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YOUTH AND DISSENT: TOWARDS A NEW SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

The very fact that no social theory anticipated or forecast the emergence of a youthful opposition suggests that something has been profoundly wrong with the way we have understood the modern world. The failure of liberal and radical theories to anticipate the emergence of a massive movement of dissenting youth both in developed and developing nations constitutes a major challenge to critical social theory.

This paper does not constitute a comprehensive theory. It only provides some building block upon which a theory of the youthful opposition may be developed. It addresses itself to the historical meaning and social significance of the adversary youth culture. It also insists that we will not understand this new culture without understanding what is genuinely new in our historical world. Both sympathizers and deprecators of the youthful opposition tend to underline its similarities with youth movements in the past. They point, for example, to the ubiquity of generational conflict through history, or they trace the new opposition to the emergence of youth as a revolutionary class, with a common relationship to the means of production. It may be that history occasionally repeats itself, but, I think this is rare, especially now, when so few of the basic historical assumptions of previous eras remain valid. My concern in this paper is, therefore, on the novelty of modern situation, and on the absence of any historical guide that might enable us to anticipate the future. This paper presupposes that we live in revolutionary times, and that the unexpected emergence of an oppositional youth culture is both a reaction against and an expression of the unprecedented incidences of our time.

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Introduction

No issue today divides the public or intellectual community so deeply as does the counterculture, the new culture, new youthful opposition. Hawks and doves, on the youth question debate campus unrest with an intensity and

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heat generally reserved only for the weightiest ideological matters. The mildest criticism of the youthful romance with violence or the gentlest critique of radical mindlessness evokes epithets like, reactionary, counterrevolutionary, or worst of all liberal from the passionate defenders of the youthful opposition. But conversely, hawks on the youth question feel that the expression of guarded optimism about the decency of students or the claim that most young people act from idealistic motives makes the speaker a sycophant, a pious piper or an apologist.

Merely to deride this debate would blind us to the real importance of the issues raised. However fashionable it has become to laud or lambaste the dissenting young, serious issues lie hidden behind the current polemics in little magazines. For the debate about the oppositional young ultimately involves a debate about the nature of man and society, and requires that we examine our basic assumptions about both. I suspect that this debate, which crosscuts and confounds the traditional distinctions between conservatives and liberals, will define the basic terms of intellectual inquiry, controversy, and creativity during the period ahead.

In the youthful opposition we are witnessing the overlap of two distinct revolutions, each with a different historical origin. The first revolution is now-traditional but once radical demand for inclusion, citizenship, or universalism—the demand that all people be granted the freedom, goods, and privileges that were once the prerogative of selected few. The second revolution is built upon the first: it is the revolution of those people who take freedoms, goods and privileges of the first revolution for granted, seeing them largely as the facts of life. Such people, mostly young seek some new fulfillment beyond material abundance, some psychological liberation beyond political freedom. They are sensitive not only to the direct oppressions of political tyranny and economic scarcity, but to the more subtle oppressions of psychological repressions, group pressures and social expectation. Basically, they are struggling to define the post-scarcity world, to answer the question— what lies beyond affluence?

In arguing that the second revolution becomes possible only because of the success of the first, I differ with many social theorists who remain in basic sympathy with the youthful opposition. For one, I believe that the emergence of the youthful opposition results from the massive social changes that are in many cases benign and beneficial— for example, the rise of many societies to day in the world where men and women no longer need worry about starvation or material security; the extension within these societies of considerable political freedom and social security; an economic system so automatically productive that people may rail against the consumer society without being considered insane. Thus, I do not agree with those radicals who see the emergence of youthful opposition as the simple consequence of oppression, repression, or the degradation of the quality of life in the liberal modern states.

Secondly, I differ from those theorists of the counterculture who interpret it as involving total break from the past. I see, in contrast, not only a rejection of much that is corrupt, immoral and unjust in the existing society, but also an affirmation of values deeply imbedded within most of the societies in the world. Whatever its lapses from democratic practice, the youthful opposition has emphasized equality, justice, and individual participation in politics. Indeed, the issues around which the oppositional youth culture has been able to organize and act most effectively, have always been impeccably traditional issues like opposition to Casteism and racism, the search for peace, or the demand for fuller participation in the democratic process.

Even the second revolution –the quest for a world beyond materialism, the rejection of vocationalism, and the emphasis on genuineness, relatedness, community, and love- can hardly be counted a total break with our culture. On the contrary, each of these values has roots in the traditions of Indian, Western and even American societies; each involves an effort to live out the dreams and private fantasies of previous generations. What originally appeared as the ideology of the anti- bourgeoisie and romantic world becomes, with the advent of mass affluence, a possible guideline for the actual conduct of life. The ideals of the second revolution can scarcely be considered a radical break with the society.

In stressing these continuities with the past, I do not mean to deny the revolutionary potential of the youthful opposition. Nor am I disqualifying my insistence that the contemporary world is genuine without precedent, and that the emergence of a new youthful opposition springs from uniquely modern conditions. But I am arguing that this revolution like all revolutions, builds upon the past, reordering its priorities and values and seeking to fulfill its promises. At both an historical and psychological level, it remains true, as Erik Erikson (1968) has argued that every effort to break with the past is also an effort to actualize what was latent in the previous generation.

The paper is divided into three parts. The dominant discourses of both psychological and sociological approaches to youthful opposition are explored in the first section of the paper in order to understand youth identities. The second section of the paper critically evaluates these perspectives and also focuses on their limitations in understanding the youthful opposition in the postindustrial and postmodern condition. The paper, finally, concludes by exploring the possibilities for an alternative perspective on youthful opposition in contemporary time.

