

American "Civilization"

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The recently deceased John Dewey was applauded by the American press as the most representative figure of American civilization. This is quite right. His theories are entirely representative of the vision of man and life which is the premise of Americanism and its «democracy».

The essence of such theories is this: that everyone can become what he wants to, within the limits of the technological means at his disposal. Equally, a person is not what he is from his true nature and there is no real difference between people, only differences in qualifications. According to this theory anyone can be anyone he wants to be if he knows how to train himself.

This is obviously the case with the «self-made man»; in a society which has lost all sense of tradition the notion of personal aggrandizement will extend into every aspect of human existence, reinforcing the egalitarian doctrine of pure democracy. If the basis of such ideas is accepted, then all natural diversity has to be abandoned. Each person can presume to possess the potential of everyone else and the terms «superior» and «inferior» lose their meaning; every notion of distance and respect loses meaning; all life-styles are open to all. To all organic conceptions of life Americans oppose a mechanistic conception. In a society which has «started from scratch», everything has the characteristic of being fabricated. In American society appearances are masks not faces. At the same time, proponents of the American way of life are hostile to personality.

The Americans' «open-mindedness», which is sometimes cited in their favor, is the other side of their interior formlessness. The same goes for their «individualism». Individualism and personality are not the same: the one belongs to the formless world of quantity, the other to the world of quality and hierarchy. The Americans are the living refutation of the Cartesian axiom, «I think, therefore I am»: Americans do not think, yet they are. The American «mind», puerile and primitive, lacks characteristic form and is therefore open to every kind of standardization.

In a superior civilization, as, for example, that of the Indo-Aryans, the being who is without a characteristic form or caste (in the original meaning of the word), not even that of servant or shudra, would emerge as a pariah. In this respect America is a society of pariahs. There is a role for pariahs. It is to be subjected to beings whose form and internal laws are precisely defined. Instead the modern pariahs seek to become dominant themselves and to exercise their dominion over all the world.

There is a popular notion about the United States that it is a «young nation» with a «great future before it». Apparent American defects are then described as the «faults of youth» or 'growing pains». It is not difficult to see that the myth of «progress» plays a large part in this judgment. According to the idea that everything new is good, America has a privileged role to play among civilized nations. In the First World War the United States intervened in the role of «the civilized world» par excellence. The «most evolved» nation had not only a right but a duty to interfere in the destinies of other peoples.

The structure of history is, however, cyclical not evolutionary. It is far from being the case that the most recent civilizations are necessarily «superior». They may be, in fact, senile and decadent. There is a necessary correspondence between the most advanced stages of a historical cycle and the most primitive. America is the final stage of modern Europe. Guenon called the United States «the far West», in the novel sense that the United States represents the *reductio ad absurdum* of the negative and the most senile aspects of Western civilization. What in Europe exist in diluted form are magnified and concentrated in the United States whereby they are revealed as the symptoms of disintegration and cultural and human regression. The American mentality can only be interpreted as an example of regression, which shows itself in the mental atrophy towards all higher interests and incomprehension of higher sensibility. The American mind has limited horizons, one conscribed to everything which is immediate and simplistic, with the inevitable consequence that everything is made banal, basic and leveled down until it is deprived of all spiritual life. Life itself in American terms is entirely mechanistic. The sense of «I» in America belongs entirely to the physical level of existence. The typical American neither has

spiritual dilemmas nor complications: he is a «natural» joiner and conformist.

The primitive American mind can only superficially be compared to a young mind. The American mind is a feature of the regressive society to which I have already referred.

American Morality

The much-vaunted sex appeal of American women is drawn from films, reviews and pin-ups, and is in large part fictitious. A recent medical survey in the United States showed that 75 per cent of young American women are without strong sexual feeling and instead of satisfying their libido they seek pleasure narcissistically in exhibitionism, vanity and the cult of fitness and health in a sterile sense. American girls have «no hang-ups about sex»; they are «easy going» for the man who sees the whole sexual process as something in isolation thereby making it uninteresting and matter-of-fact, which, at such a level, it is meant to be. Thus, after she has been taken to the cinema or a dance, it is something like American good manners for the girl to let herself be kissed — this doesn't mean anything. American women are characteristically frigid and materialistic. The man who «has his way» with an American girl is under a material obligation to her. The woman has granted a material favor. In cases of divorce American law overwhelmingly favors the woman. American women will divorce readily enough when they see a better bargain. It is frequently the case in America that a woman will be married to one man but already «engaged» to a future husband, the man she plans to marry after a profitable divorce.

«Our» American Media

Americanization in Europe is widespread and evident. In Italy it is a phenomenon which is rapidly developing in these post-war years and is considered by most people, if not enthusiastically, at least as something natural. Some time ago I wrote that of the two great dangers confronting Europe - Americanism and Communism - the first is the more insidious. Communism cannot be a danger other than in the brutal and catastrophic form of a direct seizure of power by communists. On the other hand Americanization gains ground by a process of gradual infiltration, effecting modifications of mentalities and customs which seem inoffensive in themselves but which end in a fundamental perversion and degradation against which it is impossible to fight other than within oneself.

It is precisely with respect to such internal opposition that most Italians seem weak. Forgetting their own cultural inheritance they readily turn to the United States as something akin to the parent guide of the world. Whoever wants to be modern has to measure himself according to the American standard. It is pitiable to witness a European country so debase itself. Veneration for America has nothing to do with a cultured interest in the way other people live. On the contrary, servility towards the United States leads one to think that there is no other way of life worth considering on the same level as the American one.

