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AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

by

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IN the decade and a half since the end of World War II those who have written about political ideas in America have been mainly concerned to re-establish the continuities in ideology that were lost by the rise of Italian and German Fascism. But if the Fascists were defeated in the war, the Russian territorial expansion, the creation of Communist satellite states, and the international revolutionary energy of Communist parties has presented another problem of similar proportions. Though some economists predicted a depression immediately after the war, America has moved instead rather steadily in an economic area of high business activity, high profits, high wages, inflation, and high taxation. It is in an atmosphere of imperial prosperity that the intellectuals have discussed political ideas, cultural problems in America, and how to handle Communists both at home and abroad. In this setting, there has been a constant effort at the reevaluation of American history, and the circumstances under which American institutions were formed. Our intellectuals have searched, therefore, for the roots of institutions knowing that the past is prologue to the future.

But political thought, or theory, as the case may be, is in America rather a peripheral subject. It blends into the discussion of policy and the criticism of notable personalities. There is still much borrowing of systematic ideas from Europe and the writings of European scholars in America continue as in the past. The most notable of such works in recent times is Arnold Brecht, *Political Theory; The Foundations of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (1959). It is a systematic work in the Continental tradition of the last century. Contributions to purely theoretical work have been made by Leo Strauss, and others have published theoretical papers in *Nomos*, edited by C. J. Friedrich for the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy. During the period scholars have written descriptively of ideas in action in practical politics. More especially liberal intellectuals have sought their

roots in the times of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, and they have sought to show that the New Deal was a logical outcome of a previous liberal and democratic tradition. The writing on Franklin D. Roosevelt has been voluminous and enthusiastic. Historical writing by H. S. Commager, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Marvin Meyers, and others, may be regarded as the front line of the liberal crusade. Indeed, one may say that the ideological description of political behaviour stems clearly from the tradition of V. L. Parrington's liberal treatment of American literature. The revaluation of American history extends back to the colonial period, and to John Locke. The Puritans, for example, have been rescued from the blight of oppressive narrow-mindedness to become intellectual forebears of liberty and democracy. The re-assessment of the New England mind has been a large undertaking, inspired not a little by the work of Perry Miller.

II

What have been the main issues and the more significant controversies in the interpretation of the American tradition during the last ten or twelve years?

(1) While liberalism has been on the offensive in the interpretation of American history, what was first called in England "the New Conservatism" has also emerged in the United States.

(2) Social scientists seem to have recovered their belief in progress, democracy, and science. In general, there has been a combination of the progressivism of the last century with the twentieth-century scientific study of society.

(3) The new world-position of the United States has made necessary some theoretical perception of international politics.

(4) The most bitterly contested issue has been that of the civil liberties of Communists and Negroes. The civil rights of members of religious bodies seems to be less an issue, and since the decision of *Zorach v. Clauston* (1952) a workable system of religious education in the public schools seems to be a matter of local choice. The late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy remains an issue as the publication of works of L. B. Bozell and W. F. Buckley in his defence in 1954, and the attack by Richard Rovere in 1959 will show.

(5) A large volume of writing has been produced in defence of the American economy. Socialist and progressive criticism

of capitalism has become recessive, and the general acceptance of capitalism is modified only by the greater or less injection of public housing, public power, and the expansion of social security.

(6) Owing to the emergence of motivation research, survey techniques, the psychological measurement of personality traits, the polling of the electorate on voting preferences and the consumer on what he would like to buy, there has developed a new theory of social classes, the analysis of status, and the sociology of living in the modern corporation.

(7) Finally, the most important theoretical question in American political thought has become the issue of methodology in the social sciences. The issue of method has extended beyond techniques to the whole realm of values, goals, or purposes involved in the existence of a political society. Against the objectivity of the calculators, digital computers, and electronic machines, the critics have defended the philosophical demonstration of principles, political judgment, and public morality.

III

(1) Everyone knows it is difficult to define the stand of a liberal, but most people know that describing an American liberal is the most difficult of all. Around 1900, many American students who had been in Germany had discovered the historical method in economics, which meant that economic criticism was emancipated from any knowledge of the market, as the contemporary Neo-Liberals in Europe have insisted is necessary. Having become emancipated from Classical economics, it was found that public policy might be used to regulate economic life in the interest of Christian and ethical aspirations. Thus, American liberalism was becoming collectivist by the turn of the century. But at the same time, the rise of William James' pragmatism and John Dewey's instrumentalism continued in a much revised form the Continental philosophy of liberalism, and the secular-minded approach of the Philosophic Radicals in England. American liberalism in the last few years, especially, has supported a philosophically pragmatic collectivism, favouring mainly more social security, more public housing, and more public power projects. In post-war prosperity, economic radicalism has not been a promising platform for the ambitious young politician, but liberalism and the interest of the common man seemed good

enough. Louis Hartz, in *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955) insisted that the only tradition of America is liberalism; and Bernard Crick of the London School of Economics in his brilliant *The American Science of Politics* (1959), has noted that the forces of traditionalism in America are the forces of liberalism, from which we reach two paradoxes of American thought: a traditional anti-traditionalism and an almost compulsive uniformity in individualism. Such in part has been the legacy of John Locke, a Whig monarchist who helped to found liberal republicanism in America.