I

Dominant Discourses on Youthful Opposition

The emergence of a youthful opposition is an instance of an historical

event. Marxist theorists either continued to cherish hopes of a working class revolt in the capitalist nations, or else devoted their theoretical energies to explaining how monopoly capitalism had successfully co-opted the potentially revolutionary spirit of the working class (Karl Korsch, 2009). Even the most sophisticated neo-Marxists did not predict that those who apparently benefited most from capitalist societies would help lead a new attack upon them (Anderson, 1987). In a comparable way, what I will group together as liberal theories not only failed to anticipate the emergence of the youthful revolt, but predicted that such a revolt would become progressively less likely as affluence and higher education spread. To understand the theoretical importance of the current debate over the meaning of the youthful opposition, therefore requires us to critically examine in broad outline the widely shared theoretical constructs on youthful opposition.

Two significant value perspectives on the youthful opposition—a) youth as a counterrevolutionary force and b) Youth as revolutionary force - emerged as a response to the limitations of the liberal theories in early 20th century. They have theoretical depth, scope, and profundity. They properly attempt to understand the new opposition in terms of a broader theory of man and society. The first theory, which is an adaption of liberal theories, asserts in essence that the youth movement in the industrialized nations is historically a counterrevolutionary movement, a reaction against the more basic forces involved in the growth of a new technological society. The second, on the contrary, counters by claiming that the dissenting young are true revolutionaries, an historical vanguard that is defining a new and better society. It is worth examining each theory in greater detail.

A) *Youth as a counterrevolutionary force*

The most thoughtful proponents of the counterrevolutionary theory of youth are Zbigniew Brzezinski (1982), Lewis Feuer (1969), and in very different ways, Brown(1974),Raymond Aron (2003), Daniel Bell (1973, 1976,2000), Alvin Toffler (1984, 1980), Bruno Bettelheim (1979), and Herman Kahn (1985,1986). These thinkers differ on a great many key issues. But they are usually in essential agreement on several major points.

i) First, they agree that we are in the midst of a major transformation that is taking us out of an industrial society into a postindustrial, technological, postmodern, super industrial, or in Brzezinski's terms, 'technetronic society' of the future (1982). The new society will be highly rationalized. It will be characterized by high productivity, automation, increased leisure time, more individual choices, better social planning, greater opportunities for the expression of individual interests, rapid rates of social change, more rational administration, and the demand for enormously high levels of education among those who occupy positions of leadership. It will be a society of complex large scale organizations, global communications, and a basically technical approach

to the solution of human problems. In this society, power will be increasingly not with those who possess economic capital, but with those who possess educational capital. In the technetronic society, the knowledge industry, centered above all in the professoriate and in the universities, will be the central industry of society and the central motor of historical change (Bell, 1973; Toffler, 1984).

Ii] The second assumption common to the counterrevolutionary theory of youth is that periods of basic historical transition are inevitably marked by social disturbances. Today, the transition into the technetronic age is marked by violent revulsion by those whose skills and values are made obsolete by the new social revolution.

Specifically a post-industrial society imposes what Daniel Bell (2000) terms a heavy 'organizational harness' upon the young: it requires them to study for many years, to acquire highly specialized technical skills, to stay in school, and to postpone gratification well into biological adulthood. Equally important, this new society renders obsolete a large number of traditional values, skills, and outlooks. A Technetronic society above all needs skilled executives, systems analysts, computer programmers, trained administrators, and high level scientists. Those who possess these skills are in the forefront of historical change: their talents are needed, their outlooks are valued (Brzezinski, 1982). But those identified with traditional fields like the humanities and the social sciences find that their values and skills are becoming increasingly unnecessary, irrelevant, and obsolete. The ideals of romanticism, expressiveness, and traditional humanism may dominate the contemporary youth culture, but they do not dominate the social structure—the specific institutions that are changing our lives. One consequence, then, is what Bell terms the disjuncture between the culture- specifically the adversary culture of intellectuals and many students—and the dominant social structure of large scale organization, technology, mass communications, and electronics (Bell, 1973).

The conclusion that the revolt of the young is essentially counterrevolutionary follows from the first two points. According to this theory, the humanistic young are rebelling because of their latent awareness of their own obsolescence. The 'organizational harness' around their necks is too tight and heavy for them to endure. An ever-larger group of young men and women feel that they have no place in the modern world, for they lack stable skills, basic character styles and value orientations that are adaptable to the emergent postindustrial society. They are, as Bruno Bettelheim puts it, "obsolete youth" (1979). They rebel in a blind, mindless, and generally destructive way against rationalism, intellect, technology, organization, discipline, hierarchy, and all of the requisites of a post-industrial society. Sensing their historical obsolescence, they lash out against the computers and managers that are consigning them into the 'dustbin of history' (Keniston, 1970). It is predictable

that they will end with bombing, terrorism, and anarchy, for the obsolete young are desperately pitting themselves against historical forces that they cannot stop. But students of engineering, business administration and so on, - students in the fields most rewarded in the technetronic society-do not protest or rebel; instead, it is the obsolescent humanist and social scientist who lead the counterculture.

Although theorists differ as to precisely which unconscious forces are expressed in student dissent, the logic of the counterrevolutionary argument makes recourse to psychologism almost mandatory. For if the manifest issues of student unrest are seen as pseudo issues, disguises, and rationalizations, then we are forced into the realm of the not-conscious in our search to locate the real motives behind the youthful opposition. And today in post-Freudian age, such explanations are likely to involve recourse to concepts like unconscious oedipal feelings, adolescent rebellion, castration anxiety, and the acting out of feelings that originate in the early family (Bettelheim, 1979).

