

THE SECOND COMING OF DANIEL BELL*

George Ross

Daniel Bell: *The Coming of Post Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (Heinemann, 1974), pp. 507. £5.50.

The Coming of Post Industrial Society by Daniel Bell is subtitled a "venture in social forecasting". Since the book has been greeted as a major turning point in sociological analysis by many, we might do well to recall for a moment one of Bell's earlier "ventures in social forecasting", *The End of Ideology*. Appearing at the end of the 1950s, *The End of Ideology* was an important document, but hardly because of the astuteness of its "forecasting". In fact, the book's central thesis, that radical ideologies had lost their appeal in the West, was rapidly disproved by events. In retrospect, *The End of Ideology* was significant because it communicated an understanding of 1950s America widely held by the American liberal intelligentsia. In this perspective an economically powerful America had solved, or could solve, the very social problems which had, in earlier times, prompted "ideological" or "utopian" thinking. Because of this in America the social basis of "ideological" thinking no longer existed. This was even more the case because all experiments at acting out "utopian ideologies" elsewhere—and particularly in the Soviet Union—had led to more social unpleasantness than they had originally set out to remedy. As "social forecasting", then, *The End of Ideology* was ideology, the wishful thinking of a generation of intellectuals, scarred by the battles of the '30s and '40s, who had become respected and important figures in the prosperous Cold War America.

When considering *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* we should remember the lessons of *The End of Ideology*. In this earlier book Bell was wrong in his assessment of American society. More important than this, however, he spoke for a caste of American liberal intellectuals who shared his wrong-headedness. This caste perceived their world in the same ways Bell did, a world where capitalism was no longer capitalism, but "industrial society", a world in which the "soulful corporation", disinterested governmental bureaucracies and a democratic pluralist

* The help which came from Charlotte Weissberg was indispensable.

political system saw to it that the interests of all were represented and promoted.

The Coming of Post Industrial Society appears after a decade which called all of these liberal certainties into question. The astonished "discovery" of American poverty and racism was followed in short order by Vietnam and the "discovery" of American imperialism. A new American Left emerged to confront the liberal intelligentsia with powerful arguments which claimed that, not only was the American corporation not "soulful", but that, in its search for profits and super-profits it corrupted the very "soul" of American life, destroyed natural environments, polluted air and water, dictated foreign policies which justified any extreme of repression in the Third World and, in general, manipulated politics everywhere to implement corporate goals. *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* is, in its own way, one major attempt to answer these arguments. The contents of *The Coming* may or may not be "scientifically" convincing. This remains for us to ascertain. But, whatever their truth value, they will certainly be influential. The book must also be read, then, as a summation of, and rejoinder for, the 1960s made in the name of the American liberal intelligentsia by one of its most prominent figures, Daniel Bell. As one of Bell's American critics has noted, "when Daniel Bell declares that society has changed, it does not follow that it has done so. But it does follow that many people will think that it has."¹

I

Before plunging into the substance of Bell's argument, it may help to comment briefly on his method of analysis. Bell suggests that modern societies can best be approached conceptually by dividing them into three separate spheres, the *social structure* (comprising the economy, technology and the occupational system), the *polity*, which "regulates the distribution of power and adjudicates the conflicting demands of individuals and groups", and the *culture*, the "realm of expressive symbolism and meaning" (p. 12). For each of these spheres it is the analyst's task to establish "ideal types" à la Max Weber, which will specify their central motivational and structural aspects or, in Bell's terms, their *axial principles* and *axial structures* (the energizing principles from which action flows and the "organizing frame" "around which other institutions are draped" (p. 10).

In *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* Bell does not claim to set up ideal typical maps for all three spheres in modern societies. Rather he is more narrowly concerned with what he calls the *social structural* sphere. He contends that profound changes in this sphere of American society (Bell considers America to be the vanguard of social change elsewhere)

began to occur after World War II. He feels that such changes will, once their logic is followed through, cause an entirely new social order to emerge. In other words, for Bell, changes in the "axial principle" and "axial structures" of American social structure have begun which are of such profound import that they will transform America from an "industrial society" into a "post industrial society". In fact, such changes have already gone far enough, to Bell's mind, to permit "forecasting" the shape of things 30-50 years hence, when "post industrial society" will be a full-blown reality. Thus, in much the same way as Marx used evidence from 19th century capitalism to "forecast" changes leading towards socialism, Bell, using evidence from mid-20th century America, is attempting to "forecast" changes leading to "post industrial" society. The success of Bell's endeavour, even in its own terms, depends on his ability to make several different arguments. First of all, he must convince us with hard evidence that the social structural changes he sees as so important are really occurring. He must also demonstrate to us that the changes which he can document actually add up to the introduction of new "axial principles and structures" in the social structures of American society. After all, changes occur constantly in advanced capitalist societies. More often than not, however, they amount to new developments within broader structures which remain essentially the same. Bell must prove that the changes he specifies are "system transcending" rather than "system reinforcing" modifications.

