

Democracy and the “Crisis of Confidence”

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The presidential election of 1980 dramatizes the bankruptcy of political leadership and the “crisis of confidence” among the American people. Although it is impossible at this writing to foresee the outcome of this interminable campaign, the outcome itself is in many ways less important than the circumstances leading up to the final decision. Once again it is clear that millions of voters have no particular enthusiasm for any of the candidates that have presented themselves to the public. Those who voted for Carter in the Democratic primaries admitted that they had little confidence in his leadership. Those who voted for Kennedy had to overcome grave doubts about his character. Of the various Republican candidates, John Anderson alone seemed for a time to inspire a feeling of trust, but his unexpectedly strong showing in some of the early primaries probably reflected his ability to project a fresh face, not widespread support for his policies. As Anderson’s face became more familiar and his independent candidacy forced him into the usual evasions, equivocations, and compromises, it became increasingly clear that his political ideas were quite conventional and embodied no real alternative to the status quo.

Meanwhile Barry Commoner of the Citizens Party—the only presidential candidate worth listening to—could not get a hearing. As usual, the only political ideas considered worth reporting were the ones everyone has heard before—the ideas that haven’t worked in the past and won’t work any better in the future. It is no wonder that Americans are bored to death by their politics. The media ignore serious attempts to challenge political orthodoxy, while attempting to invest politics with an air of emergency and high-class entertainment. “Wherever we see glamour in the object of attention,” David Riesman wrote in *The Lonely Crowd*, “we must suspect a basic apathy in the spectator.”

This apathy has become too obvious to ignore: hence the official outcry about the "national malaise."

In July 1979, President Carter, then at one of the lowest points in his political fortunes, lectured the nation on a "fundamental threat to American democracy . . . the erosion of our confidence in the future." Polls conducted by Patrick Caddell—the subject of much discussion in the White House during the weeks leading up to this curious speech—indicated that Americans no longer had much faith in the political process, in the country's economic future, or in their own prospects for personal advancement. The President, in passing, correctly identified the source of our malaise. "Ordinary people are excluded from political power," he said. Instead of pursuing this idea, however, he went on to criticize the spirit of self-seeking and the pursuit of material possessions, calling for a "restoration of American values" and a revival of "hard work, strong families, close-knit communities." Thus he diverted attention from the failure of our political system to the moral failure of the average American, allegedly sunk in an orgy of materialism.

Although Carter quickly dropped the subject of political participation, the important point is that he mentioned it at all. Democracy survives as an ancestral memory even as it disappears from political practice. The disparity between practice and profession—between centralized bureaucratic and corporate power and the ideal of a self-governing society—remains a sensitive issue that cannot be altogether ignored so long as our political traditions retain even the lingering force of an historical myth.

Let us explore the implications of Carter's statement that ordinary people have been excluded from political power. Without assuming that ordinary people ever had a great deal of power to lose, we can safely say that the structures of political and economic power today seem more remote and inaccessible, more impervious to popular influence, than at any time since the pre-Jacksonian era. After the initial successes of the democratic movement, beginning with the English revolutions of the seventeenth century and continuing through the establishment of equality before the law and universal suffrage, democracy in the twentieth century seems to have suffered a series of setbacks and defeats. The rise of fascism and Stalinism furnished premonitory signs of a reversal in the direction of history. In our own country, popular participation in decision making has declined gradually but steadily over the course of the twentieth century. The proportion of active voters has dwindled, even as formal suffrage requirements have been relaxed. Many governmental processes have been taken out of the political realm and entrusted to an elite of professional administrators. The decline of political parties makes the political process itself less re-

sponsive to the popular will. Bureaucracy discourages grass-roots initiatives. Increasingly people live and work in large impersonal organizations over which they have no control. Scientific technology has replaced traditional and customary know-how and rendered people dependent on experts. Citizens now take part in politics merely as consumers, and even in their private lives they find themselves unable to satisfy their needs except by consuming the products of modern technology and the advice of expert technicians—advice that extends even to child rearing, marital “adjustment,” and sexual fulfillment. Our government has ceased to be in any important sense a government of, by, and for the people. At its best, it functions merely as a government for the people, a benevolent paternalism. At its worst, it represents a warfare state, with the potential of developing into a thoroughgoing form of totalitarianism.¹