As a result, the counterrevolutionary view of youth is associated with an interpretation of psychoanalysis that sees Oedipal urges as driving forces for the student rebellion. To be sure, theorists do not agree about the exact nature of the oedipal forces that are acted out. Feuer (1969) sees a simple re-enactment of the jealous child's hatred of his powerful father; Bettelheim (1979) sees a blind striking out against surrogates for a father who was not powerful enough to inoculate his son against excessive castration anxieties; another psychoanalyst has pointed to insufficient parental responsiveness as a causative factor in radicalism; early family permissiveness or failure to set limits has also been blamed (Keniston, 1970). But whatever the precise traditional forces behind the youthful revolt are said to be, the counterrevolutionary theory, by denying the validity of the youth movement's own explanations of its acts, is forced to hypothesize unconscious motivations as the real motives behind the revolt.

A final conclusion follows from this argument: no matter how destructive the revolt of the young may be in the short run, that revolt is historically foredoomed to failure in the long run. The technetronic society, the postindustrial world, the super industrial state—these forces are unstoppable. The liberal democratic state is being basically transformed, but the ratings and rampaging of the young, devoted to adolescent ideas of self-expression, anarchism, romanticism, direct democracy, liberation, and the expansion of consciousness, cannot stop this transformation. The revolt of the young may indeed be, in Daniel Bell's phrase, the emergent "class conflict" of postindustrial society (1973). But from Bell's analysis, it follows that students are counterrevolutionary class, and their counterrevolution will fail. Increasingly, power will be held by those who have more successfully acquired the capital dispensed by the knowledge industry. The counterculture is, in Brzezinski's words, the "death rattle" of the historically obsolete (1982).

The counterrevolutionary theory of the youth is a reformulation of liberal theory, modified to make room for the convulsions of the last decade. Within any social equilibrium theory, there must be room for the possibility that the system will temporarily get “out of balance” (Keniston, 1968). Brzezinski assumes that we have entered a period of imbalance that accompanies the transition from an industrial to a technetronic society. In this transitional period, traditional mechanisms of social control, older forms of integration between social structure and culture, and previous forms of socialization have ceased to function adequately. But in the future, it is assumed, equilibrium once again is regained. Upon arrival in the technetronic society, the postindustrial society, or the world of the year 2000s, the temporary storm squalls on the weatherfront between industrial and postindustrial society will have dissipated, and we will once again be in a state of relative social equilibrium. If we can only wait out the transition, maintaining and repairing our basic institutions, we can build a new equilibrium—one that we will grind under the youthful opposition just as triumphant industrialism destroyed the Luddites. In the meanwhile, we must fight to preserve decency, civilization, rationality, and higher education from the depredation of the mindless young.

B) Youth as revolutionary force

The second major theory holds that the dissenting young are historically a revolutionary force. This theory views the counterculture as a regenerative culture, and interprets those forces that oppose it as ultimately counterrevolutionary. This view is expressed in different forms in the works of Theodore Roszak (1969) and Charles Reich (1995), in the writings of the members of counterculture like Tom Hayden (2008) and Abbie Hoffman (1967, 1968), and most convincingly of all, by Philip Slater (1990, 1992). The revolutionary view of the youth is based on the following assumptions-

a) Industrialized societies are in a period of major cultural, institutional and historical transition. But the thrust of the liberal democratic state has exhausted itself. What is variously termed “corporate liberalism”, the “establishment”, or the “welfare state” is seen as fundamentally bankrupt. Admittedly, industrial states have produced unprecedented wealth. But they have not been able to distribute it equitably, nor have they found ways to include large excluded population in the main stream of society. Furthermore, their basic assumptions have led directly to disastrous “neo-imperialistic wars like the American involvement in Southeast Asia. Corporate liberalism has produced a highly manipulated society, in which real human needs and interests are neglected in the pursuit of political power, the merchandising of products, or the extension of overseas markets. Large-scale organizations have dehumanized their members, depriving men of participation in the decisions that affect their lives. The electronic revolutions merely provide the rulers of the corporate state with more effective means of manipulating the populace. Corporate liberalism has revealed its bankruptcy (Charles Reich, 1995)..

b)The second assumption of this theory is that the economic successes and moral features of liberal industrial societies today make possible and necessary a new kind of consciousness, new values, new aspirations and new life styles—in short, a new culture. The old industrial state was founded upon the assumption of scarcity. It was organized to reduce poverty, to increase production, to provide plenty. But today it has largely succeeded in this goal, and as a result, a new generation has been born in affluence and free from repressed character structure of the scarcity culture. In an era of abundance, the niggardly, inhibited psychology of saving, scrupulosity, and repression is no longer necessary. Alienated relationships between people who view each other as commodities are no longer inevitable. The “objective consciousness” of the scientist or technician is becoming obsolete. In brief, the material successes and moral failures of corporate liberalism permit and require the emergence of a new consciousness, a post scarcity outlook, and a new vision of the possibilities of human liberation (Theodore Roszak, 1969).

It follows from this analysis that the new oppositional culture is not an atavistic and irrational reaction against the old culture but a logical outgrowth of it—an expression of its latent possibilities, a rational effort to remedy its failings, in some senses its logical fulfillment. If the central goal of the old culture was to overcome want and if that goal has been largely achieved, then the counterculture stands on the shoulders of the old culture, fulfilling, renewing and expressing that culture’s latent hopes. Far from being historical reactionaries, the counter- culturists are the historical vanguard. Their alleged anarchism and anti-intellectualism are but efforts to express the desire for human liberation whose roots lie in the postponed dreams of the old culture. As the British philosopher Stuart Hampshire (1989) has once suggested, the dissenting young are not against reason, but only against a constricted definition of reason as a quantitative calculus that ignores human values and needs.

