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Others

THE BALANCE OF POWER IN SOCIETY

BY

FRANK TANNENBAUM

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IN their zeal for bedeviling the world, the Communists are confounding the traditional democrats by taking over their slogans and insisting that they (the Communists) are more "democratic" than the traditional democrats. They promise the individual a higher standard of living, a greater share of the goods of this world, a true "people's peace", and a surer felicity. The democrats of the older tradition can only answer that the Communists' offer is spurious and the promise false, that under the new dispensation the individual would be poorer in worldly goods and lose his freedom in the bargain. But if the argument seems to put the traditional democrats on the defensive, it is because they and the Communists as well draw their inspiration from a common source of ideas and beliefs—only that the Communists insist that the traditional democrats are betraying the faith. The difficulty lies in the fact that they both aspire to felicity, both believe in continuous progress, both have the perfectibility of man as an inherent assumption, and both assume that the perfect world is identical with a static one. The economists' ideal of "perfect competition " and the Communists' ideal of a " classless society " are bastard children of the same aspiration for an immutable social order. The hope of the perfect state and the perfect man lies in both traditional democratic and Communist prescription, for in both there is the assumption of a completely malleable universe, so pliable to the human will that it can be forced to yield to the design men have framed for it. The traditional democrats would achieve their ends by individual, the Communists by collective, action. But such an assumption of a world completely malleable to the will of man is neither consonant with the nature of society, nor an adequate accounting of the rôle man plays within it.

Society is not completely malleable to the hand of man. On the contrary, society is possessed by a series of irreducible institutions, perennial through time, that in effect both describe man and define the basic rôle he plays. Even in his most primitive state man is always and only found in a community. We do not know him in isolation. More than that, we always find him possessed of a language, for without it he could not symbolize the universe about him, and if he could not do that he would not be a man. But he is not merely a member of a community. The antithesis between man and society is, like so many other intellectual constructions, a delusive and, in fact, a mischievous simplification; for every society, even the most primitive, is always possessed of a number of institutions, organic to the society itself. The family, the church and the state, to mention only the most obvious, are inherent in the pattern, inclusive in their claim upon the individual, and each in turn the visible structuring of an incommensurable experience. Man, as we know him, is therefore not merely the product of society, he is the very child of a complex institutional system that conditions his survival and sets the stage for the drama of life itself. These institutions, prevailing through time, manifest themselves in almost infinitely variable forms, but always fulfill the same rôle—the structuring of incommensurable human experiences and needs, and giving them a visible rôle in the culture. The family, in all of its innumerable designs and complexities, has always fulfilled the task of rearing the children, educating and preparing them for incorporation into the larger community. The community may have been savage, primitive or civilized, simple or complex, sedentary or wandering, organized into small villages or great nations; but always a well-defined series of relationships, responsibilities, commitments and expectancies defined how and by whom the children were to be cared for, brought up and instructed. The family may have varied in form and size, but it always fulfilled the same function in relation to the society. The very survival of the society itself was conditioned by the performance of these responsibilities.

If the family has persisted through time, so has the church. The church is here defined as that series of experiences, beliefs, attitudes, taboos and practices that, taken together, give man a sense of identity within the universe, for he has always had an implicit or explicit description of the world and of his place in it and has always had a pattern of behavior that symbolized that relationship. The religious, like the family, experience is incommensurable with any other. The mystical Chichicastanango Indian, who ascends the church steps, sometimes on his knees, swinging an incense burner, and, once inside, bows before his special saint, spends an hour talking to him, arguing with him, pleading, begging, or, in angry gesticulation, almost shouting, and sometimes in excitement throwing the rose petals he has brought, up at the saint as if in defiance, then humbly kissing the saint's feet, lighting a number of candles in front of him, and, as if that were not enough, asking permission from one or another group of Indians, who are kneeling and praying in some specially sacred spot, to join them in their devotion—that Indian can find only in the church the embodiment of his faith. This sense of humility, isolation and loneliness in the world can find strength and peace only through a constant series of acts and practices that make for a sense of continuous contact between man and the unknown. The church has fulfilled this rôle in the life of man from the beginning, and, in the nature of the case, this function could be fulfilled by no other institutions. Like the family, it has survived a thousand different cultures, and in each of them in varying form fulfilled the same inevitable and organic need—of giving life meaning by making man a part of the universe.

If the family and the church have proved perennial in the experience of man, so has the state. In one or another of a thousand variables, the state has performed the same basic function—the defense of the community against outside enemies, and the maintenance of a semblance of peace internally. The effectiveness of the state has varied, but the expectancy, the habit, and the implicit or explicit structuring of society to perform these ends have been conditions of social survival. The inner patterning that defined the responsibility for the fulfillment of these necessary tasks has called into being a great variety of types of state, but, regardless of the structure, the essential need and experience which it embodied have remained the same.