Bell is quick to disclaim that his "forecasting" amounts to either prophecy or prediction. He is building an ideal type analysis on the basis of tendencies which he claims are already unfolding in American social structure. But his "forecasting" is confined to the *social structural* (economic, occupational) sphere. He eschews any precise forecasting for the *political* and *cultural* spheres which, he asserts, have their own "axial principles and structures". In Bell's words ". . . the concept of a post-industrial society is not a picture of a complete social order, it is an attempt to describe an axial change in the social structure (defined as the economy, the technology and the stratification system) of the society" (p. 119). These "axial changes" in social structure will, according to Bell, raise issues and pose questions for both the polity and the culture. But, since these spheres have their own inner logic, in the absence of analyses specific to polity and culture (which Bell does not claim to provide) how political and cultural agents will respond to the social structural changes Bell sees in process can only be a matter for speculation. As we shall see Bell does not hesitate to speculate. For the moment, however, suffice it to note that somewhere in the course of his analysis Bell must supply his readers with a convincing rationale for what appears to be his arbitrary division of the social world into three

discrete parts. This is not a trivial methodological point. A conceptual choice to divide up society into three relatively autonomous sub-sectors could, very easily, become an *a priori* assumption that the real world is indeed divided up into three unrelated sub-worlds.

Thus Bell's use of the term *Post Industrial Society* is somewhat inappropriate. Bell "forecasts" only for one sphere of the total American society. In the absence of "forecasts" for other spheres neither Bell nor the reader can proceed to construct a full model of post-industrial *society*. Indeed, in the absence of some further specification on Bell's part of the interrelationship of the separate spheres of social structure, polity and culture, it is hard to see how Bell can even allow himself theoretically to "forecast" axial change in the social structure to the degree he does. Since both polity and culture may, in Bell's understanding, "feed back" on social structural developments to modify, or even block their unfolding, the actual shape of any "post-industrial society" must remain unknown. Yet Bell projects tendencies from contemporary American social structure into the next 30-50 years *as if* such tendencies will proceed unchecked and unmodified. It is obvious, however, that even if social structure, polity and culture can be analysed as three separate spheres each with their own specific "axial principles", they can hardly be seen as non-related. In order to be able to make sensible "forecasts", the analyst must be able to say something about their inter-relationship. And there would seem to be two basic possible kinds of inter-relationship. If polity and culture do have relative autonomy to act on the social structure, "forecasting" developments in social structure *as if* the actions of polity and culture will not affect them, might be merely an exercise. If, on the other hand, polity and culture are, in some way, derivative of social structure, the "projections" of the sort Bell makes are easier to justify, with Bell becoming, in process, a social structural determinist.

II

Enough of Bell's method, what of his argument? What is occurring in the sphere of social structure in America which makes Bell believe in the coming of "post industrial society"? Remember, Bell must first present us with evidence that certain things have already happened. Then he must provide us with a convincing argument that on the basis of what has already happened he has the right to "forecast" the unfolding of certain tendencies from the present situation towards the "post industrial society" which he foresees.

Bell begins by calling attention to certain changes which are already occurring in American society. Since World War II there has been a quite dramatic shift in the balance of economic activity from the

primacy of goods production towards the production of all sorts of services (transportation, utilities, financial services, health, education, recreation, research, government, etc.). As Bell notes, 50% of the labour force and 50% of the Gross National Product in present day America involves service work. As a result of this shift, and the changed nature of economic activity which comes with it, important modifications in the American occupational structure have occurred. Blue collar domination of the work force (which Bell sees as one important identifying characteristic of "industrial" society) has been rapidly disappearing in the face of a rising white collar/service industry working population. The bulk of this broad group can only be labelled proletarian, and does not interest Bell greatly. The category which draws his special attention is that of "professional and technical persons". As he shows, the numbers of people in this category have increased remarkably since 1947 (doubled between 1947 and 1964, with a similar increase projected to 1975, when the group will include 13 million). This group is, of course, a heterogeneous one, composed mainly of school teachers, technical workers and engineers and social workers, whose only real unifying characteristic is similar educational credentials. Within this broad category Bell is most intrigued by an elite core of scientists and high level technical cadres (roughly those with post-graduate degrees). The source of his intrigue is a belief that this new elite intelligentsia has been the critical variable in the economic growth and change of the past 25 years. Science-based industry and science-based governmental problem solving have been, to Bell, the basic cause of recent economic transformations. And central to all of this has been the stratum of scientists.