The revolutionary theory of youth also entails a definite view of the psychology of young rebels and revolutionaries. It asks that we take them completely at their word when they state the reasons for their protests, disruptions, dropouts or rejections. The dissenting young are seen as miraculously healthy products of the irrational dangerous and unjust world they inherited. Their motives are noble, idealistic, and pure, while their statements of their goals are to be taken at face value.. They are not animated by their childhood posts, but by a vision (which they may, however find it difficult to articulate), of a freer, more peaceful, more liberated, and more just society. As for the Oedipus complex, to discuss the psychological motives of the members of the youthful opposition at all is seen as a typically liberal way of distracting attention from the real issues. Thus, even if the dissenting young behave in an undemocratic, dogmatic or violent way, one understands their behavior by discussing the undemocratic; dogmatic and violent society to which they are objecting.

This view of the psychology of the youthful opposition follows logically from the assumption that the young are in the historical vanguard. For in general, historical vanguards must be endowed with ordinary wisdom and prescience, and with a special freedom from that gnawingly irrational attachment to the personal or historic past that plagues most nonvanguard groups. In the views of one theorist, “radical man” is the highest possible form of human development (Charles Hampden Turner, 1971); another political theorist has argued that only rebellion can attest to human freedom, and that among today’s young, only those who rebel are truly free (Albert Camus, 2000). The argument that the youthful revolt arises from psychopathology is here encountered by its opposite—by the claim that the new opposition springs from the extraordinary insight, maturity, high consciousness, and positive mental health of its members.

Finally, as is by definition true of any historical vanguard, the triumph of this vanguard is seen as ultimately inevitable. With rising abundance, new recruits to the counterculture are being created daily. It is the old, then, who are obsolete, not the young. The locomotive of history, so to speak, has the youth movement sitting on the front bumper, scattering its opponents in a relentless rush into the future. Eventually the opponents of progressive change will be defeated or will die of old age—only then will the truly liberating potentials of the post scarcity era be actualized in society.

In many respects the theory of the youth movement as revolutionary is embryonic and incomplete. The counterrevolutionary theory builds upon the highly developed resources of liberal social thought. But the revolutionary view, rejecting both liberalism and Marxism, presents us more with a vision of what the counterculture might be at its best than with a complex or through social analysis. Only in the work of Philip Slater (1990, 1992) do we have the beginnings of a critical examination of liberal theory. Other writers who view the counterculture as revolutionary largely limit themselves to a vision that is more literary than descriptive and that makes little attempt to connect the emergence of the counterculture to the structural changes emphasized by writers like Bell (2000), Brzezinski (1982), or Kahn (1985). In this sense, the revolutionary theory of the new opposition remains more of a promise than a fulfillment.

II

The Limits of Both Theories

The aforesaid presentation of two polar theoretical perspectives obviously does scant justice to the complexity of the specific theorists who have seriously considered the counterculture. There is no unity, either among those who oppose or among those who support the youthful opposition. Among its critics, for example, Feuer (1969) and Bettelheim (1979) concentrate upon

the psychopathology that allegedly animates its members, while Brzezinski (1979) or Kahn (1985, 1986) focuses upon the structural or social conditions that make the youthful opposition obsolete. Similarly, there is an enormous difference between the romantic portrait of “consciousness III” presented by Reich (1995) and the more careful social-psychological analysis offered by Slater in his “The Pursuit of Loneliness” (1990).

But no matter how oversimplified this account of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary theories, if either interpretation of youthful dissent were fundamentally adequate, this discussion could end. It therefore behooves us to examine each of these theories critically.

We should first acknowledge that each of these views has its highly persuasive points. Those who view the new opposition as historically counterrevolutionary are correct in underlining the increasing importance of technology, complex social organizations, and education in the most industrialized nations. They have pointed accurately to the new role of highly educated and technologically trained elite. And they seem to help us explain why youthful dissenters are virtually absent among potential engineers, computer specialists, and business administrators, but disproportionately drawn from the ranks of social scientists and humanists.

Above all, however, the opponents of the youthful opposition are accurate in their criticism of that opposition. They rightly argue that the counterculture almost completely neglects the institutional side of modern life (Daiute, Smith & Nuccie, 2006). Thus the call for liberation, for the expansion of consciousness, and for the expression of impulse has not been matched by the creation or even by the definition of institutions whereby these purposes could be achieved and sustained. Furthermore, in its cultural wing, the new opposition has often been callous to continuing injustice, oppression, and poverty in almost all countries of the world. In its political wing, the counterculture has been vulnerable to despair, to apocalyptic but transient fantasies of instant revolution, to superficial Marxism, and to a romance with violence. Finally the youth opposition as a whole has never adequately confronted or understood its own derivative relationship to the dominant society (Goodman, 1960). Perhaps as a result, it has too often been a caricature rather than a critique of the consumption-oriented, manipulative, technocratic, violent, electronic society that it nominally opposes (Keniston, 1969). In pointing to the weakness of the counterculture, its critics seems to be largely correct.

Yet there is a deep plausibility, as well in the theory that the youthful opposition is in historical terms a revolutionary movement. In particular, the revolutionary theorists accurately capture the growing feeling of frustration and the increasing sense of the exhaustion of the old order that obsess growing numbers of the educated young in both developing and industrialized nations. Furthermore, they correctly recognize the irony in the fact that the most

prosperous and educated societies in world history have generated the most massive youthful opposition in world history. And in seeking to explain this unexpected opposition, the revolutionary theory understands well its relationship to the systemic failings of corporate liberalism—its failure to include large masses in the general prosperity, its exploitative or destructive relationship to the developing nations, its use of advanced technology to manipulate the citizens in whose interest it allegedly governs, its neglect of basic human needs, values, and aspirations in a social calculus that sees men and women as merely inputs or outputs in complex organizations (Keniston & Lerner, 1970).

