December, the Senate voted aye to a motion of censure. Intolerance and anti-communist hysteria were not dead, but at least exploiting them was no longer fashionable.

There was a sharp recession over the winter of 1953-54. Industrial production actually declined by 10 per cent. The President had the good sense to turn to the chairman of his Council of Economic Advisers, Dr. Arthur Burns, who prescribed a modest course of Keynesian spending. "It is no longer a matter of serious controversy," Burns was soon saying, "whether the government shall play a positive role in helping to maintain a high level of economic activity." After 1954, traditional Republican orthodoxy as represented by Secretary of the Treasury George M. Humphrey was in retreat.

For some seven years after 1955, few fundamental disagreements, foreign or domestic, were aired in either presidential or Congressional politics. That the United States should in principle seek better relations with the Soviet Union while keeping its guard up and seeking to contain communism—this was common ground. Disagreement was relegated to issues of the second order of importance: the extent to which the United States should support the United Nations, the level of foreign aid, the speed of space development. The main lines of domestic policy were equally beyond controversy. The Eisenhower administration accepted that the federal government must continue social security and such other New Deal programs as had stood the test of public popularity. It was ready to enforce due compliance with the law in civil rights, though reluctantly and with caution.

And it was prepared to use fiscal and monetary measures to maintain full employment and economic growth. Not much more, and no less, could be said of the Kennedy administration in its first two years.

The political process, it was taken for granted throughout that period, was a matter of emphasizing one nuance or another of this generally agreed program. A "liberal" congressman, as the word was then used, was one who might be expected to speak up for the particular interests of organized labor; a "conservative" would voice the reservations of corporate business or of the armed services.

Not only in Washington but in the press, on television, and—with few exceptions—in the academic community, to dissent from the broad axioms of consensus was to proclaim oneself irresponsible or ignorant.

That would risk disqualifying the dissenter from being taken seriously, and indeed often from being heard at all.

A strange hybrid, liberal conservatism, blanketed the scene and muffled debate. It stretched from Americans for Democratic Action which lay at the leftward frontiers of respectability and yet remained safely committed to anti-communism and free enterprise—as far into the board rooms of Wall Street and manufacturing industry as there could be found a realistic willingness to accept the existence of labor unions, the rights of minorities, and some role in economic life for the federal government. Since the consensus had made converts on the Right as well as on the Left, only a handful of dissidents were excluded from the Big Tent: southern diehards, rural reactionaries, the more *farouche* and paranoid fringes of the radical Right, and the divided remnants of the old, Marxist, Left. Together, they hardly added up to a corporal's guard. And they were of course never together.

The lack of clearly opposed alternative policies was revealed, to the point of parody, by the most emotional foreign-policy issue of the time: Cuba.

"For the first and only time" in the presidential campaign of 1960, Richard Nixon wrote in *Six Crises*, he "got mad at Kennedy—personally," when Kennedy advocated support for the anti-Castro rebels. Nixon was not angry because Kennedy's position was a recipe for disaster (though it was). He was angry because Kennedy was saying in public what Nixon had been saying in private but felt bound by the obligations of national security not to reveal. He had reason to believe that Kennedy knew all along that the Eisenhower administration was secretly planning the invasion that Kennedy now, by implication, criticized it for not mounting!

After the venture duly ended in fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, Arthur M. Schlesinger, then a White House aide, was sent a cable by his former Harvard graduate students: "KENNEDY OR NIXON," it read, "DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?" The question was an unkind reference to a pamphlet with that exact title which Schlesinger had felt moved to dash off during the 1960 campaign.

Schlesinger was right, of course; it did make a difference. But this was hardly because any very distinct issues of basic policy or any sharply divergent visions of the world then lay between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. They represented the aspirations of different categories of Americans. Their symbolic meaning—vital in the presidency—was almost antithetical. By experience and temperament, they were very different men.

The fact remains that they did share the same basic political assumptions: the primacy of foreign over domestic issues, the paramount importance of containing communism, the reign of consensus in domestic

affairs, the need to assert the supremacy of the White House as the command post of a society mobilized to meet external danger. So did their staff and advisers. And so, too, did their running mates and closest rivals: Lyndon Johnson and Henry Cabot Lodge, Hubert Humphrey and Nelson Rockefeller, and everyone else who might conceivably have been nominated as a presidential candidate in that year either by the Democrats or by the Republicans. Kennedy and Nixon, wrote Eric Sevareid, Establishment liberal *par excellence* at the time, were the first two completely packaged products of the managerial revolution in politics. In politics, as in business, it was the era of imperfect competition, with candidates not just for the presidency but for most major offices hardly more different than a Chevy and a Ford, or a Pepsi and a Coke.

In September 1955, at precisely the moment when consensus was settling like snow over U.S. politics, something very similar was happening in American intellectual life. That month, some one **hundred fifty** intellectuals from many countries foregathered at a conference in Milan to debate "The Future of Freedom." They had been invited there at the initiative of an organization called the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and their proceedings were later reported in the Congress's London monthly review, *Encounter*, by the sociologist Edward Shils. (Both the congress and *Encounter* were later found to have been in receipt of secret funds from the Central Intelligence Agency.) The title the editor put on Shils's article was *The End of Ideology*?

The idea was not new. "Liberal civilization begins when the age of ideology is over," Lewis Feuer had written in an article called "Beyond Ideology," published earlier that same year. Seymour Martin Lipset called one of the chapters in his *Political Man*, published in 1960, "The End of Ideology." But the person with whom the phrase came to be most closely associated was Lipset's close friend the sociologist and journalist Daniel Bell. Originally a product of one of the many fragments of the New York socialist Left, Bell became the labor editor of *Fortune* magazine and was also for a time the director of international seminars for the Congress for Cultural Freedom. His career epitomized, in fact, the intellectual consensus that underpinned its political equivalent during the 1950s. He saw clearly its double foundation: on the fear of communism abroad and on the assumption that American society could solve its problems without irresolvable conflict.

"Politics today," he wrote in 1960, "is not a reflex of any internal class divisions but is shaped by international events. And foreign policy, the expression of politics, is a response to many factors, the most impor

tant of which has been the estimate of Russian intentions . . . the need for containment.

What sort of domestic politics did this acceptance of the primacy of anti-Communist foreign policy imply?

In the West, therefore, there is today a rough consensus among intellectuals on political issues: the acceptance of a Welfare State; the desirability of decentralized power; a system of mixed economy and of political pluralism. In that sense, too, the ideological age has ended.

Both those two highly explicit formulations are taken from the book, published in 1960, which Bell, too, called *The End of Ideology*.

What Bell meant by that was, above all, the end of the ideology of the Left. "By the end of ideology," even his friend Irving Kristol, the editor who had originally published Shils's article of the same title, was constrained to comment, "Mr. Bell appears to mean, above all, the collapse of the socialist ideal."