The centralization of power in the United States and the decline of popular participation in community life have become dramatically visible only in the period since World War II. The roots of these conditions, however, go back to the formative period around the turn of the century. We have been living ever since then with the long-term consequences of the momentous changes inaugurated at that time. The most important of these changes, of course, was the emergence of the corporation and the spread of the corporate form throughout American industry. Often misunderstood as a shift from entrepreneurial to managerial control, the corporation emerged out of conflicts between capital and labor for control of production. It institutionalized the basic division of labor that runs all through modern industrial society, the division between brain work and handwork—between the design and the execution of production. Under the banner of scientific management, capitalists expropriated the technical knowledge formerly exercised by workers and vested it in a new managerial elite. The managers extended their power not at the expense of the owners of industry, who retained much of their influence and in any case tended to merge with the managerial group, but at the expense of the workers. Nor did the eventual triumph of industrial unionism break this pattern of managerial

¹ Sheldon Wolin has called attention to an extraordinary statement in Carter's 1978 State of the Union speech: “We must have what Abraham Lincoln sought—a government for the people [*sic*].” Lincoln, of course, described democracy—it no longer seems superfluous to quote his exact words—as a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

This same address contains an early variation on the theme of the national malaise. Carter deplored the estrangement of the people from the government and “described the mood of the citizens,” as Wolin noted, “in language reminiscent of a textbook account of political alienation.” Comparing citizens in their dealings with government to travellers in a foreign country, the President observed that “often we have to deal with [our government] through trained ambassadors who have become too powerful and influential.” In an ominous tone, he warned: “This cannot go on.” Sheldon Wolin, “The State of the Union,” *New York Review of Books*, May 18, 1978, p. 31.

control. By the 1930s, even the most militant unions had acquiesced in the division of labor between the planning and execution of work. Indeed the very success of the union movement was predicated on a strategic retreat from issues of worker control. Unionization, moreover, helped to stabilize and rationalize the labor market and to discipline the work force. It did not alter the arrangement whereby management controls the technology of production, the rhythm of work, and the location of plants (even when these decisions affect entire communities), leaving the worker with the task merely of carrying out orders.

Having organized mass production on the basis of the new division of labor—most fully realized in the assembly line—the leaders of American industry next turned to the organization of a mass market. The mobilization of consumer demand, together with the recruitment of a labor force, required a far-reaching series of changes that amounted to a cultural revolution. The virtues of thrift, avoidance of debt, and postponement of gratification had to give way to new habits of installment buying and immediate gratification, new standards of comfort, a new sensitivity to changes in fashion. People had to be discouraged from providing for their own wants and resocialized as consumers. Industrialism by its very nature tends to discourage home production and to make people dependent on the market, but a vast effort of reeducation, starting in the 1920s, had to be undertaken before Americans accepted consumption as a way of life. As Emma Rothschild has shown in her study of the automobile industry, Alfred Sloan's innovations in marketing—the annual model change, constant upgrading of the product, efforts to associate it with social status, the deliberate inculcation of an insatiable appetite for change—constituted the necessary counterpart of Henry Ford's innovations in production. Modern industry came to rest on the twin pillars of Fordism and Sloanism.² Both tended to discourage initiative and self-reliance and to reduce work and consumption alike to an essentially passive activity.