The strengths of each theory, however, are largely negative: in essence, each is at its best in pointing to the flaws of the culture or the social system defended by the other. But judged for its positive contribution, each theory tends to have parallel weaknesses: each disregards the facts at odds with its own central thesis. In order to do this, each operates at a different level of analysis: the counterrevolutionary theory at the level of social institutions, the revolutionary theory at the level of culture. As a consequence, each theory neglects precisely, what the other theory correctly stresses.

The counterrevolutionary theory of the new opposition starts from an analysis of social institutions, modes of productions, and the formal organization of human roles and relationships. Despite its emphasis upon the psychopathology of the new rebels, it is fundamentally a sociological theory of institutional changes and technological transformations. It stresses the importance of applied science, the growth of new educational institutions, and the power of the new elite that dominates the knowledge industry. In defining the future, it emphasizes the further development of rational-bureaucratic institutions and the revolutionary impact of new electronic technology upon social organization, communication, and knowledge. But it tends to forget consciousness and culture, treating ideas, symbols, values, ideologies, aspirations, fantasies, and dreams largely as reflections of technological, economic, and social forces.

Scholars who argue that the new opposition is historically revolutionary operate at a quite different level of analysis. For them, the two key concepts are culture and consciousness (Keniston & Lerner, 1971). What matters most are feelings, aspirations, outlooks, ideologies, and world views. Charles Reich's analysis of three kinds of consciousness is explicit in asserting that institutions are secondary and in the last analysis unimportant (Reich, 1995). Most other revolutionary theorists also start from an analysis of a "new consciousness" to argue that the decisive resolution is a cultural revolution. How men view the world, how they organize their experience symbolically, what their values are?—these are seen as historically determining. Institutional changes are said to follow changes in human aspirations and consciousness.

Daniel Bell (1976) has written of the disjuncture of social structure and culture in modern society. We need not accept the entire analysis to argue

that this disjuncture is reflected in theories about youthful dissent. For on closer examination, they turn out to be talking about either social structure or culture, but rarely about both. The key weakness of the counterrevolutionary theory is its neglect of consciousness and culture, its assumption that social-structural, technological, and material factors will be decisive in determining the future. The parallel weakness of the revolutionary view of the youthful dissent is its disregard of the way organized systems of production, technology; education, communication, and social control influence, shape and may yet co-opt or destroy the youthful opposition. In fact, then, these two theories are not as contradictory as they seem: in many ways, they are simply talking about two different aspects of the modern world.

A second limitation of both theories is their assumption that the trends they define are historically inevitable. In this respect, both theories are eschatological as well as explanatory. The post-industrial or technetronic view assumes the future inevitability of postindustrial, technetronic, technocratic society. Given this assumption, it follows logically that anyone who opposes the technetronic society is historically counterrevolutionary. Brzezinski, for example, writes in *Between Two Ages*:

Today the militant leaders of the student reaction, as well as their ideologies, frequently come from those branches of learning which are more sensitive to the threat of social irrelevance. Their political activism is thus not only a reaction to the more basic fear that the times are against them that a new world is emerging without either their assistance or their leadership (Brzezinski, 1982, p 56).

Brzezinski's claim that the youth revolt constitutes a counterrevolutionary force clearly rests upon the assumption that the technetronic society is inevitable. Exactly the same assumption of historical inevitability is made by the supporters of the counterculture. Reich is very explicit about this in *The Greening of America*-

The revolution will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed, and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. It is now spreading with amazing rapidity—. It is both necessary and inevitable, and in time it will include not only youth but all people in America (published in Salient, Victoria University Student Newspaper, Vol.34, No. 6, September 8, 1971)

Given Reich's assumption that history is on the side of the counterculture, it follows automatically that those who oppose it are actually counterrevolutionary. But this claim that the future is in fact predetermined by blind historical forces is open to major question. In retrospect, most previous claims about the historical inevitability of this or that trend have turned out to have been more expression of the wishes of those who made these claims. It

makes equal or better sense to believe that history is on the side neither of the technetronic revolution nor of the counterculture. In fact, we may deny that history is on anyone's side, arguing that history is simply made by human beings, acting individually and in concert, influenced by the institutions in which they live and by their consciousness and culture.

If we reject the assumption of historical inevitability, both the counterrevolutionary and revolutionary theories must be understood in part as efforts to justify a set of special interests by attributing historical inevitability to them, and perhaps ultimately as exercises in the use of prophecy to convince others of truth of prophecy and thereby to make the prophecy self-fulfilling.

What both theorists fail to comprehend is the extent to which the emergence of a new youthful opposition requires us to embark upon a critical re-examination of concepts of man, society and their interrelationship that we have taken largely for granted. This inability to come to grips with the theoretical challenge posed by the new opposition is seen closely in each theory's attitude towards education. Neo-liberals who view student dissent as largely counterrevolutionary are committed to a view of education as socialization (Keniston, 1969). Given this view, it follows that a postindustrial society characterized by prolonged higher education should be a society where youthful dissent is rare. The eruption of wide-scale disaffection among the most educated products of the most industrialized societies thus requires neoliberal theories to posit wide-scale deviant socialization, or else to argue that higher education is failing to do its job. In fact, however, the extensive evidence concerning the backgrounds of young dissenters provides little support for the deviant socialization interpretation of the new opposition. And paradoxically, these institutions of higher education that liberals have traditionally seen as doing the best job seem to be the breeding grounds for the greatest disaffection.