Bell's "venture in social forecasting" is built on this new stratum of scientists. Beginning with the assumption that economic growth and change in the future will follow much the same pattern as that of the past 25 years (growing stress on service activities and on science-based techniques of innovating, planning and problem-solving), Bell foresees the eventual emergence of fundamentally new social structural forms. In "industrial society"—a goods producing society—the "axial principle" was "economizing" for economic growth. In recent years, with the expansion in the scientific and technical stratum a new "axial principle" has been creeping into the pores of American social structure, that of "theoretical knowledge". As the shift towards the service sector and towards the centrality of "theoretical knowledge" progresses in years to come, the outlines of a new social structure will become increasingly clearer. "Theoretical knowledge" will replace "economizing" for growth as the "axial principle" of social structural action and become the key source of innovation and policy orientation for both the economy and government. When, at some point in the next three to

five decades, the shift towards the primacy of "theoretical knowledge" has been completed, "post industrial society" will have superseded "industrial society".

It is not only the introduction of "theoretical knowledge" as the axial principle of social structure which marks the coming of "post industrial society", it is also the rise to power in the social structure of the occupational stratum which monopolizes the possession of such knowledge. The functional centrality and consequent power of this new intelligentsia in an economy increasingly dominated by science-based methods of production, decision-making and social control will bring decisive changes. Bell asserts that theoretical knowledge, the "axial principle" of post industrial society, is controlled by people with a strikingly different *ethos* (in Max Weber's sense) and institutional base than the presently dominant business elites of industrial society. The *ethos* of the new scientific elite is professionalism, not profit. Its institutional homes are the university and research institute, not the corporation. In the longer run, the effect of such a group moving into key positions of social structural power will be to move post industrial society away from the economizing focus of industrial society (dedication to the optimal allocation of resources among competing ends) towards a *sociologizing* *ethos* in which profit maximization on the market declines in favour of the calculation of maximal welfare for all.

These are the bare bones of Bell's "forecast". then. Recent changes in the social structure of American society have made theoretical knowledge of crucial importance for economic progress. By projecting these changes into the future, Bell foresees the possessors of theoretical power **gaining** greater and greater access to the levers of social structural power and influence. Since the new professional-scientific-technical stratum is the carrier of a new social structural ethos, its growing power will involve the progressive infusion of this new ethos into all of social life. When theoretical knowledge assumes its full centrality, when those who monopolize it are consequently propelled into social structural dominance, when their ethos becomes the "axial principle" of social structure, the end product, 30-50 years hence, will be post industrial society.

The careful reader will recognize, hidden under Bell's futurism and Weberian trappings, a very familiar old argument. Bell sees the professional-scientific-technical caste coming to social power in much the same way as many of his American sociological predecessors saw the managers coming to power in the '50s. For this reason it may be worth pausing a moment to reconsider the "managerial revolution" or "ownership-control" arguments. The proponents of the managerial revolution thesis began by granting that Karl Marx had been right, for his time, in connecting private ownership of capital, the exploitation

of workers, and bourgeois control over the state. However, decisive changes occurring in the 20th century radically altered the structural reality of capitalist societies, at least according to the managerial revolution theorists. The rise of the modern large joint-stock corporation diffused actual property rights while at the same time a stratum of professional managers developed. Both processes led ultimately to the divorce of ownership (in the hands of large numbers of stockholders and rentiers, of whom very few owned enough stock to claim a voice in the firm's direction), from control (now firmly lodged in the hands of the managers). Some versions of the argument were content to stop here, but the more ambitious managerialists had much more to say. To them, since managers were professional administrators and technicians of bureaucracy, the alleged divorce of ownership from control implied a shift in the ethos of the large corporation. Profit maximization at all costs was the obsession of the old owner-entrepreneur. The new manager cared much more about growth, performance and size, and even had some concern for communal welfare. In these stronger versions of managerialism the main result of the split between ownership and control was that capitalism ceased being capitalism (having lost the identity of private property and economic power plus the profit motive) and became something new and different, often labelled "industrial society".²