Passivity, however, created new problems of labor discipline and social control—problems of “morale,” of “motivation,” of the “human factor,” as they were known to the industrial sociologists and industrial psychologists who began to appear in the '20s. According to these professional students of “human relations,” modern industry had created a feeling of drift, uncertainty, anomie: the worker lacked a sense of “belonging.” Problems of labor discipline and “manpower recruitment” demanded an extension of the cultural reforms already inaugurated by the rise of mass marketing. Indeed the promotion of consumption as a way of life came to be seen as itself a means of easing industrial unrest. But the conversion of the worker into a consumer of commodities was

² Emma Rothschild, *Paradise Lost: The Decline of the Auto-Industrial Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), especially ch. 2, “Fordism and Sloanism.”

soon followed by his conversion into a consumer of therapies designed to ease his "adjustment" to the realities of industrial life. Experiments carried out at Western Electric by Elton Mayo and his colleagues at the Harvard Business School—the famous Hawthorne studies—showed how complaints about low wages and excessive supervision could be neutralized by psychiatric counseling and observation.³ Mayo and his colleagues found, or claimed to find, that changes in the physical conditions of work, wage incentives, and other material considerations had little influence on industrial productivity. The workers under observation increased their output simply because they had become the object of professional attention and for the first time felt as if someone cared about their work. Interviews instituted with the intention of eliciting complaints about the quality of supervision, which might in turn have enabled management to improve supervisory techniques, turned up instead subjective and intensely emotional grievances having little relation to the objective conditions of work. The workers' complaints, according to Mayo, had no "external reference," and the new sense of freedom expressed by the workers under study had to be taken, therefore, not as an objective description of an actual change in the conditions of work but as "prejudiced judgments," as "symptoms," as, in short, "simply a type of statement almost inevitably made when a not very articulate group of workers tries to express an indefinable feeling of relief from constraint." As Mayo took pains to point out, "their opinion is, of course, mistaken: in a sense they are getting closer supervision than ever before, the change is in the quality of the supervision."

It would be hard to find a statement that describes so clearly the shift from an authoritative to a manipulative style of social control—a shift that has transformed not only industry but politics, the school, and finally even the family. On the strength of such studies, sophisticated administrators came to regard moral exhortation, or even appeals to enlightened self-interest in the form of wage incentives, as outmoded techniques of social discipline. They envisioned a change in the "quality of supervision," described by Douglas MacGregor of MIT

3 See Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Fritz J. Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939); Thomas North Whitehead, *The Industrial Worker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938). Secondary sources include George C. Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), especially ch. 3; Henry A. Landsberger, *Hawthorne Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958); Loren Baritz, *Servants of Power* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1960), ch. 5; Harold L. Shepard, "The Social and Historical Philosophy of Elton Mayo," *Antioch Review*, vol. 10 (1950), pp. 396-406; Louis Schneider, "An Industrial Sociology—For What Ends?" *ibid.*, pp. 407-17; Alex Carey, "The Hawthorne Studies: A Radical Criticism," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 32 (1967), pp. 403-16.

in *The Human Side of Enterprise*—another study that has had enormous impact on managerial thought and practice—as a shift from an authoritarian style of control, relying on rewards and punishments, to a more “humanistic” style that treated the worker not as a child but as a partner in the enterprise and sought to give him a sense of belonging. Note the irony of this talk of “partnership.” The new style of management defined the worker (just as he was defined by the advertising industry) as a creature of impulse, shortsighted, irrational, incapable of understanding the conditions of his work or even of formulating an intelligent defense of his own interests. Drawing not only on their own experiments but also on a vast body of sociological and psychological theory, members of the new administrative elite replaced the direct supervision of the labor force with a far more subtle system of psychiatric observation. Observation, initially conceived as a means to more effective forms of supervision and control, became a means of control in its own right.