Those who view youthful disaffection as a revolutionary phenomenon are forced with the same dilemma. They tend to see higher education as a way of integrating or coopting youth into the existing society. It therefore comes as a surprise that higher education seems to promote disaffection and to be closely related to the emergence of a youthful counterculture. But those who view the youth movement as revolutionary have so far failed to offer any adequate explanation of why many young men and women in so many nations have escaped the net of socialization.

The fact that theorists of neither persuasion can explain the contemporary correlation between higher education and dissent indicates the need for a critical analysis of our prevailing assumptions concerning human malleability, social equilibrium, and socialization. To undertake this re-examination will be a stupendous task. It is impressive that, for all of the talk today about radical thought and the New Left, the basic assumptions of liberalism have been subjected to so little fundamental criticism.

III

Towards an alternative perspective

This paper is not merely an attempt to provide the critical reanalysis or even to outline it. Rather, it is an agenda, or more precisely, some items on an agenda, if accomplished, might move us towards a better understanding of the meaning of the new opposition and of contemporary society. This agenda is presently tentatively, and largely as an indication of theoretical problems that have been opened up by a decade of dissent. The work, I believe, needs to be done, falls into three broad categories. First, there must be a critical reanalysis and reformulation of the theoretical assumptions with which we attempt to understand man and society. Second, we must begin to come to terms with the characteristics of modern society and modern man in their own right, and not in terms of strained analogies to the past. Third, a revised theoretical framework and a better understanding of contemporary man in society should help define a new political agenda and understand the recent youthful opposition.

- a) The first assumption to be reanalyzed critically is the assumption of virtually limitless human malleability and influenceability. The full agenda for the reexamination of our understanding men and society would be lengthy. But as we examine our theoretical assumptions, it will not suffice simply to reject out of hand which I have termed liberal views. The goal should be to analyze these views critically, preserving what is valid in them while complementing them with new understanding of the inherent logic of human development, of the central role of conflict in social change, and of the forces in man that militate against acquiescent acceptance of the existing social order.
- b) The second related theoretical task is to understand the special characteristics of modern personality and modern society. Even if a critical analysis of the basic assumptions of liberal thought were completed, the substance of a more adequate account of what is unique about our own era would still be lacking. Here, I can only indicate very briefly the general lines of thought that seem most likely to be worth pursuing.

If we start from a dialectical view of historical change, but admit that Marx's juxtaposition of a revolutionary proletariat and a reactionary bourgeoisie did not necessarily mark the last stage in the dialectic, then we must entertain seriously the possibility that conflicts about which Marx wrote have been resolved and new conflicts today have begun to emerge. I believe it is useful and accurate to consider the corporate liberal state as embodying to the large extent the synthesis of the class conflicts that preoccupied Marx. In this respect, liberal theorists were correct in arguing that earlier conflicts between capitalist

entrepreneurs and exploited workers had been softened and essentially reconciled by the growth of powerful bureaucratic trade unions able to negotiate with large but publicly regulated corporations. The welfare state indeed mitigated many of the most vicious exploitations of unstrained capitalism. The liberal consensus of the mid-20th century tolerated a wide spectrum of political opinion and many forms of deviant behavior (Keniston, 1968). Furthermore, if ideology is narrowly defined to mean fascism, then it was largely accurate to say that the age of ideology was dead (Daniel Bell, 2000).

The dominant class conflict of early 19th century were increasingly resolved, reconciled, or synthesized in the liberal-democratic-capitalist or socialist states in Western Europe, America and even South Asian and South East Asian countries (Dahrendorf, 1957, 1975, 2017) . The ascendancy of the corporate liberal state, however, did not mark an end to social conflict or to the dialectic of history. The successes of emergent technological society were purchased at an enormous moral ecological price (Keniston, 1963, 1968). Fulfilling the promises of liberalism was far from complete, and it became apparent that the liberal programme itself would not suffice to fulfill them. Increases in national productivity were not enough to include in the mainstream of affluence those whose poverty was structural rather than merely economic. Casteism in India and racism in America persisted despite state's commitment to end it. Effective political power remained in the hands of selected few. It is therefore accurate to say that liberal social thought and liberal reformism proved largely ineffective in solving traditional economic, social and political conflicts of modern industrial society (Sen, 1999, 2016).

The inability of liberalism to complete its own agenda was one of the new contradictions that become apparent only with the advent of corporate liberal society. The second contradiction was in some ways more profound, and even more directly related to the emergence of a youthful opposition. This new generation took for granted the accomplishments of corporate liberalism, expressing neither gratitude nor admiration for many achievements by liberal democratic states. To this new generation, what were instead important were first of all the inabilities of the liberal society to fulfill its own promises; and second the surfacing of a set of cultural and psychological goals that have previously been deferred in liberal society. These newly surfaced aspirations had to do above all with the quality of life, the possibilities of self-expression, the expansion of consciousness, and the pursuit of empathy, sentience, and experience (Sen, 2016,2017)

The roots of the new opposition lie precisely in the successes of liberalism- e.g., its success in extending to most of the population the material and social benefits it had promised, but its inability to complete the process or to define goals beyond abundance. To the new generation, and specifically to the educated, affluent and secure members of this generation, the historical successes of the corporate liberal state were less important than its moral,

ecological, psychological and cultural failures (Bell, 1973)

To understand the new conflicts in corporate liberal society, I believe, we must above all examine the role of the knowledge sector. The liberal-democratic and industrialized nations are increasingly dominated neither by capitalists nor by workers, but by a vast new intelligentsia of educated professionals who exert unprecedented influence on both public policy and private practice (Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 2018). In some ways, their contemporary role is analogous to the traditional role of intellectuals and artists in earlier historical eras. But because of their increasing numbers and influence, they occupy an altogether different place in technological societies. What they share is that the enterprises in which they are engaged depend upon extensions, manipulations, or applications of knowledge and ideas. The knowledge sector thus includes not only universities, scientific laboratories, research institutes, and the world of creative arts, but a much broader set of enterprises including corporate research and development, the communications industry, data analysis and data processing, the major higher professions, advertising, merchandising, administrative science, personnel management, Human resource management, systems analysis, entertainment and so on. So defined, the knowledge is clearly that sector of contemporary industrialized societies that has grown most rapidly in size and power.