If the institutions have always been multiple and proved irreducible, it is because the experiences they embody are incommensurable. They have been, however, not merely multiple and irreducible, but also competitive. Each of the institutions in its own inner logic tends to be all-embracing, laying claim to the entire man, and showing an impelling tendency to assume all responsibility for the governance of society. A glance at the rôle of any one of these institutions under conditions that favored its full development will illustrate the issue in hand. If we take the European church at the height of its power, how vast is its rôle, and how varied its responsibilities. What was there that did not fall within the province of the church? From the time the child was born—or even before that, because marriage could take place only within the church—to the time the man was buried, because he could be buried only by the church and in a cemetery sanctified by the church, the individual lived within the orbit it prescribed. His beliefs were inculcated by the church; his morals, ethics, politics, law, theology and philosophy came to him at the hands of the church. In his social life, the church defined his holidays, saints' days, and prescribed the form and character of the festivals; it influenced the games he played, the dress he wore, the food he ate. In his economic life, it imposed a tax (one-tenth) upon his income, it defined the permissible and nonpermissible in business activity—such as limiting the rate of interest—it influenced property distribution by abstracting part of the property from the ordinary tax laws, by accumulating property and removing it from private ownership and from the market, by collecting money for the building of churches, monasteries, cathedrals and convents. In law, it claimed through the development of the canon law an increasing rôle in defining and punishing a great variety of civil and criminal acts. In politics it took on the rôle of crowning kings and freeing subjects of their allegiance to the crown—thus actually playing the part performed by a revolution. It was the great patron of the arts—painting and music were influenced by the church and performed for its greater glory. The church set the style in architecture. Its many cloisters, monasteries and colleges became the centers of learning, and all learned men were beholden to it, and lived their scholarly life within its folds, both physically and spiritually. The church, too, was the great source of social welfare: the hospitals were under its control and staffed by special groups of trained nurses organized in religious orders; it supported orphan asylums and homes for the aged; the unfortunate—the weak, the blind, the lame and the poor—found refuge under its roof and succor in its establishments. Nothing in the society went on outside the orbit of the church.

If we turn now to examine the contemporary state, it is clear that it lays claim to all the mundane responsibilities, prerogatives and powers once exercised by the church. The state, like the church, casts a protective mantle over the individual before he is born by insisting that it alone can legitimatize a child by marriage, and by imposing, normally, very serious handicaps upon the illegitimate. Marriage can be performed only by persons licensed by the state and upon the payment of a fee legally prescribed. The child can be attended at his birth only by a midwife, nurse or doctor licensed by the state; and the state assumes powers over the child in case of neglect or incompetence of the parents. In certain extreme cases it can take the child from its parents and raise it at public expense, farm it out, or permit its adoption by foster parents. At a tender age the state compels the child's attendance in school, prescribes the course of study, trains, licenses and pays the teachers, provides the buildings where the instruction is given, chooses the textbooks the child may read, maintains a clinic to guard the child's health, and may even provide food, not to mention transportation to and from the school. It specifies and attempts to control the ideas in which the child may be reared and the essential loyalties with which he is to be endowed.

The state, like the church in an older day, influences what the individual may or may not do, the amount he can earn, the profession he may follow. The range, number and variety of rules by which the state shapes the economic activities of the individual are almost beyond enumeration. They include the kinds of vocational, professional and cultural training offered in schools, the multiple systems of licensing, degrees and examinations which determine competence for the earning of a living as a doctor, teacher, lawyer, engineer, or chauffeur—for one cannot even drive a car without an examination and a special license. The state licenses the butcher, baker and candlestick maker; and the beggar must have his official tag before he can exhort the passer-by to remember the virtue of Christian charity. The state influences and limits what a man may earn by open and hidden systems of taxation, such as tariffs, quotas, income and consumers' taxes. It limits or encourages production, it grants patents, it controls prices, it prescribes the rate of interest, it withholds or grants credit, and it interferes in the commercial relations between men by prescribing forms of contracts and by forcing upon the banks specified policies intimately affecting the economic relations between men. It sets limits to the transfer of property from parents to children by inheritance taxes, fixes wages and hours of labor, directly or indirectly influences prices, prescribes the permissible in food distribution, thus affecting the diet by a whole scheme of regulations governing the production, sale and distribution of foods and drugs.

So, too, in the social life of the individual, it sets limits to the permissible in styles and behavior by laws prescribing what is or is not decent; it censors movies, plays and the printed word; it licenses public halls and amusement places; it watches over family relations, interferes between parents and children, and between man and wife; it attempts to control gambling, drinking and extra-legal sex relations. The universities have fallen to the state; so have the hospitals, infirmaries, orphan asylums and homes for the aged. Even charity has become a function of the state on a large scale, and the poor, the weak, the halt and the blind, once the concern of the church, have now become a special province for the exercise of those efficiencies and skills that come under the heading of a " Department of Public Welfare ".