Against such a new dogmatic of liberalism, the task of the new conservatives has been formidable. What the resurgent conservatives have done is to claim that conservatism has shared in the building of the American tradition, or, if that tradition was liberal at the outset, it was a very different kind of liberalism than one finds today ensconced in a refurbished Jacksonianism and New Dealism. The difficulty has been essentially this; both liberalism and conservatism have been historically different in Europe and the United States. Liberalism and neo-liberalism in Europe stands for the operation of the free market, while liberalism in America has become increasingly collectivistic. Conservatism in Europe has stood for the preservation of the viable elements of the old order, but it has been against the industrial system, which has included the free market. In America, the conservative has not had an old order to defend, and both our commercial and agricultural society has been in theory a free-market system. In the period being discussed, conservatism in both Europe and America has recognized its great enemy in Communism, and conservatives have felt that liberals might not be adequate opponents of the Communist system. At the same time the American conservative has been forced to accept some version of the welfare state, while the liberal has not insisted that capitalism must go. In philosophy, the conservative is a less than enthusiastic pragmatist, and liberals are surely less anti-clerical than they have been in the past.

Just as the liberals, the American conservatives have studied continuities between the past and the present. These developments can be seen in Peter Viereck's *Conservatism Revisited* (1949) and in his subsequent works. The most notable of the works on conservatism in recent years is Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (1953), and the succession of volumes he has written. Kirk

has founded and edited *Modern Age*, which has become a notable journal of intellectual conservatism in America, supplementing the more practical publications of political conservatism, such as the *National Review*. Clinton Rossiter and others have explored the nature of conservatism in America, and there has been a remarkable increase in the study of Edmund Burke. In fact, we are probably in a great period of Burkean research and publications. The new conservatism has, of course, inspired a voluminous literature of criticism and counter-attack. It is difficult to say what the future of either self-conscious liberalism or conservatism may be, for while the liberal political sociologists have attempted by scaling techniques to brand the conservative as a prejudiced or authoritarian personality, people generally do not seem concerned with this form of intellectual controversy.

(2) It is said that American pragmatism rests on miles of submerged conviction, and much the same may be said of the attempt to defend democracy and progress by scientific method. The massive iceberg of inarticulate premise in America has been a kind belief in the inevitability of progress, correlated with the intellectual remnants of Spencerian and Darwinian evolutionism and the doctrines of the late nineteenth-century political progressives. Following World War II, there was a return to the traditional optimism of the American social sciences, including political science. There was, no doubt, a belief in the uniqueness of American democracy, for which the social scientist in government service abroad might become a kind of secular missionary. It is because of the inarticulate premise of beneficent evolution, progress, and efficacious reform that no pragmatism, or value-free social science can be immediately injurious to the future of American democracy. There seems to be some agreement that the most notable of American Universities in the development of social scientific optimism has been the University of Chicago. Pragmatism took flight when John Dewey was there, as well as the social theories of George Herbert Mead. But in political science, it was the work of Charles E. Merriam in promoting new adventures in method, first formulated in his *New Aspects of Politics*, a thoroughly notable work. Associated with Merriam was T. V. Smith, who considered himself a philosopher of democracy through numerous books, extending into the immediate period. Harold D. Lasswell, inspired by Merriam, has continued to the moment his attempts to formulate categories

for the policy sciences and the behavioral sciences. Along with Lasswell in his earlier period, Stuart A. Rice and H. F. Gosnell made considerable advances in the application of statistics to the data of politics.

(3) The idea of the uniqueness of American republicanism in the eighteenth century, of the uniqueness of our democracy and popular sovereignty in the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth the principle of our unique development of democracy and science in social study, have all implied a greater or less degree of isolation from other countries. Our theory of international politics was negative, and America was an example to the nations. Beginning with World War I, a profound transformation has taken place, and in the period after World War II it was recognized that the American involvement in international politics was permanent. Under the circumstances, one issue was whether the idealism of the progressive period might be extended to the world, as in the idealism of Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations. But disillusionment has run deep and new theories of realistic international politics were formulated. Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans J. Morgenthau have presented theories of realism, interest, and negotiation that have profoundly influenced American thought on international politics. But others have attempted to retain the idealism of an earlier day, such as the proposition that America has stood for the juridical equality of nations rather than the defence of its own interests. Here again, during the last decade, what may amount to a profound change in American traditional attitudes in international affairs may have taken place.