Neo Marxists have tended to see this knowledge sector as a 'new working class' or technical intelligentsia—merely the handmaiden of the capitalist managers and politicians assumed to exercise real power (Szelenyi, 1982). Theorists of postindustrial state, in contrast have emphasized the dominance of the knowledge sector in advanced societies, viewing academics as the key professionals and universities as the key institutions of the postindustrial society (Bell, 1973). Still others operating in a more traditional framework, have seen the knowledge sector as one of many interest groups competing in the process of defining social and political policy (Richardson, 2000).

But in the end, none of these characterizations seems quite adequate to define the unique role of knowledge sector in the technological societies. The argument of Bell, Brzezinski, and Daiute (2006) that the knowledge sector constitutes the dominant sector of technological societies seems closer to the truth. But this view in turn tends to exaggerate the power of the academic profession and the indispensability of such institutions as universities to technological society. It is also tempting to accept the liberal analysis of the knowledge sector as merely one of many interest groups, but this view, too, fails to acknowledge the very special powers that today accrue to those who possess knowledge and the visible tokens of its possession: higher degrees, recognition in the knowledge community, access to the mass media, and so on (Habermas, 2015). Therefore, one of the major theoretical tasks ahead is the careful definition and explication of the relationship between this new sector and the remainder of society. One of the chief characteristics of the knowledge

sector, even as it has moved towards increasing influence, has been to publically proclaim its neutrality—its indifference to the major moral, psychological and political questions of the day.

Of late, it has become clear that the value free self-definition of the knowledge sector masks an important ideology, an ideology increasingly recognized and challenged by the new opposition. This ideology can be termed ‘technism, i.e., a set of pseudo-scientific assumptions about the nature and resolution of human and social problems. Most highly articulated in the various forms of systems analysis, technism insists that the highest rationality involves measurement and consigns the incommensurable (feelings, values, intangibles) to a lesser order of rationality and reality. It further assumes that innovation is desirable, that growth is imperative, and that whatever is technically possible, should be done, and that large quantity are preferable to small ones. Drawing heavily upon the mystique of science, technism adds to true science a series of further assumptions that quality is an ideology, one that prefers not to recognize itself or be recognized as such.

Paradoxically, however, it is from within the knowledge sector that today there also emerges the most astringent critique of technism. Institutions of higher education have indeed become the prime exemplars of a technist approach to problems of government, business and social planning; but they have also prime generators of the anti-technist, romantic, expressive, moralistic, anarchic humanism of the new opposition. Rejecting technism, this opposition stresses all those factors in human life and social experience that do not fit the technist equations. If value free, objective technism is the dominant voice of the dominant knowledge sector, then expressive, subjective anarchism is the subversive force (Anthony Giddens, 1990; Sarah Pickard, 2019). Theodore Roszak’s eulogy of the counterculture (1969) is illustrative, for Roszak abhors above all what he calls objective consciousness—technist consciousness of the scientist or program analyst. The new opposition can thus be seen as the ideological reflection of an emergent contradiction within the knowledge sector, as the new antithesis to the knowledge sector’s technism, as embodying a counter emphasis upon people, upon creative disorder, upon the non-quantifiable, the subjective and the qualitative. Increasingly, this contradiction between objective technism and subjective anarchism defines the key ideological polarity of our time. The intimate relationship between the knowledge sector and the new opposition is also apparent when we examine the social origins of the members of opposition. For the core of the counterculture consists not of the children of the working class, or of the lower middle class but of the children of the knowledge sector. New opposition is not monolithic, and that we must distinguish its political from its cultural wing. Available evidence suggests that members of the political wing are the most concerned with institutional, political and social change, and are also with most likely to express solidarity with the basic values of their parents. Recruits to the cultural and expressive wing of the counterculture, in contrast, are

concerned with the expansion of consciousness, the development of alternative life-styles, and the pursuit of communal ways of living. As a result, they reject not only the conventional values and institutions of the society they live in, but the values and life styles of their parents.

A variety of factors within the knowledge sector clearly cooperate to generate its own opposition, for example, the ambivalences of the parents of the youthful dissenters towards the very knowledge sector in which they are employed. But no factor is of greater significance than the impact of higher education upon its recruits.. Higher education bears a paradoxical relationship to the knowledge sector. On the one hand, higher education is essential for the maintenance and growth of the knowledge sector, but on the other hand, higher education provides many of the catalysts that push students to develop a critical consciousness which leads them to become part of the youthful opposition, and thus oppose the dominant ideology of the knowledge sector. A technological society cannot rely exclusively upon a narrowly system of higher education. Therefore, it must foster a high degree of critical consciousness among its most educated products, and this critical consciousness is readily turned against the dominant assumptions and practices of the technological society. In a way not often acknowledged by educators but increasingly sensed by the general public, higher education today is subversive in that it is helping to create youths who challenge many of the basic assumptions of their society. Prolonged mass higher is a major factor in producing millions of young dissenters from the social order that creates them.

This argument indicates that higher education is a key process whereby the contradictions of technological society are being generated. Higher education also has a socializing function, as pointed by liberal theorists and for many of those who are exposed to it, socialization remains its primary result. Especially when higher education remains narrowly technical, and when students by previous inclination or present experience reject alternatives views of the world and accept conventional definitions of morality, then education performs the function currently assigned to it by most liberals and radicals, namely the function of integrating the individual into society. But increasingly, higher education conspires with the mass media and the juxtaposition of cultures within modern societies to create millions of young men and women who are unwilling to accept the existing social order uncritically.