The state, too, like the church of old has become a patron of the arts; and public buildings are decorated, sometimes with surprising results, by artists hired at public expense. The state provides public concerts, supports the opera, and finances national, state or city orchestras. In many places, the entire range of aesthetic and artistic education is in the hands of the state.

This cataloguing could go on indefinitely, for there is nothing in the life of man upon which the sovereign state does not lay a claim, or with which it does not in effect interfere. It is perfectly clear that what the church took for its province in the past, the state has now taken for its own; and modern means of communication and control have probably increased the "efficiency" and minuteness of the state's interferences.

But these supervisory and all-embracing claims upon man have been, and in places still are, exercised by the family, where the family is powerful enough. When conditions have been propitious, the family, as in China, in certain parts of Brazil, in Scotland, or even in Kentucky, has had an inclusive influence in shaping the destiny of the individual. The powerful family, as we know it, in a hundred different places and at different times has claimed for itself a complete control of the individual. Such a family is always large, possessed of innumerable relatives, associates and dependents. Through intermarriage the family name is spread over an entire province, and none there are who dispute it in its own territory. If the state is strong enough to name a governor for the province, he is always a member of the family. The local militia is in the hands of the family, the judge is a relative, and the tax gatherer, if he dare show his face, closely related. All of the economic activity of the region is in the family's hands. The priest is some promising and likely son purposely trained to fill that post to the family's great honor. The church is built on family ground, at family expense, and the priest receives his stipend at the family's hands.

The stranger is an outsider, an itinerant soul who lives in the area or passes through the family's domain by special sufferance. The law, justice, order and social disciplines are within the hands of the family, and younger children are sent to school, married, put to vocations, and allotted their places as a matter of course. The more distant relatives and retainers find their rôle within the pattern and accept it as part of the immutable rule of life itself. In innumerable instances, in many parts of the world, membership in such a family was all the honor a man needed, and it exacted and received a devotion as great as that ever received by church or state. There was a time, and not so very long ago, when one would rather be a member of one of the great Scottish clans—a Douglas, for instance—than a native of Scotland itself. Just as the church and state have at different times encompassed the individual from cradle to the grave, and prescribed his spiritual as well as his material destiny, so the family, too, in its turn has played the same historical rôle.

These perennial institutions, structured about the incommensurable experiences of man, all in their turn claim him as their own. He is a member of each of them and cannot escape them. The very content of life is found within their framework, and their claim upon it is in each case a total claim. Quite without deliberate intent, these institutions in turn, in the unplanned insistence to fulfill the need represented by the unique experience around which they are structured, tend to embrace all of the life of man. They compete not merely for his loyalty, but also for the exercise of the innumerable responsibilities and functions, and the satisfaction of the innumerable needs and aspirations that the life of man generates in a living world. The difficulty lies in the fact that the field, though it be complex, is limited, and that whatever one institution performs, and takes upon itself to perform, is at the expense of another. When the state takes over the educational system, it takes it away from the church; and when it takes upon itself the right to compel the schooling of the children, it takes the power of decision away from the family. What is true of education is true of marriage, what is true of sumptuary rules is true of the care of the young and the old. Every time the state assumes a new responsibility previously exercised by another institution, it is at the expense of that other institution in a material as well as a spiritual sense. As the state grows strong, the church and the family grow relatively weak; and as the church or family is strong, the other institutions are relatively weak.

These institutions, all at the service of man, are competitive with each other, and the conflict between them is, in fact, irremediable. Institutional friction and instability are, therefore, the normal state of society, and the hope of peace and quietude is an idle dream. Competition, imbalance and friction are not merely continuous phenomena in society, but in fact are evidences of vitality and "normality". They reveal a healthy competitive institutional relationship in which no one is permitted completely to dominate the scene; for, in the circumstances, the peace represented by the dominion of one institution over all of the others is unhealthy, is evidence of lack of resilience on the part of the other institutions, and is a sure sign of a spreading tyranny. The formal peace represented by the power of one institution over all of the others is synonymous with death. It is no accident that Hitler undermined the family and the church, and stripped them of all those functions that described them as family or church. It is no accident, because tyranny is the child of the preponderance of one institution over all of the others. Complete suppression and destruction of the other institutions have never occurred, and, in the nature of the case, cannot occur, for the experiences these institutions represent are both irreducible and incommensurable. But if these institutions cannot be completely suppressed, there is ample historical evidence that one or another can be so weakened that resulting imbalance manifests itself as tyranny, and ends—as it always has—in violence, convulsion, revolution and, in the current scene, in war between nations. The weakening of the other institutions normal to a healthy society seems to be accompanied by a series of political passions and moral perversions that distort the simple values consistent with a balanced social order, and the consequent disorder seems to become all-embracing.