The "managerial revolution" thesis is, of course, one of the dogmas of post World War II American liberal thought. This does not make it true however. There is considerable evidence that propertied interests still play a major role in deciding the destinies of major corporations, even if stock ownership has been to some degree diffused. There is also a great deal of evidence that managers of top corporations tend to become large property owners in their own right during their progress towards the tenure of managerial positions. On the basis of a now extensive literature there is presently enough doubt about the validity of the simple ownership/control divorce thesis that the question must be considered still open.³ That managerialism has led great corporations away from tried and true capitalist goals of profit maximization is not an open question at all. Anyone in the least bit familiar with the workings of American business must be aware that corporate profits are the goal of corporate endeavours, whether such endeavours be directed by owners or managers. It may well be that modern large corporations have evolved somewhat different perspectives on how to maintain and maximize profits but the goal of ultimately making as much money as possible remains.

Thus, despite managerialism, capitalism remains alive and easily recognizable. The intellectual lesson to be remembered from the long "managerial revolution" controversy is significant for our present

purposes, however. The rise of a new occupational category with a degree of functional indispensability in the social structure (managers) was greeted by many analysts as the harbinger of a new economic ethic. In point of fact, however, the rise of the managerial elite within Western capitalism did not mean the coming to social power of a group with radically different objectives from earlier owner/capitalists. While the structure and administration of capitalist enterprises may well have been changed somewhat at this juncture in Western economic history towards bureaucratic rationalization and routinization (due probably as much to increasing size as to the arrival of managers) capitalism remained capitalism. The fundamental characteristics of the capitalist mode of production remained clearly identifiable. Managers did not transform capitalism. Rather they were absorbed into a system of organization and incentives vastly more powerful than any autonomous ethic which they may have brought with them. The managers were used *by*, and became the agents of, monopoly capital. How could it have been otherwise?

All of this is important because Bell's own argument both presupposes, and is analogous to, the "managerial revolution" theory.⁴ It is hard to envisage circumstances in which the fate of Bell's professional-scientific-technical vanguard will be much different from that of the managers. Their indispensability as suppliers of theoretical knowledge to the capitalist corporation and state (if, indeed, Bell is correct in his "forecast" that such knowledge will become indispensable) is of the same order as the indispensability of the administrative skills brought to capitalism earlier by the professional managers. In the case of the managers, the indispensability of their skills did not entitle them to a chance to transform society (which they did not want to do anyway!). Likewise, the indispensability of the theoretical knowledge of the new intelligentsia does not mean that it will acquire decisive power or that its particular ethos will be enshrined as the dominant ethic of the social structure.

Bell's assertion that the new intelligentsia will come to power and change the ethos of American social structure is, then, a huge sociological non sequitur. Bell's failure to recognize that the society which he sees as the vanguard of "post-industrial society" is, in fact, the vanguard of world capitalism is his undoing. The hold of capitalism and its ethic of profit maximization on American society is immensely powerful. American and multi-national corporate giants face an ever more exiguous international environment. This, plus market control, makes greater planning, "forecasting" and, perhaps, the use of theoretical knowledge, both possible and necessary. The same factors have promoted the creation of a bureaucratized and interventionist state. Given the obvious and immense social power in America of huge capitalist

economic units the odds are overwhelming that Bell's professional scientific-technical caste will make its peace with advanced capitalism quite easily. Nothing about this group as it presently exists in the USA would indicate the contrary. The pursuit of "theoretical knowledge" in the USA, and the consequent expansion of the stratum engaged in this pursuit has been promoted, encouraged, directed and financed either by the US government, usually with "defence" objectives in mind (connected with a foreign policy designed, in the main, to keep the world free for US corporate enterprise) or by American corporate interests. On the face of its record since 1945, the prospects of the professional-scientific-technical caste as the carrier of an autonomous, system-transforming, ethic are rather bad. Indeed, throughout most of this period, this stratum has had little difficulty in subscribing to the objectives set for it by American capitalism (although the Indochina war did dampen the enthusiasm of certain sectors in the group, it must be said).