The systematic observation of symptomatic data, even before it became a technique of labor discipline and social control, had already come to serve as the basis of a new system of industrial recruitment, centered on the school. The modern system of public education, remodeled in accordance with the same principles of scientific management first perfected in industry, has replaced apprenticeship as the principal agency of training people for work. The transmission of skills is increasingly incidental to this training. The school habituates children to bureaucratic discipline and to the demands of group living, grades and sorts them by means of standardized tests, and selects some for professional and managerial careers while consigning the rest to manual labor. The subordination of academic instruction to testing and counseling suggests that “manpower selection” has become almost indistinguishable from social control—“adjustment to reality”—and that the school system constitutes part of a larger apparatus of counseling or resocialization intended to assign people to their appropriate social roles and to enable them to accept those roles with a minimum of emotional distress. This tutelary complex, which includes not only the school but also the juvenile court, the psychiatric clinic, the social-work agency, in short, the whole range of institutions operated by the “helping professions,” discourages the autonomous transfer of power from one generation to the next, mediates family relationships, and thus socializes the population to the demands of industrial life.

All these institutions operate according to the underlying principle that a willingness to cooperate with the proper authorities offers the best evidence of “adjustment” and the best hope of personal success, while a refusal to cooperate signifies the presence of “emotional problems” requiring more sustained thera-

peutic attention. As an agency of manpower selection, the school system, supplemented by other tutelary agencies, serves as an effective device for rationing class privilege, as Christopher Jencks has pointed out, in a society that feels uneasy about privilege and wants to believe that people get ahead on merit alone.⁴ As an agency of social discipline, the school, together with other elements in the tutelary complex, both reflects and contributes to the shift from authoritative sanctions to psychological manipulation and surveillance—the redefinition of political authority in therapeutic terms—and to the rise of a professional and managerial elite that governs society not by upholding authoritative moral standards but by defining normal behavior and by invoking allegedly nonpunitive, psychiatric sanctions against deviance.

The extension of these techniques into the political realm transforms politics into another article of consumption. Here again, the emergence of new techniques of control and new styles of political leadership marks the growing influence of the managerial elite. One does not have to accept the thesis of a “managerial revolution” or a “new class” to acknowledge the force of Riesman’s observation that the “bullet that killed McKinley marked the end of the days of explicit class leadership.” Nineteenth-century politics, according to Riesman, turned on “easily moralized judgments of good and bad” and on “agreement between the leaders and led that the work sphere of life was dominant.” Although the power of the ruling classes rested at bottom on force, they sought for the most part to govern through moral persuasion. They defended their leadership by appealing to a common fund of moral principles and to common standards of political justice. These ideals, of course, were open to conflicting interpretations, and the standards of right and wrong upheld by the governing classes—for example, the proposition that every man had a right to the fruits of his own labor—could be turned against the established order and made to serve as the basis of demands for its reformation or even its overthrow. But the bitterness of ideological conflicts in nineteenth-century politics itself testified to an underlying agreement about the nature of political discourse. All parties to these debates assumed that political actions had to be justified by an appeal to a body of moral principles accessible to human reason and subject to rational discussion. The idea that moral judgments are by definition subjective and therefore lie outside the realm of rational debate played little part in nineteenth-century politics.

Political leadership remained essentially the art of oratory: this explains the persistence of a classical and Renaissance tradition of humanistic education having as its object the training of the “good man skilled in public speaking,” in

⁴ Christopher Jencks et al., *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), pp. 183–85.

Cato's phrase. Quintilian's description of the orator, which retained considerable influence among educators right down to the middle of the nineteenth century, envisioned the political leader as a "man who has added to extraordinary natural gifts a thorough mastery of all the fairest departments of knowledge," and who employed his skills in the "defense of the innocent, the repression of crime, the support of truth against falsehood in suits involving money," and in the still more important work of "guiding the people from the paths of error into better things."⁵ In the second half of the nineteenth century, the decline of the liberal arts college and the rise of the modern university, with its devotion to specialization, scientific research, professional training, and community service, already signaled the waning of an older tradition of statecraft and its replacement by a new science of administration. The founders of the university movement conceived of the new statesman as a professional administrator, skilled in the science of organization and management. The twentieth century added to his duties responsibility for crisis management, conflict resolution, and social pathology—the diagnosis and cure of anomie.