These observations on contemporary society are obviously incomplete, sketchy and doubtless often wrong. However, they indicate my contention that in analyzing contemporary societies, we do well to start from one of the central points emphasized by the counterrevolutionary theorists, namely the ascendancy of the knowledge sector. But an analysis of the meaning of this sector, I believe, leads not to the conclusion that it will inevitably triumph, but rather to the realization that the knowledge sector is riven through with basic contradictions, and that is generating its own critics on a mass scale.

- c) The arguments outlined above indicate my basic agreement with the counterrevolutionary theorists of youth that we are in a period of transition “between two ages”, in Brzezinski’s phrase, and that this transition is likely to be prolonged and difficult. This analysis also suggests, however that the emergence of a new opposition is a sign of the surfacing of new contradictions within the dominant knowledge sector of technological society, and specifically, that youthful dissent is the expression of an historically revolutionary trend.

Several general political implications follow from this line of reasoning.

- i) It follows that visions of immediate social or political revolution are based on a flawed social and historical analysis. The processes of socio-historical change in which we are living are long-term, secular processes, which will take at least a generation to work themselves out. Those who have serious interest in effecting meaningful social change must therefore be prepared to devote decades, and even a lifetime, to this enterprise.
- ii) If we view the youthful opposition as reflecting emerging contradictions within the dominant knowledge sector of technological societies, we would be wrong to ally ourselves politically with either the value-free technism (defined as thesis in this conflict), or with the subjective anarchism(defined as antithesis). In the long run, what will be called for will be a synthesis of technism with anarchism, of scientific objectivity with romantic expressiveness of the counterculture. It would therefore be a political mistake to embrace unreservedly the future of either the systems analyst or of the tribal communitarian. Instead we must work towards a future that could bring together the enormous power placed in man’s hands by his technology and the vision of human liberation proclaimed by the counterculture. A politics that aligns itself with either the thesis or the antithesis will be a politics that settles for too little.
- iii) Another corollary of the views outlined here concerns the need to support a particular kind of higher education. Those who bitterly oppose the new opposition are already eager to limit higher education to technical education, eliminating or de-emphasizing its critical component. This strategy, if successful, could well reduce the numbers of those who possess that critical consciousness which seems vital for membership in the new opposition. It is therefore important for all who sympathize with the opposition to seek to extend higher education that is truly critical. The current radical attack upon higher education is, I think, misguided when it fails to discriminate between technical and critical education. Higher education in the broad sense not only has been but should continue to be the nursery for the new opposition. And the possibility that the new

opposition might eventually generate enough political power to create major social changes depends in large part on the continuing creation, through education, of an ever-larger minority and eventually even a majority who share the basic orientations of that opposition. This process will take, at the very least, a generation. But, it will not occur at all unless higher education as critical education is nurtured.

- iv) It also follows from these comments that those who today argue that the working class in highly industrialized countries retains its revolutionary potential are incorrect. If we insist that the dialectic of social change did not cease with Marx's death, then it makes theoretical sense that the groups like working class, which were once revolutionary, might have become largely counterrevolutionary. Empirical evidence supports this proposition: the new revolutionary class appears to be a subsector of the knowledge sector, while the working class constitutes a conservative and at times, a reactionary force. No political programme today can or should neglect the real interests of the dwindling and often still exploited working class. But the political programme based on the assumption that the working class in the industrialized nations can be exhorted to assume its true revolutionary role built upon an historical mirage.
- v) The proposition that social forces that begin as progressive generally and reactionary obviously applies to the youthful opposition itself. As the youthful opposition ceases to be youthful, it must constantly guard against further evolution into a reactionary force. We can envision how this could occur: the collectivism of the counterculture could readily become insistence upon the abrogation of individual rights; the counterculture's opposition to technism could degenerate into a mindless hatred of reason, science, intellect, reflection, and accuracy. Today youthful opposition is so weak politically that none of these dangers seems socially or politically important. But should the opposition gain in strength, its own reactionary potentials might well unfold.

In essence, then a politics consistent with this agenda must be one that rejects both the value-free technism of corporate liberalism and subjective anarchism of the counter culture, attempting instead the painful and slow work of creating a synthesis of the institutions of technological society with the culture of oppositional youth. That synthesis must ultimately entail the creation of a culture where the concept of liberation is not merely a facile slogan, but a commitment to the hard work of creating institutions within which genuine human relatedness may be attained. That synthesis must attempt to combine new-culture participation with old culture competence. It must involve an effort to turn modern technology around so that it facilitates man's liberation instead of encouraging his manipulation; so that it helps men understand each other rather than oppose one another.

It is easy to call for a synthesis in general terms. It will be difficult to achieve it in practice. Nor do I believe that such a political synthesis is inevitable or even highly probable. We are indeed at an historical juncture, a turning point, a cultural and institutional crisis. And the youth revolt, the counterculture, the new opposition—these define one pole, one catalyst, one ingredient in that crisis. But history is not necessarily on the side of progress, synthesis or the good. What happens in the future will depend not upon blind institutional and cultural forces, but upon the intelligence, good will and hard work of countless individual men and women. It is possible to day to begin to imagine a society far better than any society we have known—a society where technology serves man, where abundance makes possible higher levels of human development, where men and women attain new freedom not only from hunger, injustice, and tyranny, but from the inner coercions of greed, power-lust, and envy. The political agenda should be to move towards these goals, and to do so even in the absence of certainty that history is on our side.

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