Bell and his group, in fact, announced the death of ideology somewhat in the way in which the death of royalty used to be announced. "The King is dead," said the courtiers. "Long live the King!"

At one point in his book, he defined what he called "a total ideology":

" . . . an all-inclusive system of comprehensive reality, it is a set of beliefs, infused with passion, and seeks to transform the whole of a way of life. This commitment to ideology—the yearning for a "cause," or the satisfaction of deep moral feelings—is not necessarily the reflection of interests in the shape of ideas. Ideology in this sense is a secular religion. Consciously or not, Daniel Bell was describing the American ideology of the age of consensus. Cause, commitment, system of beliefs and way of life, it was indeed a secular religion.

Confident to the verge of complacency about the perfectibility of American society, anxious to the point of paranoia about the threat of communism—those were the two faces of the consensus mood. Each grew from one aspect of the experience of the 1940s: confidence from economic success, anxiety from the fear of Stalin and the frustrations of power. Historical logic made some form of consensus likely. It was natural that the new prosperity should calm the class antipathies of the depression years. It was normal that the sense of an enemy at the gate should strengthen national unity. And a reaction was predictable after the lacerating politics of the McCarthy period. But the basis for the consensus was something more than a vague mood or a reaction to passing events. The

assumptions on which it was built had an intellectual life and coherence of their own. In barest outline, they can be summarized in the following set of interrelated maxims:

1. The American free-enterprise system is different from the old capitalism. It is democratic. It creates abundance. It has a revolutionary potential for social justice.
2. The key to this potential is production: specifically, increased production, or economic growth. This makes it possible to meet people's needs out of incremental resources. Social conflict over resources between classes (which Marx called "the locomotive of history") therefore becomes obsolete and unnecessary.
3. Thus there is a natural harmony of interests in society. American society is getting more equal. It is in process of abolishing, may even have abolished, social class. Capitalists are being superseded by managers. The workers are becoming members of the middle class.
4. Social problems can be solved like industrial problems: The problem is first identified; programs are designed to solve it, by government enlightened by social science; money and other resources-such as trained people-are then applied to the problem as "inputs"; the outputs are predictable: the problems will be solved.
5. The main threat to this beneficent system comes from the deluded adherents of Marxism. The United States and its allies, the Free World, must therefore expect a prolonged struggle against communism.
6. Quite apart from the threat of communism, it is the duty and destiny of the United States to bring the good tidings of the free-enterprise system to the rest of the world.

The germ of this intellectual system, which by about 1960 had emerged as the dominant American ideology, was a simple yet startling empirical discovery. Capitalism, after all, seemed to work.

In the early 1940s, the economist Joseph Schumpeter, at work on his last book, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, reluctantly came to the conclusion that socialism-a system about which he cherished so few illusions that he expected it to resemble fascism when it came-was inevitable. Capitalism was doomed, he feared. Schumpeter was a conservative, though a highly original one, and he had arrived at this conclusion by his own line of argument. The modern corporation would "socialize the bourgeois mind," destroy the entrepreneurial motivation that was the driving force of capitalism, and thus "eventually kill its own roots." He was at pains to distinguish this position from what he saw as the almost universal

vulgar anticapitalism of his time. "Every writer or speaker hastens to emphasize . . . his aversion to capitalist and his sympathy with anti-capitalist interests."

Well under ten years later, the exact opposite would have been closer to the truth. In the United States (though nowhere else in the world), socialism was utterly discredited. The same transformation could be observed in popular attitudes and in intellectual fashion. In 1942 (the year that Schumpeter's book was published), a poll by Elmo Roper for *Fortune* found that only 40 per cent of respondents opposed socialism, 25 per cent said they were in favor of it, and as many as 35 per cent had an open mind. By 1949, a Gallup poll found that only 15 per cent wanted "to move more in the direction of socialism"; 61 per cent wanted to move in the opposite direction. Making all due allowance for the respondents' possibly vague notion of what socialism means, it was a startling shift, yet not more startling than that of the intellectuals.

As late as the war years, most American economists, led by Alvin Hansen, predicted that capitalism was entering a phase of chronic stagnation. Most other intellectuals took the economists at their word and assumed that the task was to replace capitalism with some more promising system.

Suddenly, in the late 1940s, the moribund system was declared not only alive but healthy. The economic *ancien regime* was acclaimed as the revolutionary harbinger of a brave new world.

In 1949 Daniel Bell wrote an article called "America's Un-Marxist Revolution."

"Keynes, not Marx," wrote Arthur Schlesinger in the same year, "is the prophet of the new radicalism."

"The world revolution of our time is 'made in U.S.A.,'" wrote Peter Drucker, the champion of management, also in 1949. "The true revolutionary principle is the idea of mass production."

And in 1951 the editors of *Fortune* magazine gave to an ambitious, much noticed synthesis of the American Way of Life a title borrowed from Marx and given currency by Trotsky. They called it U.S.A., *the Permanent Revolution*:

There has occurred a great transformation, of which the world as a whole is yet unaware. . . . No important progress whatever can be made in the understanding of America unless the nature of this transformation is grasped. . . . There has been a vast dispersal of ownership and initiative, so that the capitalist system has become intimately bound in with the political system and takes nourishment from its democratic roots. . . . U.S. capitalism is popular capitalism.

At the root of this optimistic new political philosophy, there lay an appropriately optimistic new economic doctrine. It came to be known as the New Economics, though by the time of its triumph, in the 1960s, when its licensed practitioners monopolized the President's Council of Economic Advisers, many of its leading ideas were going on thirty years old.

There were many strands to the New Economics. But the essence of it was the acceptance in the United States of the ideas of John Maynard Keynes, *not* as first received in the 1930s but as modified by American economists in the light of the success of the American economy in the

1940s

The nub of Keynes's teaching was that, contrary to the tenets of classical economics, savings did not necessarily become investment. This was the cause of cyclical depression and of unemployment: left to itself, the capitalist system contained forces that would tend to produce stagnation. To that extent his position was pessimistic. But Keynes was a political economist. He did not think that things should be left to themselves. He believed that governments could cure the kind of deflation that had caused the Great Depression by spending, and if necessary by deficit spending. He actually wrote a long letter to FDR, in early 1938, pleading with him to spend his way out of the recession. The letter was ignored. But after 1945 the university economists succeeded in persuading the more enlightened businessmen, and some politicians, that Keynes was right. Capitalism could be *made* to work. Depression and unemployment were avoidable, and it was up to government to avoid them.

From a conservative standpoint, Schumpeter introduced ideas that matched the new Keynesian orthodoxy better than he would have liked. He stressed the unique character of American capitalism. He emphasized productivity and technological change. He argued that concentration and oligopoly, which most economists had wanted government to destroy by trust busting, actually favored invention and innovation.