But if instability, competition and friction between the institutions are inevitable and continuous, what happens to the theory of progress? It is evident that the state progresses at the expense of the church and the family, the church at the expense of the state and the family, and the family at the expense of the other two institutions here under consideration. There is no way in which all of the institutions can grow—that is, increase the range of their activities and influences at the same time. The contemporary "progress" of the state and its increasing absorption of the activities and the functions of the other institutions natural to man and society are steadily reducing the rôle of these other institutions in society.

What is now said about the state could in times past have been said about either the church or the family. The balance between these institutions is always uneasy and always changing. Social "progress" as an all-embracing concept becomes a snare and a delusion. The easy self-delusion men indulge in—the happy tendency to assume that what men do now is better than what they did before, that contemporary slogans have some peculiar excellencies in them denied to slogans of yesteryear—makes it almost impossible for men whose heads have been filled from childhood with the gospel of "progress" to face the possibility that the "progress" they are making is at the expense of other institutions equally important to social well-being, and equally dear to the hearts of men.

The difficulty lies even deeper than this: it lies in the fact that for many generations men have assumed that "progress" is linear, is always going up, and is in its very nature all-inclusive and endless in time. It is another instance of the taking over of a seemingly acceptable description of what seems to occur in the sciences—the progressive accumulation of knowledge, skills, and insight into the ways of nature, and the cumulative competence to do better today the task done yesterday. The increasing effectiveness of weapons of war from the wooden club through the bow and arrow, the pike, the gun, the cannon, the machine gun, and the atomic bomb, each more efficient and more destructive, up to a point where the use of the atomic bomb might "progress" the very race of men from the face of the earth can be spoken of as linear progress in an endless chain toward infinite success. So too, perhaps, it can be said of the course of invention in transportation, where men began on foot, tamed and mounted a beast of burden, invented a wheel and constructed a carriage, a bicycle, an automobile, and more recently an airplane, each in turn increasing the distance he could span and reducing the time required to span it, until contemporary speeds are such that there is a possibility that a projectile hurled into space will travel with such speed that it will have reached its destination in a time span so small that its arrival and departure will seem simultaneous. This, too, may perhaps be described as linear progress, infinitely cumulative. The natural and comprehensible carrying over of these notions has obscured the issue that, material changes apart, institutional growth occurs only in a competitive institutional setting, and takes place only at the expense of other equally important social institutions. The concept, if it is to be used at all—and, in the Western world it would seem almost impossible not to use it—can only be made to mean movement toward equilibrium among social institutions. If each of the basic institutions is structured about an essential and noncommensurable experience, then the good life is possible only in a world where men can live at peace within all of the institutions organic to society, and progress could then come to mean progress in the method of reducing the area of imbalance that is always present. Though perfect equilibrium is not achievable, a working equilibrium is possible; and attainment of that might well be considered the great task of statesmanship, the true purpose of government, and the major problem of political theory and social ethics.

If the idea of progress becomes subject to profound modifications in the light of the irreducible friction between the basic social institutions, the nature of the rôle of property, so closely identified with the idea of social progress, is similarly subject to reconsideration. When the church is strong and growing stronger, then it accumulates, and has to accumulate, an increasing share of the wealth and income of the community. The building of churches, monasteries, hospitals, universities, orphanages and homes for the aged, their support and their staffing, and the hundred other obligations and functions which naturally fall to the church, when the church is a great and growing institution, call of necessity for a cumulative control of the available capital and income of the community. When the state grows powerful, it proceeds to absorb an increasing share of the property and takes it away from the other institutions. It takes it away from the church—by force if necessary—by diverting income from church sources, by syphoning off, through licensing and other means, of income that might and would have gone to the church, and, finally, it acquires it from the family, by taxation in a thousand ways—from a tax on cigarettes to inheritance taxes. If the state is going to support the schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, old-age pensions and many other activities, it can do it only by securing for itself an increasing proportion of both the property and the income of the community. There is, in fact, no alternative to the process except not to assume such multiple responsibilities.

This process is, of course, also visible in the history of the family. Where the family is powerful and preponderant, it is rich and holds for itself all of the property that it can. There is seldom such a thing as a powerful and poor family. Power goes with responsibility, and responsibility with the exercise of infinitely variable functions; and that rule is conditioned by the possession of property and income. Property is instrumental to the institution. It is not a thing in itself. But if the major historical rôle of property is instrumental to the institution, then the economic interpretation of history, the theory of the class struggle, and the concept of dialectical materialism are all subject to reconsideration.