(4) The most thunderous, though perhaps not the most important question in American political thought during the last decade has been "McCarthyism." The investigation of Communists in American government, education, and cultural activities extends back into the late 30's when Congressman Martin Dies headed a Special House Committee on Un-American Activities. During World War II, when Communist Russia and Capitalist America were allied against the Axis, there was a tremendous effort to soften the revolutionary idea of Communism and there must have been a significant infiltration of American government by Communists and fellow-travellers. The issue of espionage arose, and in 1950 Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin began his crusade against Communist influence on

American policy. There were three committees dealing with this, the McCarthy Committee on Government Operations, the Internal Security Committee, both in the Senate, and the Un-American Activities Committee in the House of Representatives. The height of investigation activity was in the Spring of 1953, and it virtually ended following the Army-McCarthy hearings and the vote of censure in the Senate against Senator McCarthy, not for the embarrassment he had caused Communists, but because he had not obeyed the rules of courtesy of the most exclusive club in the world—the United States Senate. The issue became extremely bitter and continues so in a quiet way to the present. Those who supported the three regular investigating committees said Communists are engaged in a conspiracy to overthrow the American political and cultural system; they should be exposed and removed from their positions. Moreover, one who pleads the Fifth Amendment merely says that he refuses to answer because a truthful answer might tend to incriminate him and the Constitution protects against self-incrimination. The critics of the investigating committees, and eventually this included nearly all of the liberal intellectuals in the country, said that the committees abused their power and exposed to ruin in a careless fashion many individuals who could not possibly be proved to be Communists. The virtual, though not complete, suspension of the investigation by Congress of Communists is clearly one of the great victories of the American intellectuals against McCarthy as a kind of old-style populist.¹

Still, the larger question is obviously the debate on civil rights. The Supreme Court in an epoch-making series of decision has changed the theory of the Constitution on civil rights. In 1954 the segregation of Negroes and whites in public schools was declared contrary to the Constitution, and in subsequent de-

¹ Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics* (1959), p. 242, has said of Senator McCarthy that, though according to the Adorno personality scales, he might be an authoritarian personality, "his tactics and support were fundamentally democratic, just as much as that of his predecessor in Wisconsin, the late 'wise and good' Robert LaFollette. McCarthy's following was not a semi-Fascist rabble, but ordinary, decent Americans who could not but believe that a threatening outside world must be a result of an internal American mistake or treason—control of their habitual environment has always seemed so much a matter of American will, who exhibited in the uniformity of their liberalism an almost complete forgetfulness of that notion of tolerance of opinion which has been such a prized and hard-raised fruit of Anglo-American experience."

isions the rights of persons charged either with subversion or ordinary crimes have been significantly expanded. Congress may reassert by legislation some of the powers taken away by the Court, but the process of abolishing segregation in education and other situations in the South has been slow indeed. It should be noted that racial conflict in the North has more often than not centred on public housing projects and in the invasion of previously white neighbourhoods by Negro renters and buyers. Security against espionage will probably be attained without great difficulty, but the Supreme Court may have much time to wait before its decisions on the equality of races are carried into effect. The books supporting the absolute defence of civil liberties are too numerous to mention, but some like Walter Berns in his *Freedom, Virtue, and the First Amendment* (1957), believed that virtue not liberty was the highest aim of government. Or, one may balance the work of Zechariah Chafee, Jr., *Free Speech in the United States* (1941) against Sidney Hook, *Heresy, Yes—Conspiracy, No* (1953).

(5) Historically, there has been great debate over the justice of American capitalism. It seems that the slant of the modern mind outside the United States is against capitalism, but during the present time of prosperity there does not seem to be any disposition in America to destroy it. The discussion of capitalism is associated with the theory of the modern corporation, and the traditional issues of national power and the control of monopoly remain unchanged. But there seems to be agreement that there is in the United States a new form of capitalism, and one not essentially different from some of the Continental countries where much of the free market has been restored. In defense of the American system, Calvin Hoover, in *The Economy, Liberty, and the State* (1959) has called it welfare capitalism, progressive capitalism, or simply the organizational economy. It is a capitalism in which the ownership of stock is widely distributed among the people, and in this sense it has been called popular capitalism. On the other hand, the critics have stressed the great concentration of the control of American wealth in the management of a relatively few giant corporations. Though published in 1932, the book by A. A. Berle and G. C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, has remained a classic in the field, and it has suggested to many that individualism and private enterprise are no longer realistic concepts. James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution*

in 1941, prophesied the rise of a new governing class, but students of the corporation, like Peter Drucker, and the vast number of individuals devoted articulately to the defence of free enterprise, have believed the modern corporation, welfare capitalism, and the independence of management, are all part of the new scheme of democracy. But such a conception has involved also the recognition of vast labour organizations, which have engaged the giant corporations in the process of collective bargaining.