The growth of a professional civil service, the rise of regulatory commissions, the proliferation of governmental agencies, and the dominance of executive over legislative functions provide merely the most obvious examples of the shift from political to administrative control, in which issues allegedly too abstruse and technical for popular understanding fall under the control of professional experts. Governmental regulation of the economy has often been advocated with the explicit objective of insulating business and government against popular ignorance—as when George W. Perkins, one of the founders of Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive party and a leading champion of the regulatory commission, demanded that economic issues like tariffs and trusts be taken "out of politics," deplored the "shockingly incompetent manner in which our great business problems have been handled," and cited the "hullabaloo over the Sherman Law" as an example of the incompetence of politicians and their constituents.⁶ But even reforms intended to increase popular participation, such as the presidential primary, have had the opposite effect. Twentieth-century politics has come to consist more and more of the study and control of public opinion. The study of the "American voter" incorporates techniques first perfected in market research, where they served to identify the whims of the

⁵ Quoted in O. B. Hardison, Jr., *Toward Freedom and Dignity: The Humanities and the Idea of Humanity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. 38; for another translation, see William M. Smail, ed., *Quintilian on Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, n.d. [1966]), pp. 108, 114.

⁶ John A. Garraty, *Right-Hand Man: The Life of George W. Perkins* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960), p. 318.

“sovereign consumer.” In government as in industry, devices originally intended merely to register opinion—polls, samples, and balloting itself—now serve to manipulate opinion as well. They define a statistical norm, deviations from which become automatically suspect. They make it possible to exclude unpopular opinions from political discussion (just as unpopular wares are excluded from the supermarket) without any reference to their merits, simply on the basis of their demonstrated lack of appeal. By confronting the electorate with the narrow range of existing choices, they ratify those choices as the only ones capable of attracting support. Just as the interviews conducted at Hawthorne trivialized the workers’ grievances, polls and surveys trivialize politics by reducing political choices to indistinguishable alternatives. In both cases, those in power invite popular “input” strictly on their own terms, under cover of scientific impartiality. The study of “voting behavior” becomes at the same time an important determinant of that behavior.

In industry, the exclusion of workers from control over the design of work went hand in hand with the rise of a new and profoundly undemocratic institution, the corporation, that has centralized the technical knowledge once administered by craftsmen. In politics, the exclusion of the public from political participation is bound up with the decline of a democratic institution, the political party, and its replacement by institutions less amenable to popular control. The policy-making function of the party has been taken over by the administrative bureaucracy; its educative function by the mass media. Political parties now specialize in marketing politicians for public consumption, and even here party discipline has broken down to a remarkable extent. The electorate is “no longer bound to party through the time-honored links of patronage and the machine,” as Walter Dean Burnham points out. As a result, politics has become an “item of luxury consumption . . . an indoor sport involving a host of discrete players rather than the teams of old.”⁷

The decline of party loyalty, the prevalence of split-ticket and single-issue voting, the dissociation of presidential and congressional voting coalitions, and the stabilization of membership in the House (with an increasing proportion of incumbents regularly reelected and giving more attention to the requirements of reelection—to the immediate interests of a particular constituency—than to policy formation or even to the interests of the party as a whole) have created what Burnham calls an “institutional deadlock.” Many of President Carter’s political troubles have reflected these underlying conditions, which are likely to confront future Presidents as well, even those who do not suffer so obviously from the stigma of being outsiders to the Washington political game. Given the

⁷ Walter Dean Burnham, “Party Systems and the Political Process,” in *The American Party Systems*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 305.

decomposition of party loyalty, the growing gap between Washington and the rest of the country, and the popular demand for presidential leadership that transcends party politics, the President has become an outsider almost by definition. The condition of standing to one side of the Washington scene, a disadvantage in governing, works to his advantage in political campaigns. The "future for policy-making," Burnham writes, thus "rests uneasily between the alternatives of reinforced institutional deadlock and of executive imposition of policy on the rest of the system."⁸