Unlike Schumpeter, John Kenneth Galbraith was a Keynesian, and it was he who attempted the inevitable synthesis in *American Capitalism*, published in 1952. Galbraith also started from the observed fact that competition in American corporate capitalism was imperfect. He propounded the theory of what he called "countervailing power." Competition had been supposed to limit private economic power. Well, it didn't. But private power was held in check "by the countervailing power of those who are subject to it." The concentration of industry had brought into existence strong buyers-Sears Roebuck, A & P-to match strong sellers. It had also brought strong unions into existence to match strong employers. Galbraith and Schumpeter

were drawn from different premises and tended toward different conclusions. Yet they shared one common perception: the empirical observation that American capitalism was a success. "It works," said Galbraith shortly on his first page, "and in the years since World War II, quite brilliantly."

There is another fact about the social situation in the United States that has no analogue anywhere else in the world, said Schumpeter in his second edition, published in 1946, . . . , namely the colossal industrial success we are witnessing.

And a few pages later, he italicized a passage that condensed the gist of the new hope and the new pride:

In the United States alone there need not lurk, behind modern programs of social betterment, that fundamental dilemma that everywhere Paralyzes the will of every responsible man, the dilemma between economic progress and immediate increase of the real income of the masses.

In practical terms, the gospel of the New Economics could be translated into exciting propositions. Government can manage the economy by using fiscal and monetary policy. The tyranny of the business cycle, which had brought economic catastrophe and the specter of political upheaval, need no longer be tolerated. Depressions could be a thing of the past.

By changing interest rates and by increasing or decreasing the money supply-technical matters that had the added advantage of being remote from the scrutiny of everyday politics-government could flatten out fluctuations in economic activity.

The economists were emboldened to maintain that these fiscal and monetary controls could be manipulated with such precision-"fine tuning" was the phrase used-that in effect they would be able to fly the economy like an airplane, trimming its speed, course and altitude with tiny movements of the flaps and rudder. That was a later claim. The essential promise of the Keynesian system was that it would allow government to guarantee low and diminishing unemployment without inflation. It could thus banish at a stroke the worst terrors of both liberals and conservatives. At the same time, thus managed, the economy would also be able to deliver growth.

Growth was the second key concept of the new intellectual system, and the link between its strictly economic and its social and political ideas.

We are so accustomed to the idea of economic growth that it comes as a surprise to learn that it was a newer idea than Keynes's discovery of

the way to beat the business cycle. Just as modern biology had to wait for the invention of the microscope and modern astronomy for the perfection of the telescope, the idea of economic growth developed only after precise techniques for measuring the gross national product became available. These were perfected only in the late 1930s, by Professor Simon Kuznets, of the University of Pennsylvania.

It is hardly possible to exaggerate the importance that the new concept assumed in the intellectual system of American liberals in the 1950s: It became the test, the aim, even the justification of free enterprise—the race, the runner and the prize.

The economic historian W. W. Rostow offered an interpretation of modern history as a contest in terms of economic growth—and called it an 'anti-Communist manifesto.'

The political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset came close to making it the chief criterion for judging a political system. "Prolonged effectiveness over a number of years," he suggested in his book *Political Man*, "may give legitimacy to a political system. In the modern world, such effectiveness means primarily constant economic development."

But perhaps the most lyrical description came from Walter Heller, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He called economic growth "the pot of gold and the rainbow."

The liberals did not worship economic growth merely as a golden calf. They saw in it the possibility of solving social problems with the incremental resources created by growth. That will be done, they hoped, without the social conflict that would be inevitable if those resources had to be found by redistributing existing wealth.

This was the hope that both Schumpeter and Galbraith had seen. Brushing aside the pessimists, Schumpeter had dared to predict in 1942 that GNP would reach \$200 billion by 1950. (In the event, he was a pessimist himself: GNP in current dollars reached \$284 billion by 1950.) "The huge mass of available commodities and services that this figure . . . represents," he wrote, "promises a level of satisfaction of economic needs even of the poorest members of society . . . that would eliminate anything that could possibly be described as suffering or want." And of course

Schumpeter was fully aware of the ideological implications. Such a massive creation of new resources could be the key to his central dilemma. It might "annihilate the whole case for socialism so far as it is of a purely economic nature."

What Schumpeter had described as a theoretical possibility in the 1940s had become by the end of the 1950s the "conventional wisdom," and in the 1960s it was to be the foundation of public economic policy.

"Production has eliminated the more acute tensions associated with inequality," Galbraith wrote in *The Affluent Society*, a book whose title was to become a cliché to an extent that did little credit to the subtlety of its argument. "Increasing aggregate output is an alternative to redistribution."

The same idea was spelled out in the stonecutter's prose of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's drafting committee:

A healthy and expanding private economy means far more in terms of individual and family well-being than any reasonable expansion of government service and social programs.

"Far greater gains were to be made by fighting to enlarge the size of the economic pie," one of President Johnson's economic advisers wrote, "than by pressing proposals to increase equity and efficiency in sharing the pie." "When firing on all eight cylinders," said another, to an approving audience of bankers, "our economy is a mighty engine of social progress." In theory, there could be little arguing with that proposition. Its truth in practice would depend on a number of questions: one's definition of social progress, the extent to which social progress could be guaranteed to follow from the application of resources, and the propensity of government to devote incremental resources to other purposes, such as fighting wars. But the relevant point here is that it was a proposition ideally suited to be one of the main props of an ideology of liberal conservatism. It offered to the liberals the hope of progress and a feeling of benevolence, and to the conservatives a vista of business prosperity and an unthreatened *status quo*.

Looking back on the decade, Paul Samuelson touched in a single paragraph all the essential elements of his generation's ideology: the optimism, the confidence that more means better, the faith in the harmony of interests between capitalism and social progress, the cankerous sense that all this must be related to the competition with communism:

"The New Economics really does work," he wrote in November 1968 on the eve of the Democrats' fall from power and of the sharpest fall in the stock market and the severest economic problems for a generation:

Wall Street knows it. Main Street, which has been enjoying 92 months of advancing sales, knows it. The accountants who have been chalking up record profits know it . . . and so do the school nurses who measure the heights and weights of this generation. . . . You can bet that the statisticians of the Kremlin know it.

No tenet of the consensus was more widely held than the idea that revolutionary American capitalism had abolished the working class, or-as

approximately the same thought was sometimes expressed—that everybody in America was middle class now or that American society was rapidly approaching economic equality.

A small encyclopedia of statements to this effect can be garnered from the historians, the social scientists and the journalists of the time. "The organizing concept of American society," wrote Peter Drucker, "has been that of social mobility . . . which denies the existence of classes."

"The union," said the editors of *Fortune*, "has made the worker, to an amazing degree, a middle class member of a middle class society." "New Dealism," said historian Eric Goldman, ". . . found that it had created a nation of the middle class."

Yet another historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, boldly dated the abolition of the proletariat rather earlier than some would say the proletariat came into existence. He cited the observations of a Polish Communist visitor to confirm "a fact that has puzzled socialists and communists for a century: the American workman is an expectant capitalist, not a class-conscious proletarian."