The continuous technological changes are important in their bearing upon the relative rôle of the various institutions, facilitating their growth or decline. While technology is not the only source of social change in the sense of enhancing the powers of growth of one institution against another—as, for instance, communication has clearly facilitated the growth of the power of the modern state—it is still a very important source of such change. To that extent, at least, it would seem true to say that a changing technology, leading to a changing position of the institutions in regard to each other, also affects the transfer of property from one institution to another; for the exercise of responsibility involves the accumulation of property, and the accumulation of property facilitates the increasing exercise of responsibility. This is, however, a very different thing from saying that a changing technology induces a changing class structure and a new kind of class struggle.

The very idea of the class struggle is subject to revision; for the concept is a verbal formula derived from older ideas inherent in European theology and has nothing to do with the description of industrial society, though it may have some reference to a more static agricultural community. It is a verbal construct fitting a preconceived notion of the nature of "progress", and has within it the commitment to historical inevitability. It is really a part of European theology translated into mundane terms.

If the idea of a horizontal division of society into classes is an inadequate description of social conflict, this does not deny that conflict exists both between the institutions and within them. Between the institutions the conflict is moral, psychological and political, for the guidance and governance of the whole man. Internally, within the institutions there is a many-sided contention which might be considered a conflict of numerous interests. But these conflicts are continuous and irreducible. There is the difference in the family between the old and the young, the well and the sick, the children and the parents, and the strife embraces all of the issues that life presents. Nor is there any way of writing finis to this internal strain. In the church the laity and the clergy, the upper hierarchy and the parish priesthood, and the different orders of the church as well are continously warring with each other. Here again the conflict is philosophical, moral and political, and not merely economic. There is always the question of how much and what kind of responsibility different individuals and groups within the institution should exercise, and on what moral ground their power can be justified.

What is true of the family and the church is also evident within the state. The citizens are critical of the government, oppose its tax policies, resent conscription, and flout price control. The friction between the citizens and the state is continuous. Within the government itself, the civil servants are resentful of the elected officials, the younger bureaucrats condemn the older ones, and the departments compete for power, for an increasing share of the budget and for public influence. No department ever feels that it can fulfill its proper task with the money and personnel available to it. But the conflict here is not merely economic. It is also moral, political and ideological. Strife is within the institutions, but it is in the nature of a family quarrel.

In great part, this is the case in the contemporary struggle between labor and capital. The habit derived from Christian theology of stating differences in absolute terms has obscured the issues involved, and what is in effect an internal institutional conflict has been defined as a class war, predestined in its outcome. An internal institutional quarrel has been endowed with the qualities of a battle between good and evil, and the end of the drama has been so weighted that the good must win in the end as it does in fact in the Christian theology from which the original concept is derived in the first instance. The perennial quarrel, however, is really between both labor and capital within the larger institutions of the economy and the other institutions, that is, the family (parents and children), the church (laity and clergy) and the state (citizens and government). As the institution of the economy (labor and capital) has grown strong in recent times, it has been at the expense of the state, the family and the church. The issue has been obscured because the economy (labor and capital), unlike the family, the church and the state, has come to the fore as a separate institution rather late in human experience.

cf my Aristotle

That fact, explicable historically, does not modify the basic character of the social structure or the inherent frictions. It merely adds another institution to the conflict, and by that much complicates the existing competition among them. The economy as an institution has achieved an independent rôle only in recent times because for untold centuries the activities which characterize it were immersed within the other institutions. From the very beginning—that is, from what we know of savage and primitive peoples—we find a complex body of accepted rules defining both the ownership of property and the performance of specified tasks. One might speak of an entire body of social legislation embodied in taboos denying the rights and duties of the members of the community, but the fulfillment of these obligations took place within the family structure, within the church, or within the state. It required many centuries, in most instances, before labor, ownership, commerce and industry were divorced from the other institutions and became separate activities governed by rules apart from those that governed the other institutions. Even in highly organized societies, like those of Greece and Rome, and the European cultures before the sixteenth century, and even later, the economy, if recognized as a separate and going concern, was but a fraction of the total economic activity of the society; for the greater part of labor, commerce, industry and ownership was still within the ordinary operational behavior of the other institutions.

The precipitation of the economy as a going concern, separate and apart, on a scale so broad as to enable it to mature into an institution in its own right, is largely the cumulative outcome of the Industrial Revolution, and it accomplished that by gradually taking from the other institutions functions which had hitherto been carried out within their orbit, and by increasing the number of men and women who lived a greater proportion of their lives, either as laborers, business men, industrialists or capitalists, outside of the other institutions, and beyond the rules natural to the other institutions. In fact, the mores of the other institutions in many instances did not apply to the activities of this new institution, and they did not apply partly, at least, because of the speed with which men and women were being loosened from their older moorings.