The new machinery of social discipline, far from stabilizing the industrial system, has created a state of permanent crisis, which gives a certain plausibility to the claims of the crisis managers, to be sure, but at the same time makes the system more difficult to govern. Advanced industrial society appears at first sight to have achieved a highly efficient system of hierarchical control that approximates the benevolent totalitarianism predicted by Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, and other prophets of a technological anti-utopia in the no longer distant future. The corporations, the military, and the bureaucratic state appear to constitute an interlocking, self-contained structure of power, impervious to criticism and change. The common people, effectively barred from decision making but diverted by an expanding array of consumer goods and consumer choices, accept their disfranchisement with few profound or searching complaints. The modern organization combines an unprecedented concentration of power with anonymity, a diffusion of responsibility that protects those in power from public accountability. Power exercised in the name of benevolence, moreover, escapes the check of legal safeguards designed to limit the powers of governments that confronted the citizen frankly as an adversary, not as a counselor and friendly helper.

This appearance of monolithic control is deceptive, however. The whole system depends on the illusion, even to some extent on the reality, of popular consent; and the illusion has begun to wear thin. The modern corporate state took shape as a compromise between traditionalism and revolution—between traditional forms of authority on the one hand, based on the family, the church, and the institution of absolute monarchy, and the all-powerful state on the other hand, the Jacobin or Stalinist dictatorship that extinguishes all trace of autonomous private initiative in the name of a higher historical necessity. The liberal state operates through indirect controls allegedly designed to protect private property and individual rights against encroachment by other citizens or by the state itself. It therefore has to maintain at least the appearance of political freedom and individual autonomy. Yet the effect of its discipline, as we have

8 Walter Dean Burnham, "American Politics in the 1970's," *ibid.*, p. 352.

change. Those movements, based on declining classes—artisans and yeomen—incorporated preindustrial traditions of work and preindustrial definitions of the political community, and they remained close enough to an earlier way of life to retain a vision of how society could be organized on principles completely alien to those of industrial capitalism. The strength of the labor movement in the 1870s and 1880s, writes Gregory S. Kealey in his study of the Toronto working class, “lay in the workers’ knowledge of a past that was totally different from their present. They knew that industrial capitalism was a social system with a history [and that] the economy had been, and thus could be, organized in radically different ways.”¹⁰

Nineteenth-century artisans and farmers did not mindlessly reject machinery or seek to revive the preindustrial order, as legend has it, but neither did they accept the destruction of their way of life as a foregone conclusion, preordained by the march of historical progress. They grappled with the problem of how the advantages of modern technology might be combined with small-scale production and grass-roots political control. In the twentieth century, a new kind of Left emerged that dismissed as hopelessly reactionary their attachment to such “outmoded” institutions as the family farm. Both the Marxist Left and the non-Marxist Left—with a few important exceptions on either side—now embraced modern technology without reservations and sought merely to free it from capitalist constraints. If anything, non-Marxists like Edward Bellamy and Thorstein Veblen waxed even more lyrical about the wonders of technology than the advocates of “scientific” socialism. But Marxists too condemned the farmer’s devotion to his land, or the artisan’s devotion to his craft, as backward and “nostalgic.” It followed almost inevitably from these premises that such forms of false consciousness had to be forcibly eradicated by a radical vanguard of professional revolutionaries, enlightened engineers, and/or disinterested social planners. The elitism of the twentieth-century Left, Marxist and non-Marxist, grew out of its commitment to the dream of a society fully rationalized and integrated into a single productive machine—a vision resisted by those among whom the Left sought a following, hence one that had to be imposed on the masses by an intelligentsia in command of the underlying logic of historical progress.