Frederick L. Allen, on the other hand, wrote a best seller to prove that "the big change" in American life between 1900 and 1950 was the "democratization of our economic system."

One's first reaction is to yield to the cumulative weight of so many impassioned opinions and to conclude . . . what? For even the most cursory reading of such a miscellany raises questions. Had class stratification never existed in the United States, as Drucker seemed to think? But, then, can one imagine social mobility without class? Mobility between what? Had there never been an American proletariat, as Professor Morison seemed to believe? Or had there been a "big change"? Perhaps the proletariat had ceased to exist. But, then, which agency had earned the credit for this transformation? "Industrial enterprise," as some claimed? *Fortune's* unions? Or Goldman's "New Dealism"? Corporate business, labor and government may work in harmony. But they are hardly synonyms.

A second reading of this miscellany of texts and of the other evidence suggests two more-modest conclusions:

- 1) A great many Americans, moved by the ideal of equality but perhaps also by reluctance to admit what was seen as a Marxist analysis of their own society, passionately wanted to believe that the concept of class was alien to the United States.

It suited business to believe this. It suited labor. It suited intellectuals, and it suited the press. It suited liberals, and it suited conservatives. Who was left to argue otherwise?

- 2) Nevertheless, something *had* happened. In the profound transformations of the 1940s the class structure of American society and its implications for politics had changed in complex and confusing ways—though not to the point of making "everybody middle class," still less of invalidating class analysis.

The abolition of the working class, in fact, was a myth. Like most myths, it did have a certain basis in fact. But it oversimplified and distorted what had really happened. It transformed a modest and temporary decline in inequality into a social revolution. At the same time, it confused the idea that many Americans were far better off than they had been, which was true, with the claim that poorer Americans had made dramatic gains at the expense of the better off, which was at best dubious.

Two developments probably explain the strength of this myth. The real performance of the economy during and after World War II made it possible to believe it. And the triumph of the liberals over the Left made a lot of people want to believe it.

The prosperity of the 1940s really was widespread. Mass unemployment ended, after twelve years. Dollar wages, especially for workers in such strongly unionized (and highly visible) industries as steel, automobiles, and rubber, rose dramatically. But real wages for most workers rose too.

There was also a highly obvious equalization of *consumption*, which looked like an equalization of wealth, all the more so because it was concentrated in the most visible forms of consumption: clothes, for example, and cars. Nylon stockings were a favorite example with economists and journalists alike. They were introduced in September 1939, the month Europe went to war. Ten years later, they were still a luxury in Europe. But in the United States, production in 1949 was 543 million pairs: every typist could afford to be dressed like a film star from ankle to thigh. The parking lots full of shiny, late-model automobiles outside factories were much commented upon; and "everybody" could afford the new electrical household gadgets.

In other ways, too, it really did look as though the rich were getting poorer and the poor richer. The rich complained bitterly about the income tax, and in fact the maximum rate rose from 54 per cent in 1932 to 91 per cent in the 1950s. Meanwhile, the after-taxes income of families in the lower income brackets was rising faster than that of the better-off families, and the income of the wealthiest 5 per cent actually dropped. John Kenneth Galbraith quoted the tax table in *The Affluent Society*, and it certainly conveyed an impression of affluence that was not only growing but also being more equally distributed.

Between 1941 and 1950, measuring in dollars of 1950 purchasing power, the income of the highest 5 per cent of all families, after income taxes, actually fell. Thereafter, the lower you descended on the income scale, the higher the gains.

Highest fifth:	up 8%
Second fifth:	up 16%
Third fifth:	up 24%
Fourth fifth:	up 37%
Lowest fifth:	up 42%

There is a pleasing regularity about that series that would seem to clinch the argument. But, unfortunately, there are several ways of looking at the distribution of income. The whole study of income and wealth, in fact, bristles with treacherous problems for the statistician. He must make up his mind whether different figures from different sources, the only ones available for different periods, are really comparable or not; whether to measure income before or after taxes; what allowance, if any, to make for tax evasion by the rich and for "transfer payments" out of taxes made by government to the poor. And unless he is most unusually naive, he will be uncomfortably aware that these are not only technical but political decisions.

The best way to measure the distribution of income is to measure what proportion of the total national income has gone at different times to different fractions of the population, ranged in order from the richest to the poorest.

When the historian Gabriel Kolko did this, he came up with a result that

Despite the obvious increase in prosperity since the abysmal years of the Great Depression, the basic distribution of income and wealth is essentially the same now as it was in 1939, or even 1910. Most low-income groups live substantially better today, but even though their real wages have mounted, their percentage of the national income has not

changed.  
Kolko computed the percentage of national personal income received, before taxes, by each tenth of the population by income, over the whole period from 1910 to 1959. He found that while the share of the highest tenth had dropped, it had dropped only from 33.9 per cent in 1910 to 28.9 per cent in 1959. And over the same period, the share of the national income that went to the whole lower half of the population dropped from 27 per cent to 23 per cent. It is certainly hard to talk about the abolition

of the proletariat, or even of economic democratization, in reference to a society in which the whole poorer half of the population has been getting relatively poorer.

The same distribution tables also suggest what has actually occurred to give the illusion of social progress. The pattern is best described by comparing the proportions of the national income that went at five different dates to three fractions of the population: the rich, represented by the top tenth of all incomes; the middle class, represented by the next four tenths, taken together; the poor, represented by the lower half. (I should perhaps say that I am not suggesting that the terms "the rich," "the poor" and the "middle class" correspond to those fractions; I am merely using a convenient shorthand for three groups.)

In 1929, before the Depression and the New Deal, the top tenth received 39 per cent of the national income. The middle class got exactly the same share. And the poor got the rest: 22 per cent.

In 1941, after twelve years of massive unemployment, the poor's share had fallen still further, to 19 per cent. The share of the rich had also fallen, by five percentage points, to 34 per cent. The whole gain, at the expense of both rich and poor, had gone to the "middle class."

In 1945, after four decisive years of war, boom and full employment, the poor had . . . recovered to exactly the point where they stood before the Depression: 22 per cent. The rich had lost another five percentage points, to 29 per cent. The middle class took just short of half the national income: 49 per cent.

And in 1949 and 1959, the years of the Permanent Revolution and the Affluent Society? Nothing had changed. That was the remarkable thing. To be precise, the top tenth gained one percentage point in 1949 and had lost it again by 1959. The middle four tenths together dropped a point in 1949, and stayed on 48 per cent in 1959. The poor gained one point, moving to 23 per cent by 1959. That was all.