As it developed, this institution soon displayed all of the characteristics of the older ones. It began to apply sanctions and to demand loyalties all of its own. It developed a new series of motives for human activity. It took over, as far as it could, the education of men, women and children. It exacted special obligations and introduced new rules. It challenged the state, the family and the church, wherever these interfered with its own activities, and claimed for itself, as it grew stronger, rights and prerogatives inconsistent with the other institutions. Long before labor unions became powerful, it exacted from the individual and from the other institutions very much the same kind of moral commitments that labor is exacting from them at present. The large industry, corporation, trust and cartel, when they felt themselves powerful enough, challenged the other institutions to a point where it became a matter of self-defense on their part to find some means of controlling and confining the prerogatives which were now being insisted upon and exercised by this newcomer in the field of institutional structure. Long before labor unions became strong within the new institutions, the state, the church and the family waged a campaign and placed numerous restrictions upon it. The nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century are replete with the record of the agitation and resulting legislation in the name of the other institutions to restrict and put limits upon the now self-conscious and imperious economy.

The rise of the trade unions is in its essence an internal movement within the economy, just as much as a rebellion of the citizens against the state, or the laity against the church. From the point of view of the other institutions, their only concern with the economy as an institution is that production shall continue at an acceptable price and quality, and that in the process the economy shall not attempt to absorb the powers and activities essential to their ministration to man as a moral and psychological being. In the nature of the case, however, the quarrel continues today when the unions are strong, as it did yesterday when the industry was strong and the unions were weak; for the new institution makes the same claims against the others in the name of labor that it did previously in the name of capital. The unions now exact loyalty from their members as the employers did yesterday, the unions challenge the state, they expel members (just as the employers discharged them) with the same dire effect upon the individual where the union has a monopoly. The unions participate in politics, interfere with the family in numerous ways, attack the church if it does not support them (as the employers did yesterday), control income by setting wages, influence promotion through seniority (as did the employers), impose a tax upon their members, regulate the members' holidays and vacations, and influence their politics, ideas and ethics. The unions have become the patrons of " proletarian " art, literature and music, and, as in the other institutions, they have a whole process of supplying the reading materials and the ideas that their members are expected to acquire.

It will be said that the quarrel between capital and labor is chiefly economic. That is not really the basic quarrel, for the standard of living is ultimately determined by production, and if production is great enough it must, in an industrial economy, be distributed. If it is not distributed there is no market; if there is no market there can be no demand, and if there is no demand there can be no production. The quarrel between capital and labor within the economy is not primarily over production; it is over control. It is a conflict to determine what elements within the institution are to have the greatest influence in shaping the direction of the institution—a struggle that is characteristic of the other institutions, notably both the state and the church. The internal quarrel within the economy will go on for a long time; forever, in fact, even if the intensity of the passions that have been generated dies down, and even if the issues over which the quarrel rages will change. The real conflict is not between capital and labor. It is between the economy (capital and labor) and the other institutions, especially the state; for, if the economy continues as it has in recent years, it may take upon itself an increasing number of the powers, responsibilities and prerogatives now exercised by the state, and, if it does, it will behave toward all of the other institutions with the same arbitrariness and tyranny that both the church and the state have shown, when they were preponderant, against the other institutions.

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ambiguous

The social conflict is not the result of a dichotomy, as the traditional class-conflict theory would have it, between two forces that have an inevitable battle to fight, with a given side predestined to win and, in the process, to destroy the other. It is rather a conflict between multiple forces in which none can really win the battle—a battle to which no finis can be written—for conflict is part of the process of institutional life itself, and the end of the conflict would really signify the end of life itself.

That these broad issues in human society should have been reduced to the simple formula of a dichotomy between good and evil is one of the strange and remarkable chapters in the intellectual history of western Europe in recent times. The Marxian formula is a European product, steeped in European theology, that probably could not have originated in any culture except one in which there was acceptance, implicit or explicit, of the belief that between God and the Devil there is an eternal war, that God is destined to win the battle in the end, that no compromise with evil is possible, that the end can be achieved only by a cataclysm, and that, when the battle is finally over, history itself will terminate, for in a classless society, as in heaven, there can be no conflict and therefore no history. This quite unconscious commitment to a division of the universe into absolutes—labor and capital—with no basis of compromise between them, with labor as the predestined victor, as if destiny itself had conspired for that very purpose, with the revolution taking the place of the cataclysm, and with communist societies living in eternal felicity forever—progress itself seemingly coming to an end, except as continuous felicity—is really a translation to the mundane world of the underlying theology of the Christian doctrine, and calling it economics and science.