In a review of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*—a book that did so much to convert American intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the cause of social reform and also to identify socialism with centralization and state control—William Morris put his finger on the “unmixed modern” mentality, which conceives of the ideal society as “one great monopoly,” or again as a “huge standing army, tightly drilled” and chained to the

¹⁰ Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 295.

machines that have ostensibly liberated mankind from toil. Himself the product of another tradition prematurely discarded by the Left, the romantic critique of capitalism, Morris noted that Bellamy had "no idea beyond existence in a great city"—a "Boston beautified." Bellamy's Nationalist utopia represented the social vision "of the industrious *professional* middle-class men of to-day purified from their crime of complicity with the monopolist class, and become independent instead of being, as they now are, parasitical."¹¹

The goal of social reconstruction, according to Morris, should have been not to replace human labor by labor-saving machines but to make work artistic and varied. Capitalism had debased the pleasure of creation by turning it into a wage relation, and a utopia based on equal pay for equal work merely carried the logic of capitalism to its conclusion. "If you are going to ask to be paid for the pleasure of creation," Morris wrote in *News from Nowhere*, "the next thing we shall hear of will be a bill sent in for the begetting of children."¹² Unfortunately, Bellamy's militaristic and technocratic vision of the future left a much deeper imprint on the Left than that of Morris, easily dismissed as "anachronistic."¹³ The poverty of the progressive and socialist Left appears most clearly in its failure to criticize the industrial division of labor and its political consequences—the root cause of all those forms of misery and injustice that are peculiar to modern society. Far from criticizing the division of labor, the Left began to advocate its extension even into the domain of domestic life, the one area not yet completely assimilated to the standards of industrial production.

¹¹ William Morris, "Looking Backward," *Commonweal*, June 22, 1889, pp. 196-97.

¹² William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1917), pp. 126-27.

¹³ In his book on American progressivism, Daniel Aaron echoes the received wisdom when he dismisses Morris's utopia as "aristocratic." (*Men of Good Hope* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1961], p. 126.) In fact, Morris was a socialist, a revolutionary socialist at that, and he wrote *News from Nowhere* (in reply to Bellamy) during the same period of his life in which he was pointing out that Fabian socialism would contribute to the solidification of capitalist control. But, of course, it was not his kind of socialism that finally prevailed, but "scientific" socialism, whether in the form of Fabianism, Leninism, or Bellamy's Nationalism, movements radically different in some respects but similar in their central assumptions and in the elitist political strategies to which those assumptions led. Even E. P. Thompson has to go to great lengths to prove that *News from Nowhere*—to which he devotes only a couple of paragraphs in a book of nine hundred pages—embodied a certifiably scientific brand of utopian thinking. Thompson's retraction of this interpretation, in the new edition of his biography of Morris, should be required reading for the Left, not only because it shows Thompson at his best, but also because it exposes so clearly the tyranny formerly exercised by Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, even over a writer temperamentally drawn to Morris and to the romantic critique of industrial capitalism but capable of dealing with Morris, in the mid-'50s just before his own break with the Communist Party, only by trying to assimilate Morris to the Leninist tradition. (E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* [New York: Pantheon, 1976], pp. 763-810.)

Thus the socialist (Bellamite) feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman called, in effect, for the application of scientific management to the home. I bring up her arguments not in order to belabor feminism, which is profoundly anti-technocratic when it becomes truly radical, but to show how completely the socialist Left has assimilated the underlying principles of the social order it claims to criticize. According to Marxist tradition, the destruction of the ties of home and neighborhood (a painful but historically necessary process) would emancipate the proletariat from "rural idiocy." The results do not seem to have borne out this sanguine view of the industrial revolution.

"Cooking is a matter of law," said Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "not the harmless play of fancy. Architecture might be more sportive and varied if every man built his own house, but it would not be the art and science that we have made it; and while every woman prepared food for her own family, cooking can never rise beyond the level of the amateur's work." Here is the pure gospel of modernism. Like other household tasks, the "selection and preparation of food should be in the hands of trained experts," according to Gilman; nor did she hesitate to extend the same reasoning to motherhood itself.¹⁴