The fact that the distribution of income in America is not equal, and is not noticeably getting any more equal, is now generally accepted. In a study for the joint Economic Committee of Congress published in 1972, Lester C. Thurow and Robert E. B. Lucas of M.I.T. showed that the distribution of income from 1947 to 1969 had remained approximately constant: "Everybody's income (male, female, majority, minority, rich and poor) had been rising at approximately the same rate, leaving their ratios unaffected." An analysis of the 1970 census data by Peter Henle, a Library of Congress statistician, reported what he called "a continuing slow trend towards inequality." The commonsense conclusion would seem to be that there has been essentially no change in the distribution of income in the United States since World War II.

There has been only one rather sharp change in the twentieth century. This was the gain made between 1929 and 1945 by the second and third tenths of the population at the expense of the first. Their combined share went up from 22.1 per cent in 1929 to 29 per cent in 1945 and has since remained roughly constant. The redistribution of wealth, then, such as it was, seems to have been over by 1945. And it was a redistribution not from the rich to the poor, but from the very best off to the next best off. The second and third tenths of the income scale at that time would have included some executives, managers, professionals, some higher-paid clerical workers, and the very best-paid craft and industrial workers in the strongest unions. A shift of 10 per cent of the national income in their direction scarcely constituted either the abolition of the proletariat or the coming of the universal middle class. Yet, by a kind of intellectual parallax error, that was how it was seen.

The mood of the country may have been relatively complacent in the late fifties and the early sixties. But this was not, as the liberal analysis assumed, because the condition of the American people left so little to be desired. It was because a number of historical factors had weakened the political unity and consciousness of the working class and deprived it of the means to perceive its own interests and to defend them.

One of these factors was the way the idea of equality had evolved in the United States. Historically, the actual condition of American society with the two major exceptions of black and red Americans had probably always more closely approached a condition of equality than European society. The availability of land, the unexploited resources of a "new" country of continental extent, the absence-or near absence-of an established feudal upper class with a vested interest in maintaining inequality, all tended to minimize inequality in practice. Yet in theory Americans had always been less concerned than Europeans with equality of condition. The paradox is only apparent. Because of the relative abundance of their environment, Americans could afford to think equality of condition less important than equality of opportunity. In most other cultures, people knew all too well that there would never be enough opportunities to go round.

The historian David Potter argued powerfully in his 1954 essay *People of Plenty* that almost every distinctive aspect of American life, from child rearing to political institutions, could be traced to the pervasive influence of economic abundance:

The very meaning of the term "equality" reflects this influence. . . . A European, advocating equality, might very well mean that all men should occupy positions that are roughly on the same level in wealth, power or enviability. But the American, with his emphasis on equality of

opportunity, has never conceived of it in this sense. He has traditionally expected to find a gamut ranging from rags to riches, from tramps to millionaires. . . . In America, "liberty," meaning "freedom to grasp opportunity," and "equality," also meaning "freedom to grasp opportunity," have become almost synonymous.

To a European mind, to equate equality with a freedom to grasp opportunity which guarantees an abundance of tramps and millionaires . . . comes close to equating equality with inequality. It is in any case a habit of mind whose tendency is to inculcate conservative social attitudes. It has tended to make working-class Americans suspicious of appeals to class solidarity. It has enhanced the appeal of the free-enterprise system, which has certainly been a lot more successful at creating opportunities than at creating equality of condition. It explains why people should not be particularly concerned about the failure to redistribute income so long as everyone was getting richer. And it does partially account for the fact that domestic discontent played so small a part in the politics of the fifties.

There was a second group of reasons why American politics failed to reflect class interests or class consciousness. It is true, as Arthur Schlesinger has written, that "in spite of the current myth that class conflicts in America were a fiendish invention of Franklin Roosevelt, classes have, in fact, played a basic part in American political life from the beginning." But the horizontal class lines in American society have always been crosshatched by deep-cut vertical divisions: ethnic, sectional, and racial. Ultimately, these can be traced back to two of the great facts that set American history apart from that of all the other developed Western nations: slavery and immigration. But there were also reasons why their combined impact blurred the reality of class conflict at this particular moment in American history.

One reason was obvious.

The American working class was divided, because the feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group often took priority over an individual's economic interests or over any sense of class solidarity. In political terms, this frequently meant that the votes of ethnically conscious low-income voters could be recruited to support politicians who, once in office, only fitfully defended the social and economic interests of their constituency. This was notoriously true of the big-city machines, which, in a decadent form, were still one of the typical forms of political organization in the fifties and, for example, played a part in the election of President Kennedy in 1960. But by the fifties the machine no longer fought for the bread-and-butter interests of its immigrant supporters as it had in its classic phase. Instead, traditional ethnic loyalties were played upon at election time to enlist the support of ethnic blocs on behalf of policies that fre-

quently countered the real interests of lower-class voters. Ethnic antics at election time only briefly interrupted the politicians' eager co-operation with the dominant business interests.

The historical fact of immigration had another, less obvious effect. To the extent that Americans are a self-chosen people, their patriotism has always been a more self-conscious emotion than the more visceral tribal feelings of other nations. The immigrant's patriotism has tended to be compounded in roughly equal proportions of status anxiety-the desire to be assimilated as a good American-and of gratitude for his share in the abundance of American life.

Both the abundance and the anxiety were far more visible in the fifties than they had been in the thirties. In the immigrant, this desire to prove oneself a good American had often been in conflict with the impulse to protect the social and economic interests of the lower class. By the fifties, a full generation after the end of mass immigration, the drive for full assimilation was as strong as ever in second- and third-generation Americans; economic needs, as a result of the postwar prosperity, seemed far less urgent. Again, the effect was to increase the conservatism of that considerable proportion of the working class that came of relatively "new" immigrant descent. For this large group, the free-enterprise system was seen as Americanism; social criticism, class **solidarity** and radical politics were rejected as "un-American."

If ethnic factors dating back to the days of mass immigration, and the preoccupation with equality of opportunity, both helped to obscure the working class's interests from its own members, the sectional and racial basis of the political system derived from the struggle over slavery was responsible for the fact that no great party of the Left was available to represent those interests. In so far as working-class interests were to be effectively represented within the two-party system, they must be represented by the Democrats. But the Democratic Party under Harry Truman and Adlai Stevenson was no party of the Left: It was not only the party of the immigrant, the Negro, the Roman Catholic, the Jew, the **city** dweller, and the industrial worker; it was also the party of the rural, conservative, nativist South, an element that not only accounted for a third and more of its strength in Congress but held the balance of power in presidential elections.

During the Depression, the New Deal had come closer to being a party of the Left, because the contradiction at the heart of the Democracy was partially concealed by the sheer economic need of the South. Southern Democrats could vote for and work with Roosevelt because they knew the South desperately needed the federal government's economic help. Southerners in Congress might be racial and therefore constitutional conser

vatives, willing to fight the national Democratic leadership if they must in defense of the South's peculiar social system; but in the New Deal period, that system was not under direct attack. The immediate issues for the South were economic. So long as that remained true, southern "economic liberals"-which often meant men who were not liberals at all except when it came to accepting federal largess-could work happily enough with northern Democrats.