If this cultural setting conditioned the very theme, the Hegelian dialectic supplied an important intellectual tool to dialectical materialism. But dialectical materialism is only dialectical nonsense. The average Marxian adopting dialectical materialism to the use of the class war has assumed a universe in which any idea or force can have only one consequence, and that consequence its opposite—that is, assumed that all of the rest of nature is a vacuum, and only the thesis and the antithesis exist, waiting for the synthesis—the synthesis which in Marxian terms became the classless society. What is this but the transfer to the social sciences of such dichotomies from the moral field as right and wrong, good and evil, and from the physical sciences such notions as night and day, black and white, hot and cold, and the assumption that, in like fashion, just two opposites rule in all social phenomena? But the facts are completely different.

The consequences of any movement, idea or invention are beyond present conjecture or measurement, nor is there any way of deciding which of the many influences are likely to prove most significant. It would, for instance, be impossible either to enumerate or to describe with any certainty all the consequences of even so recent and innocent an invention as the automobile.

A universe in which there are only two opposite forces, one the product of the other, waiting for the synthesis, is a figment of the imagination, has no base in reality, and falsifies the nature of the world it would describe. The facts are completely the reverse. The forces of the world are numerous, complex and intertwined, and none there are so wise as to be able to untangle the one force that will reshape all of life. There is, in fact, no one force, process or movement. Each item is but a thread in a complex weave, tied in with all of the others. The synthesis need not be waited for, since it occurs each day, and the world is different with every sunrise—that is, the balance between the basic institutions is always shifting, and every event has its part in the changing process. In addition to its fallacy of assuming a vacuum wherein the thesis and the antithesis can work out their destiny, this notion suffers from the implicit idea that the synthesis, when it occurs, produces a state of perpetual rest. Like the doctrine of the class struggle which leans so heavily upon it, dialectical materialism is weighted with the wish for eternal rest—that is death.

If, then, an institutional analysis of society is incompatible with the concepts of dialectical materialism, and the idea of the class struggle, it also calls in question a whole series of political doctrines resting upon the antithesis of man and society that has for so long a time bedeviled political theory. There is need, in view of the above, for reconsideration of the doctrine of evolution as applied to society, of the concept of the harmony of interests, of the philosophy of inherent rights, of the principle of utility, and of the current belief that the nation is the great organizing principle. Instead, it follows that the great desideratum is the achievement of an approximate, even if ever-changing, equilibrium among the conflicting institutions. Strife is accepted as normal and as an evidence of social health, and, therefore, as a social good. It denies to any institution the power completely to destroy the other institutions, therefore putting a limit upon its ambitions to secure absolute dominion and absolute peace, which is here identified with tyranny. If the impossible should happen and one institution destroyed the others, it would have to assume their rôle, for they are structured about an incommensurable experience, and, therefore, willy-nilly re-create the divisions and strains which it sought to eliminate. Compromise becomes the true rule of politics. No interest can be absolutely denied, no victory can be absolutely complete. All majorities become temporary, all reforms become conditional upon the survival of active opposition, and, by the nature of the case, all government comes to be concerned with the details of the relationships among institutions.

Revolution is therefore the result of the excessive power of one institution. In a well-balanced society, where the institutions keep each other in check, man lives in comparative peace. His great problems are relative, his conflicts are over details, and the opponents live together as friends, belong to the same club, go to the same church, and marry into the same families. But as soon as one of the institutions, be it the state, the church, the family or the economy, becomes so strong as seemingly to threaten the very survival of the others, then the issues cease to be petty, capable of compromise, and the arguments become preludes to civil wars and revolutions. The contentions between the partisans of one or another institution take on an ideological character, the contrasts between them seem absolute, and the petty quarels become symbolic of the greater conflict. People begin to talk as if the end were in sight, as if doom were awaiting them at the next turn, and hope of peace—the older peace—fades, and with it tolerance, gentleness and human sympathy. Life ceases to seem important or to have any special value. The cause, whatever it may be, or whatever its name, takes precedence over all else, and men make ready for death—either their own or that of their enemies—as if the earth were not sufficiently broad to contain them both.

Civil war and revolution come almost as a relief, for now it seems that the issues will be finally settled, for all time. In that situation there is no compromise, and rebellion, revolution and civil war are a logical, inevitable, and supposedly necessary consequence of the claims to absolutism in the name of one of these institutional interests. Some sort of equilibrium is ultimately reëstablished among the various forces at play, and life can go on again in a normal way—with petty quarrels over immediate issues, and nothing seems so profoundly tragic as to require the destruction of those who disagree with you.