This program, which it is hardly necessary to add still commands widespread support among socialists, exemplifies the poverty of the modernizing Left and its failure to offer an alternative to industrial capitalism. The development of a democratic Left in the 1980s depends first of all on the recognition that when the worker forgot how to build his own house, and his wife forgot how to cook, they lost control over much else besides. Now that the machine technology that replaced architectural and culinary craftsmanship has proven to be not only inhumane but intolerably inefficient as well, the fatal weaknesses in the modernist tradition stand fully exposed. Just as the technology of housekeeping and motherhood has turned its back on the household arts of an earlier day—thereby making women less capable of providing for their families at the same time that it raises the cost of housekeeping, floods the market with adulterated and poisonous products, and generally depresses the standard of living—so modern architecture has replaced craftsmanship with prefabricated steel and glass, repudiating as a grotesque example of rural idiocy the idea that "architecture might be more sportive and varied if every man built his own house." It is no longer any secret (thanks to Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, Paul and Percival Goodman, Peter Blake, Moshe Safdie, and other critics of modernism) that such an architecture has made cities boring, monotonous, unconvivial, and finally even unsafe, since the absence of street life and the rigorous separation of working and living quarters create vacant

¹⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1900), pp. 231, 237.

spaces ideal for mugging and murder. The high-rise offices and apartment buildings that turn their backs on the street—human filing cases, as Mumford has called them—exemplify in the most palpable form the bankruptcy of the technocratic “city of the future.” Yet the underlying principles of industrial civilization—the separation of planning from the execution of tasks, of living from working, of expertise from experience—continue to find almost automatic acceptance, even by the Left, as part of the inexorable march of historical progress. Anyone who calls these principles into question is accused of wanting to turn back the clock to the days of cottage industry. But what if industrial civilization should prove to have been itself an aberration in the course of history, not its climax? Future developments may show that industrialism was a step fundamentally in the wrong direction, the mounting costs of which mankind can no longer afford. Is it still too soon to consider how some of our mistakes might be undone?

In arguing that the modern development of industry—the modern division of labor—has destroyed both craftsmanship and ordinary know-how (both true professionalism and amateurism), made people dangerously dependent on experts (while reducing the experts themselves to semiliteracy), centralized political and economic power, and created an energy-wasteful and environmentally destructive technology, I have said nothing new. A long line of critics have made us familiar with this indictment of modern society. But the point that should invite second thoughts on the Left is that few of those critics are socialists or radicals in the accepted sense of the word, and some of them, in fact, are out-and-out conservatives. Why is it that we so often have to turn to the Right for the most penetrating criticisms of modern life? Why has the Left found so little to say against capitalism beyond what was said long ago by Marx and Engels? Not only has the twentieth-century Left added very little to the Marxian analysis of capitalism, it has clung to those elements in the socialist tradition that are hopelessly dated or were dubious to start with. It is essential for people on the Left to understand that the arguments I have outlined here—arguments for which I claim little originality, some of which derive from conservative thinkers, some from a structuralist critique of the tutelary complex, some from anarchists, and some from a few independent-minded Marxists, whose ideas are more subversive than they realize—cut sharply across the grain of progressive, Marxist, enlightened modern thought. The critical reinterpretation of modern technology, professionalism, and expertise, and of the new system of social control with which they are bound up, suggests the conclusion, among others, that Marx's own faith in the historically progressive character of the industrial revolution, like that of his followers, may have been fundamentally misguided. Recent interpretations of working-class history, by showing how working-class radicalism in the nineteenth century drew not so much on factory experience as

on earlier traditions of solidarity and political republicanism, point to a similar conclusion. It appears that the modern factory system, instead of serving as the nursery of working-class revolution, has proved instead to be its burial ground.

A radical movement capable of offering a democratic alternative to corporate capitalism will have to draw on traditions that have been dismissed or despised by twentieth-century progressives and only recently resurrected both by scholars and by environmentalists, community organizers, and other activists. It will have to stand for the nurture of the soil against the exploitation of natural resources, the family against the factory, the romantic vision of the individual against the technological vision, localism over democratic centralism. Such a radicalism would deserve the allegiance of all true democrats.