The prosperity of the years after 1941, and in particular the improvement in the economic situation of the southern white working class as a result of industrialization, diminished this incentive for southern Democrats to cooperate with the national party. In spite of much picturesque mythology about their populist fervor and the wool-hats and galluses of their disciples, most of the leading Southerners in Congress in the fifties were essentially responsive to the business elites of the South. While they continued to support some liberal programs, they were not about to allow the Democratic Party to evolve into a national party of the Left. The more racial issues supplanted economic ones in the forefront of their constituents' concern, as they did increasingly after the *Brown* decision in 1954, the more the sectional dilemma made any such evolution of the Democratic Party unlikely.

The Left, in short, had by the late 1950s virtually ceased to count in American political life. But this fateful eclipse was masked by the triumph of the liberals.

To draw a distinction between the Left and the liberals may sound sectarian or obscure. It is not. It is vital to understanding American politics in the age of the consensus, and therefore to understanding what happened after it.

When I say that the Left had almost ceased to exist, I am not thinking of the socialist Left, though that had indeed withered into insignificance long before the collapse of Henry Wallace's Progressive Party, in 1948.

What I mean by the "Left" is any broad, organized political force holding as a principle the need for far-reaching social and institutional change and consistently upholding the interests of the disadvantaged the interests of the disadvantaged the society. The liberals were never against the most powerful groups in such a force.

What I mean by the liberals is those who subscribed to the ideology I have described: the ideology that held that American capitalism was a revolutionary force for social change, that economic growth was supremely good because it obviated the need for redistribution and social conflict, that class had no place in American politics. Not only are those not the ideas of

the Left; at the theoretical level, they provide a sophisticated rationale for avoiding fundamental change. In practice, the liberals were almost always more concerned about distinguishing themselves from the Left than about distinguishing themselves from conservatives.

The confusion between the liberals and the Left arose partly, perhaps, because, in the 1950s, "liberal" was often used as a euphemism for "Left." In the McCarthy era, to call someone a man of the Left carried a whiff of treason with it; to call him a liberal was a graceful alternative.

A deeper reason for the confusion lay in the fact that in the very parts of American society that might have been expected to hold out as the bastions of the Left, the liberals had triumphed. Organized labor, the intelligentsia, and the universities had become the citadels of what was in effect a conservative liberalism.

There were three important developments in the American labor movement in the 1940s, said the editors of *Fortune*: First was the renaissance of the craft-based, politically conservative American Federation of Labor. Fighting back after a period in which it had seemed destined to be swamped by the industrial unions, the AFL doubled its membership in the 1940s and almost recovered parity with the CIO. The second was the "anti-ideological" trend in the CIO, as *Fortune* put it, in the Daniel Bell sense, meaning the trend toward the liberal ideology. And the third was the decline of the left wing in the labor movement generally.

In the forties, the big industrial unions deliberately concentrated on collective bargaining, as opposed to either political activity or drives to increase their membership. They succeeded in winning high wages and fringe packages of social benefits-for their members. But the proportion of union members to the total work force, which had increased sharply in the thirties and the early forties, began a long decline after 1950. By the 1970s, no more than 15 million out of more than 80 million American workers were organized by unions affiliated to the AFL/CIO. Most lowpaid workers remain unorganized.

Just as industrial unionism really got going only after the Supreme Court upheld the Wagner Act, in 1937, so two legislative defeats seriously impeded labor's power to organize the unorganized and increased the temptation for the leadership to sit back and enjoy the power and emoluments of its existing strongholds, not to mention the Florida sunshine. Each followed a successful campaign by labor's enemies to capitalize politically on unfavorable news exposure.

The first defeat was the enactment of the Taft-Hartley Law, in 1947, and in particular of its notorious Section 14b, which gave the states the power to pass labor laws that in effect nullified federal law. Taft-Hartley

would probably not have passed had the press not given unsympathetic prominence to the series of major postwar strikes, symbolized in the UAW's 113-day strike against General Motors over New Year's 1946. The Republicans recaptured the House of Representatives that fall with the slogan: "Had enough?" Enough had.

"Labor"-that unreal collectivity-had itself more to blame for the second setback: the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, which might with equal justice have been called the Kennedy-Griffin Act, since so much of its preparation was done by Senator John F. Kennedy on the Senate Labor Committee.

The background to Landrum-Griffin was the series of exposures of union racketeering that began with the 1952 New York State Crime Commission report on Joe Ryan of the Longshoremen. In 1957, the McClellan Committee, with Robert Kennedy as a young tiger on the staff, began its hearings on the Teamsters. By 1959, George Meany was saying ruefully: "We thought we knew a few things about trade union corruption, but we didn't know the half of it. . . ." Gallup findings show that public approval of labor unions has never subsequently recovered the level (76 per cent) it stood at before the McClellan Committee hearings began. By late 1959, under the influence of this barrage of evidence that some unions were little better than organized crime, Gallup recorded another result that would have been truly astonishing to any European, or to any American in the thirties: almost three times as many Americans (41 per cent) thought Big Labor carried the greatest threat to the economy as thought Big Business did (15 per cent).

When the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations finally bit the bullet and merged, in 1955, one of the formal articles of the merger declared:

the merged federation shall constitutionally affirm its determination to protect the American trade union movement from any and all corrupt influence and from the undermining efforts of Communist agencies and all others who are opposed to the basic principles of our democracy. . . .

It was understandable that the new organization to represent American labor should put itself on record as determined to oppose communism. After all, the vast majority of American workers had always been devoutly anti-Communist. Yet it was unfortunate that in the very years when the American labor movement was losing the battle to organize the general mass of American workers, and so ultimately condemning itself to be no more than a pressure group for one particular fraction of the population, it should have thrown itself so very enthusiastically into the diversion of anti-communism.

In 1946-47, with the help of AFL funds supplied by Meany, the ex-Communist Jay Lovestone was instrumental in breaking strikes called by the French and the Italian Communist unions. By 1948, Lovestone's top agent in Europe, Irving Brown, was paying \$1 million in secret U. S. Government money to gangster elements in the French dockers' union in Marseilles. A long and progressively more compromising involvement with the clandestine side of U.S. foreign policy had begun.