It is, of course, true that all of the institutions have this germ of over-all sovereignty in them; but, if the opposition is effective, then society can live on indefinitely in peaceful friction, in a world which seems to be going nowhere, and which seems to have no all-dominant philosophy or faith, no impassioned ideal that drives it beyond human reason and beyond human frailty, and gives some of its leaders the assumption of acting like gods, of acting for eternity, of being moved by voices and intuition to compel men to accept the new faith in the state or the church or the economy at any cost, at any sacrifice.

The road to social peace is the balance of the social institutions, and a wise statesman would strengthen those institutions that seemed to be losing ground, even if he were not addicted to them; for the only way to peace in this world of fallible human nature is to keep all human institutions relatively strong, but none too strong, relatively weak, but not so weak as to despair of their survival. It is thus only that peaceful irritation and strife, so essential to social and individual sanity, can be maintained.

For this purpose democracy is the natural vehicle, for it is essentially a process rather than a doctrine. It is a way of evaluating human experience and bringing it to bear upon the issues at hand. The sense of meaning and insight each man's life represents reflects a unique view of the universe. The sum of these views becomes the source determining government policy. The fact that the individual experiences are frequently contradictory and their sense of meaning incompatible with that derived from other experiences gives the democratic process its proper rôle. The process is, in fact, the patterning together of all the contradictions of life's experience, and by trial and error discovering what meaning and direction the basic conflict reveals. The government is, therefore, the funnel for all of these values, that is, the sense of direction implicit in the total social experience. The lack of certainty that may be revealed is but an evidence of the inner contradictions, and the changing policy resulting from changing experience is both the necessary and essential method of democracy. The chief function of government is to help keep the balance. At best, it would be a neutral instrumentality representing all of the institutions and their total impact upon society. It would effectuate a daily compromise between them.

Society, however, is not merely composed of a number of separate institutions in constant conflict with each other. It also consists of men who are members of all of these institutions, each of whom reflects in his character, beliefs and ambitions the variable imprint that life's experience has given him. He does not merely live in a number of institutions, he really lives in a society made up of these institutions. But the institutions themselves contain innumerable groups and individuals whose experience is variable, whose needs are private, and whose ends are particular. Society is, therefore, the framework for all their effort, and they, each in turn, seek to mold the social structure to their private, group or institutional ends. The individual, the group or the institution may be assertive and purposeful, but society is neither one nor the other. It is the sum of all the past and present forces at play, of the ambitions in operation, of all the movements in conflict. Society is the recipient as well as the mold, but the mold gives the content a sort of inner cohesion. It is not just a vacuum. It contains the residue of all the past experience. This residue is the ethos, and every society has a distinguishable ethos of its own. Society is, therefore, not something formless, rootless and uncrystallized, or just put together of a number of institutions. On the contrary, while it has no purpose or direction of itself, it does have a content derived from the past labors of uncounted human strivings, of hopes achieved, and of failures. This content, this ethos, becomes the frame for the present and future activities of all its members, all its groups, all its institutions; for, without attempting to define the ethos of the time, it does in its turn define the objectives and gives direction to the will and labors of all the men and institutions composing the society.

Neither men nor institutions labor in a moral vacuum. If they did, they would labor to no purpose at all. Life in a world without an ethos would be completely futile. The ethos is neither the law nor the written word, it is neither the faith nor the prophecy: it is the underlying sense of proportion and propriety that gives the law, the written word, the faith and the prophecy what cogency they may have. The ethos is, therefore, larger than any specific doctrine or formula, than all of the unconsciously asserted formulae taken together. This is an instance where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

It is not true that men are cognizant of the good end to be served by society as is implicit in Aristotle's dictum. If it had a recognizable end it would have a sense of direction, but the only sense of direction in any society is represented by the conflicting ends of its component members. To speak, therefore, of society as established for, or as possessed of, purpose, or as aiming at any objective, is to impute to a going concern, with special emphasis, values that are already there. But the implicit value system, the ethos, is a result of an infinitely variable experience. The true well-being of a society, therefore, lies in diversity rather than in identity of interests. The greater the variety of groups, the richer is the community and the more certain of continuous harmony. The harmony best suited to a society is one which comes from many-sided inner tensions, strains, conflicts and disagreements. Where disagreement is universal, men can agree only on particulars, and where men can really quarrel only about particulars they have too many things in common to tear the community apart. Divergence of interests within the community, in as many-sided and conflicting forces as possible, is the condition of healthy controversy and social peace. It is a fundamental error to attempt to secure unanimity in all things, or even in many things. Agreement by a working majority, yes, but even here that agreement is best which is only temporary and which is achieved for varying reasons. In society, unanimity and death are synonymous. Conflict, strife, divergence, difference of interest and opinion over many things for many reasons, and in varying degrees of intensity, are the conditions of social peace. The conflicting processes of democracy are consistent with and essentially a part of the stresses and strains of life itself.

FRANK TANNENBAUM

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