Our radio service is Americanized. Without any criterion of superior and inferior it just follows the fashionable themes of the moment and markets what is considered «acceptable» — acceptable, that is, to the most Americanized section of the public, which is to say the most degenerate. The rest of us are dragged along in its wake. Even the style of presentation on radio has become Americanized. «Who, after listening to an American radio program, can suppress a shudder when he considers that the only way of escaping communism is by becoming Americanized?» Those are not the words of an outsider but of an American sociologist, James Burnham, professor at the University of Princeton. Such a judgment from an American should make Italian radio programmers blush for shame.

The consequence of the «do your own thing» democracy is the intoxication of the greater part of the population which is not capable of discriminating for itself, which, when not guided by a power and an ideal, all too easily loses sense of its own identity.

The Industrial Order in America

In his classic study of capitalism Werner Sombart summarized the late capitalist phase in the adage Fiat productio, pariat homo. In its extreme form capitalism is a system in which a man's value is estimated solely in terms of the production of merchandise and the invention of the means of production. Socialist doctrines grew out of a

reaction to the lack of human consideration in this system.

A new phase has begun in the United States where there has been an upsurge of interest in so-called labor relations. In appearance it would seem to signify an improvement: in reality this is a deleterious phenomenon. The entrepreneurs and employers have come to realize the importance of the «human factor» in a productive economy, and that it is a mistake to ignore the individual involved in industry: his motives, his feelings, his working day life. Thus, a whole school of study of human relations in industry has grown up, based on behaviorism. Studies like Human Relations in Industry by B. Gardner and G. Moore have supplied a minute analysis of the behavior of employees and their motivations with the precise aim of defining the best means to obviate all factors that can hinder the maximization of production. Some studies certainly don't come from the shop floor but from the management, abetted by specialists from various colleges. The sociological investigations go as far as analyzing the employee's social ambience. This kind of study has a practical purpose: the maintenance of the psychological contentment of the employee is as important as the physical. In cases in which a worker is tied to a monotonous job which doesn't demand a great deal of concentration, the studies will draw attention to the «danger» that his mind may tend to wander in a way that may eventually reflect badly on his attitude towards the job.

The private lives of employees are not forgotten — hence the increase in so-called personnel counseling. Specialists are called in to dispel anxiety, psychological disturbances and non-adaptation «complexes», even to the point of giving advice in relation to the most personal matters. A frankly psycho-analytic technique and one much used is to make the subject «talk freely» and put the results obtainable by this «catharsis» into relief.

None of this is concerned with the spiritual betterment of human beings or any real human problems, such as a European would understand them in this «age of economics». On the other side of the Iron Curtain man is treated as a beast of burden and his obedience is maintained by terror and famine. In the United States man is also seen as just a factor of labor and consumption, and no aspect of his interior life is neglected and every factor of his existence is drawn to the same end. In the «Land of the Free», through every medium, man is told he has reached a degree of happiness hitherto undreamed of. He forgets who he is, where he came from, and basks in the present.

American «Democracy» in Industry

There is a significant and growing discrepancy in the United States between the shibboleths of the prevailing political ideology and the effective economic structures of the nation. A large part of studies of the subject is played by the 'morphology of business». Studies corroborate the impression that American business is a long way from the type of organization which corresponds to the democratic ideal of U.S. propaganda. American businesses have a «pyramid» structure. They constitute at the top an articulate hierarchy. The big businesses are run in the same way as government ministries and are organized along similar lines. They have coordinating and controlling bodies which separate the business leaders from the mass of employees. Rather than becoming more flexible in a social sense the «managerial elite» (Burnham) is becoming more autocratic than ever — something not unrelated to American foreign policy.

This is the end of yet another American illusion. America: the «land of opportunity», where every possibility is there for the person who can grasp it, a land where anyone can rise from rags to riches. At first there was the «open frontier» for all to ride out across. That closed and the new «open frontier» was the sky, the limitless potential of industry and commerce. As Gardner, Moore and many others have shown, this too is no longer limitless, and the opportunities are thinning out. Given the ever increasing specialization of labor in the productive process and the increasing emphasis on «qualifications», what used to seem obvious to Americans — that their children would «go further» than they would — is for many people no longer obvious at all. Thus it is that in the so-called political democracy of the United States, the force and the power in the land, that is to say the industry and the economy, are becoming ever more self-evidently undemocratic. The problem then is: should reality be made to fit ideology or vice-versa? Until recently the overwhelming demand has been for the former course of action; the cry goes out for a return to the «real America» of unfettered enterprise and the individual free of central government control. Nevertheless, there are also those who would prefer to limit democracy in order to

adapt political theory to commercial reality. If the mask of American «democracy» were thereby removed, it would become clear to what extent «democracy» in America (and elsewhere) is only the instrument of an oligarchy which pursues a method of «indirect action», assuring the possibility of abuse and deception on a large scale of those many who accept a hierarchical system because they think it is justly such. This dilemma of «democracy» in the United States may one day give place to some interesting developments.

(from *Il Conciliatore*, no. 10, 1971; translated from the German edition in *Deutsche Stimme*, no. 8, 1998)