By the mid-1960s, the AFL-CIO was showing itself a good deal more adventurous and active in fighting communism abroad than it was in organizing unorganized workers in the U.S.A. But George Meany had always belonged to the more conservative wing of the movement. What is more surprising is that anti-communism became the shibboleth of the originally militant CIO wing to almost the same extent. At the time of the merger, Walter Reuther, the most radical and socially conscious labor leader of his generation, allowed the AFL to take the two top places in the new organization, confident that he would be the ultimate legatee of unity. Reuther had started on the left of the United Auto Workers. He was a socialist, and he spent a year in the Soviet Union in the early thirties. But when he finally emerged as the leader of the union, in the 1947 union elections, it was as the leader of the anti-communist faction, and his victory was generally reported, with approval, as "a swing to the Right." By 1948 Reuther was attacking leftist trade union officials as "colonial agents of a foreign government." At this same time, the future Supreme Court justice and member of the Johnson Cabinet Arthur Goldberg replaced the leftist Lee Pressman as general counsel of the CIO-an archetypal liberal, who was to end up defending the Vietnam War to the United Nations, replacing a man of the Left. It is striking how many of the most prominent liberals of the fifties and sixties-Reuther, Goldberg, Hubert Humphrey-first came to prominence by attacking not the Right but the Left.

"Though intellectuals have not created the labor movement," wrote Joseph Schumpeter, "they have worked it up into something that differs substantially from what it would have been without them." He was right. But in the fifties the role of the intellectual was not so much to radicalize the labor movement, as Schumpeter supposed, as to divert a considerable proportion of its energies and those of what would otherwise have been the American Left, from the feelings and needs of union members and the real though complex problems of American society to a crusade against communism.

Daniel Bell has written of the men who were the intellectual mentors of his generation-he mentions among others Lionel Trilling, Sidney

Hook, Edmund Wilson, Reinhold Niebuhr, James T. Farrell, Richard Wright and Max Lerner-that the reason why there had been no revolt against them was because they had led their own counterrevolt. It was a perceptive remark; conceivably, more so than he realized. He went on:

They had their Iliad and their Odyssey, were iconistic and iconoclastic. They were intense, horatory [hortatory?], naive, simplistic and passionate, but after Moscow trials and the Soviet-Nazi pact, disenchanted and reflective; and from them and their experiences we have inherited the key terms which dominate discourse today: irony, paradox, ambiguity and complexity.

They had their Iliad, too, those heroes of the thirties, "And drunk delight of battle with their peers, / Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy." But now, in the fifties, they had come home and would, "sitting well in order to smite the sounding furrows" of irony, paradox, complexity and other safely non-political abstractions. Soon a younger generation of oarsmen-Bell enumerates himself, Harvey Swados, Hofstadter, Saul Bellow, Leslie Fiedler and Alfred Kazin-would be smiting furrows of ambiguity in a similarly dynamic but well-disciplined manner.

They have had their Iliad and their Odyssey, but unfortunately not yet their Homer. The files of the Partisan Review, Dissent, Commentary and the rest over a third of a century are a rich archive, in which one day, perhaps, some intellectual historian may find the materials for a satisfying account of exactly how, and exactly why, a large part of the intelligentsia of New York first flirted with revolutionary Marxism and then repented.

Until then, we can keep our suspicions that rather more complex causes were at work than are allowed for in the received version of naive passion, abruptly turned off by the Moscow trials and the Nazi-Soviet pact. How much did the fragmentation of the Left into what were scarcely more than personal cliques, the Fieldites, the Johnsonites, the Zamites, the Schachtmanites, contribute to its paralysis? How important was the sheer anti-intellectual stupidity of the Communist Party?

Or are we paying too much attention to the factors that may have repelled the intellectuals from the Left and not enough to those that attracted them to liberalism? to the reawakened pride in America, engage at last against fascism, prospering and victorious? Didn't Leslie Fiedler, after a visit to Italy in 1952, pronounce to the readers of Partisan Review-yes, Partisan Review, which had been born to bring a new hope from Europe to the land of the capitalist Abgang-that "a hundred years after the Manifesto, the specter that is haunting Europe is-Gary Cooper!" Didn't Lerner end his book with Emerson's proud and boastful hope: "We think

our civilization is near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cockcrowing and the morning star"? The last chapter of Kazin's *On Native Ground* opens with a quotation from Abigail Adams: "Do you know that European birds have not half the melody of ours?"

It may be that this optimistic nationalism had a special appeal to intellectuals who were, in such notable proportion, themselves the second and third-generation children of immigrants, inheritors of the dream. It may be that, like other Americans of the same generation, they felt a need to assimilate under the pressure of the great nativist rebellion that was McCarthyism, to prove themselves good Americans and better than the book burners.

Whatever the exact causes, the intellectual ballast shifted. In 1932 those who endorsed the Communist Party's candidate for President of the United States included Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, James T. Farrell, Langston Hughes, Theodore Dreiser, Erskine Caldwell, Lincoln Steffens, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter, Edmund Wilson, Nathanael West and Malcolm Cowley. Twenty years later, scarcely an intellectual with a shred of reputation could be found even to raise a voice against the outlawing of that same party. The change is measured, too, by the trajectory, in hardly more than a decade, of *Partisan Review*, the most admired highbrow periodical of the time, from dutiful Stalinism through Trotskyite heresy to the bleakest Cold War anti-communist orthodoxy.

Yet it is striking, in retrospect, how central to that supposedly apolitical culture anti-communism became. The formation of Americans for Democratic Action, excluding Communists, Arthur Schlesinger thought, marked "the watershed at which American liberalism began to base itself once again on a solid conception of man and of history." Of American history? No: for Schlesinger, liberalism had virtually been created by anticommunism, apparently. "The growing necessity of checking Communism," he wrote, "by developing some constructive alternative speeded the clarification of liberal ideas in 1947 and 1948."

Long before that, anti-communism had played a key part in defining the specifically American intellectual culture. Sociology was the characteristic discipline of the liberal pundits. And academic sociology had always been more or less explicitly a critique of Marxism. Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, to name only the three greatest masters of the discipline, were all explicit anti-Marxists. Even more interesting, Talcott Parsons, the most admired American sociologist and the *chef d'ecole* if there was one, consciously turned to Pareto as an alternative to Marx.

The crisis of the 1930s [Alvin Gouldner has written] led some American academicians to look to European academic sociology as a de

fense against the Marxism that was recently penetrating American campuses.

. . . A group of Harvard scholars . . . , which included Parsons, George Homans and Crane Brinton, formed a seminar on Vilfredo Pareto, which began to meet in the fall of 1932, and continued to meet until 1934. Also attending were R. K. Merton . . . and Clyde Kluckhohn. The political implications of the circle's interest in Pareto were expressed by George Homans, who candidly acknowledged . . . "I felt during the Thirties I was under personal attack, above all from the Marxists. I was ready to believe Pareto because he provided me with a defense."

After World War II, in almost every department of intellectual life, the doctrine of "American exceptionalism" revived. At the same time, utilitarian doctrines, stressing that morality in politics was an illusion, undercut the moralistic basis of left-wing politics. Sociology, history, economics, political science, even theology in the hands of Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, followed parallel paths, rejecting those who argued for radical change and emphasizing the virtues of "the American way."

What role remains for the men of the Left? Seymour Martin Upset asked in *Political Man*. Not to advocate change in the society of his own country, if he lived in "the West." Even socialists must agree, Upset thought, that complete socialism was dangerous and that Marxism was an outmoded doctrine.