(6) The new capitalism and the modern corporation having been accepted, the sociological study of the American individual who lives in the office of the corporation and in a society of mass communication and mass consumption has been spectacular. Instead of the traditional theory of the middle class, the students of status and class in America have found the middle class sharply divided, and some have thought there are as many as six distinct classes in American society. The sociologists, like Lloyd Warner, have developed theories of class that the experts in mass persuasion have used in opinion surveys, public relations, and in the modern advertising system. The sociological has become more interesting than the political, even to the political scientists. Instead of institutions, political thought has turned its attention to the personality, and to voting behaviour research, which is surely one of the notable developments of the last ten years. Such research combines the standardized pragmatic philosophy of many social-science intellectuals with the Freudian theory of the authoritarian personality, which emerged with T. W. Adorno and others, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). It accepts, as in the University of Chicago school of political science, science as the handmaiden of democracy. C. Wright Mills studied the office in *White Collar*, William F. Whyte, *The Organization Man*, and Vance Packard has popularized the findings of sociological surveys and theories of depth psychologists and advertising technicians in *The Hidden Persuaders* and *The Status Seekers*. But David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* seems more than any other writer to have formulated a whole new theory of American life in the mass age. One general conclusion seemed to emerge: the mobility of the American worker in industry is very limited, both by the fact that management is largely chosen from college graduates, and by the fact that immobility has been introduced by labour union regulations concerning seniority. Status may be enhanced by the mass consumption of those things related to a higher social

level. Indeed, consumption must be encouraged merely to keep industrial production afloat. The search for status as class insignia was on, then, in full blast in the United States, but it was largely outside the office, the workshop, and factory. If the survey researchers have a true picture of the American personality, the political implications surely must wait another decade at least for clarification. Perhaps it means personalities are more important than principles.

IV

(7) The revolution of the behavioural sciences, the revolution in the theories of methodology and the philosophical implications of these developments, is surely the most significant of the newer trends in intellectual American political thought. The theory of the scientific study of politics is very old, but it has emerged in our time as a prevailing issue in political science. These American developments began after World War I when Charles E. Merriam of the University of Chicago became the most prominent of the promoters of new types of social science research. He proposed that the knowledge gained by the various social sciences had become such that a new and essentially happy human society could be planned by economists, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and political scientists. The recessive contributions possible from historians and philosophers was no accident, since the new methodology was hostile to philosophy, or "metaphysics," and history was, of course, of no use to those who were remaking society in the light of new knowledge. Merriam seldom, if ever, undertook to say what knowledge had been contributed by a social science, but this ultimate aim seemed to be the planning of American society and the use of the proper social scientists in government in order to carry out the general objectives of national planning. His associates and disciples, such as Harold D. Lasswell, Arthur F. Bentley, T. V. Smith, H. F. Gosnell, and a younger generation of behaviourists, have carried forward his ideas of social rather than the physical planning of the American state.

Behavioural science has become particularly significant in the last decade. It has been formulated from a conventional James-Dewey pragmatic epistemology and a theory of radical empiricism; it has rejected the philosophical proof of values or of moral

judgments, and with it the historic disciplines of metaphysics, theology, and history; and it involves a correlation of a great variety of new concepts for the understanding of human society; but beyond this, is the correlation of a variety of techniques like mathematical statistics, electronic computers, and in the most abstract theory the government of society through Norbert Wiener's invention of *Cybernetics* (1948). George A. Miller, the Harvard psychologist, said in 1957: "I sometimes wonder whether the digital computer may not be as important to the social sciences as the microscope was to the biological sciences."

None in America object to the collection of facts, or social science data, but in result the philosophical counter-attack must be critical of the value theory of the behavioural sciences, that is, of metaphysical implications read into the new concepts and techniques of social study. John H. Hallowell has defended his conception of a demonstrable moral foundation of democracy; Walter Lippmann in *The Public Philosophy* (1954) has returned to the necessity of recognizing a natural law element for a political and public philosophy, as one may also find in the extended life of philosophical work of Jacques Maritain. A significant defence of a transcendent order against the immanentist philosophy of the behavioural sciences is found in the magistral works of Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, and the six-volume work on *Order and History*, three volumes of which have already appeared. In the defence of a theistic, natural law, or Christian interpretation of politics, one finds also the examination of the problem of church and state, and the proper organization and improvement of education in America.