Did it follow that the Left was totally obsolete? Upset thought not. "The leftist intellectual, the trade union leader, and the socialist politician" could still make themselves useful-abroad, where society had not yet evolved to such a fortunate state of perfection as in the United States. Such disaffected persons, no longer required at home, could "communicate and work with non-Communist revolutionaries in the Orient and Africa at the same time that they accept the fact"-it sounds like a polite way of saying "on the condition that they accept the fact"="that serious ideological controversies have ended at home."

In the culminating chapter, that is, of one of the most admired works of political science that the age of the liberal consensus produced, it was argued as a conclusion of high academic seriousness that the only use for dissenters from the liberal ideology was as its propagandists abroad. It was a proposition that wrapped Irving Brown's transactions with the Corsican milieu of Marseilles in *ex post facto* respectability and gave a postdated endorsement to those intellectuals who were to try to win the hearts and minds of Vietnam.

In the great American universities, the twenty years after World War II are beginning to be remembered with nostalgia as a Golden Age. En-



rollments were multiplying. Endowments were accumulating. Funds from the federal and state governments and from private foundations were becoming available on a scale undreamed of. The salaries and the social status of professors were rising. They were certainly higher, both absolutely and in relation to those of the business world, than they had been since before World War I, and perhaps higher than they had ever been, at least for men sensible enough to have specialized in some useful subject that would earn them consultancy fees from large corporations, from government, or from the armed services. At a time when the U. S. Air Force was paying (through the RAND Corporation) for a sociological study of the toilet training of the French, even that qualification need not stand in the way of a man of imagination.

Life was still Spartan in the fifties, of course, even in Cambridge, at Berkeley or at Columbia, compared with the splendors to come. But life was also a good deal more soothing and pleasant than it was to be later. Academic affluence had the charm of novelty. Installing the first generation of IBM computers was the most fun. It was pleasant for men whose wives had typed out their dissertations on the kitchen table to become directors of research institutes, commanding generals of armies of researchers. There was a certain temptation to use these logistical resources to attack intellectual problems somewhat as General Eisenhower had overcome the Wehrmacht, by the methodical application of sheer weight. Yet the most influential books of the fifties were, with some exceptions, short, entertainingly written, and the work of individuals.

By the fifties, the academic profession was drawing talent from a wider catchment area. At one end of the income scale, able men of prosperous families who would earlier have gone into business were attracted to the universities in the Depression; at the other, a growing proportion of the population was now graduating from college. Finally, tens of thousands of gifted refugees from Europe leavened American academic life. But the essential reason for the intellectual excitement that blossomed in the best American universities in the late fifties was neither academic influence nor increased competition. It came from the feeling that, for the first time, the academic world seemed thoroughly integrated into the life and purposes of the nation.

To begin with, this may have owed something to the achievement of the atomic scientists. When the mightiest arm of American power was the product of research science, it was hard to dismiss any research as impractical dreaming. Physicists, mathematicians, engineers, were among the first to be accepted by government. But the social scientists were not far behind.

(Indeed, one branch of social science, economics, had long moved with assurance in the world of business as well as in Washington.) The

earliest big government research contracts dealt with such "nuts-and-bolts" questions as the design of unmanned satellites or the nose cones of missiles. But as early as 1948 Nathan Leites was calling on the academic techniques of textual and literary criticism to describe "The Operational Code of Politburo." It was not long before sociologists, political scientists, even historians, were being called into service by the government—all of the social sciences received from the relationship an injection of adrenalin, as well as of money.

This was the broader context in which the system of thought I have called the liberal ideology was fitted together and came to predominate not only in the universities but in government and to some extent in politics. The interaction, however, was reciprocal. The intellectuals tended to be influential only in proportion as their ideas fitted in with the needs, fears or preconceptions of their new patrons. They tended to be forced into the role of technicians. The "hot" topics of specialization were those most immediately related to the government's most urgent perplexity, or at best to the tactics of its political opponents. Either way, that generally recommended those studies *which* assumed the permanence and the paramourcy of the Cold War.

"It is remarkable," wrote Henry Kissinger in 1962, "that during a decade of crisis few fundamental criticisms of American policy have been offered. We have not reached an impasse because the wrong alternative was chosen in a 'Great Debate: The alternatives have rarely been properly defined." It was indeed remarkable. The Pentagon Papers are a sustained commentary on that observation. Yet it is strange that Henry Kissinger, the future virtuoso of the Carrot and the Stick, should find it hard to understand why the alternatives did not get defined. For if the fear of being investigated had shown the intellectuals the stick during the first half of the fifties, the hope of being consulted had shown them the carrot in the second. Alternatives were not what the government wanted. It wanted solutions. It expected to get them from men who displayed a maximum of technical ingenuity with a minimum of dissent.

The liberal ideology equipped the United States with an elaborately interrelated structure of coherent and plausible working assumptions, all poised like an inverted pyramid on two fundamental assumptions, both of which happened to be diametrically wrong.

American capitalism had not, it turned out, eliminated the possibility of serious social conflict at home. Nor was the most urgent danger to the nation from communism abroad. On the contrary, the United States stood on the eve of exceptional social turmoil. Abroad, unified Communist

power was breaking up, confronting the world with all the dangers of a period of fragmentation and "détente."

This error was to be pitilessly exposed, and that soon enough. Yet the effect of the liberal consensus was to be even more disastrous than the particular mistaken assumptions on which it was based. It condemned the United States to face the real dangers for too long without any fundamental debate. Thanks to the liberal triumph, the powerful emotions and interests that always work for conservative policies were not balanced by equally powerful forces and principles of the Left. Instead, they were opposed by a liberalism that was in effect hardly to be distinguished from a more sophisticated and less resolute conservatism.

## 5 The

### *Presidency*

" . . . the White House, on which an impatient world waited for miracles."

Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1960*, last sentence.

"Somehow we must learn to govern our people from an office that is secular and not from a court that is sanctified."

George E. Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency (1970)*, last sentence.

The years of the consensus were also the high summer of the cult of the presidency. And this was natural, for the same forces that had forged the consensus endowed the modern presidency with its prestige and power.

Whatever its deeper origins, in political terms the consensus could be seen as a kind of gigantic deal. The Republicans and all but the most unreconstructed of conservatives accepted the new economics of government intervention, because they understood that government would have to accept responsibility for the well-being of the economy. We are all Keynesians now, said even conservative economists. Democrats and liberals, in return, accepted the new foreign policy of global containment. Indeed, as we have seen, it was to a considerable extent the liberals and the Democrats who framed that policy, or at least who sold it to the country. There was no mystery about the reasons for this drift of policy toward the center. Conservatives had accepted the need for government intervention because in the economic crisis of the 1930s the great majority of the electorate looked to government for help. Liberals had accepted an active, anti-Communist foreign policy because, in the world crisis of the 1940s,