In summary, then, it is quite insufficient for Bell to predict the coming of a fundamental change in American social order simply because theoretical knowledge is becoming more important in American social structure, and that a new occupational stratum with a monopoly on such knowledge is arising. When discussing change in America we are not discussing change in a vacuum. America is a flourishing capitalist order, in which a hegemonic class of property owners, supported by a resourceful stratum of professional administrators, in control of American ideological life and with determinant levers of governmental power is unlikely to see much virtue in ceding its place to a new intelligentsia. How will the professional-technical-scientific caste make its way to the top? Here Bell has very little to say. He must do much better than he does to establish that this stratum is indeed the carrier of a new, system-transforming, ethic in the face of the present lack of evidence that the world-view of this stratum is appreciably different from that of the existing American corporate elite. Even beyond this he must prove further that the ethic and institutions of American capitalism are, or will be, ready to give way to such new influences, if they can be proven to exist. There is next to no evidence from America which would indicate this to be true.

Since the USA remains the *lynchpin* and heartland of the world capitalist system, it would make a great deal more sense, on the basis of Bell's evidence, to "forecast" quite a different scenario. The chances are overwhelming that "theoretical knowledge" will be used in ways which will keep American capitalism intact. Likewise, the chances are overwhelming that the "intelligentsia stratum" which carries and develops such knowledge will end up serving, rather than transforming, American capitalist goals. Faced with the institutional strength and

power of enticement of the American corporation and the American corporate liberal state, the independent ethos of the intelligentsia (to the extent that there is one) will, in all likelihood, prove weak indeed. In the absence of a political movement for socialism, to which sectors of this new intelligentsia might well be attracted, this "forecast," and not Bell's, seems most compelling. Bell's vision of the transition from "industrial" to "post industrial" society is, then, not very helpful. It might be in order on the basis of Bell's evidence to argue more humbly for the imminence of a shift from mass production capitalism to a more advanced stage of capitalism characterized by a greater degree of planning and the utilization of more "theoretical knowledge". But Bell does not make this argument.

Whatever one chooses to conclude about Bell's central "forecast", *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* presents the reader with several other dilemmas. We must remember, first, that Bell states clearly his intention to "forecast" only for the sphere of social structure. Yet, as he notes at the outset, the changes which he foresees in the social structural sphere will pose important issues and questions for both the polity and the culture, the other two important spheres in his analysis. His discussions of these issues and questions, and his speculation about the ways in which they will be addressed by the polity and culture, are well worth more detailed attention.

Despite the fact that Bell sees his new intelligentsia making inroads into politics through the penetration of governmental bureaucracies, he also foresees major obstacles to the maturation of "post industrial society" coming from the polity. According to Bell one of the inevitable by-products of the coming of "theoretical knowledge" as the axial principle of the social structure will be that major social choices will more and more be made outside the market economically and outside parliamentary exchange politically. The essence of planning and forecasting in both the economic and political spheres is to promote policy choices which transcend the short-term time perspectives of both the market and liberal parliamentary debate. As Bell notes, the market and parliamentary bargaining both have one great virtue. They lead people to perceive that basic social decisions are being made by "nature" (both the economic market and the pseudo-market of political goods which is liberal parliamentarism lend themselves ideally to the process of mystification definitively analysed by one K. Marx as commodity fetishism). In the emergent "post industrial" situation, such decisions will reemerge from the realm of "nature" and be attributable to identifiable elites, Bell's planners and technocrats making social choices according to consciously decided-upon criteria derived from "theoretical knowledge". The de-reification of major social options following in the wake of advancing theoretical knowledge will, Bell

fears, stimulate new political activity among underlying groups. Bell anticipates that post industrial society will be a *communal* society politically. What he means is that collectivities based on occupation and status will be the main political forces. Since not all of these collectivities will possess, respect or understand the expertise of the ~~professional-technical-scientific~~ caste, the risk, according to Bell, is that the full benefits of this caste's superior rationality will be lost in political to-ing and fro-ing.

It is worth stopping on this point. The precise way Bell discusses the political question is very significant. As he puts it over and over, the political danger of post industrial society is "populism", the expressions of "resentment" by the "populace". Readers familiar with American history will be aware of the pejorative connotations of the term "populism". In American parlance, populism is a form of a political philistinism, luddite political activity engaged in during periods of great change by groups who do not understand what is going on, and desire, above all, to hold back the inevitable and, ultimately, to prevent progress. Nowhere in *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* (except perhaps in his *Coda*, where he discusses culture) do Bell's own values come out more clearly. *Bell clearly desires the coming of post-industrial society and believes that the rule of the professional-scientific-technical caste* (of which he considers himself an **important** member) *will be a benevolent one*. The problem he foresees is that this caste will increasingly make decisions publicly which will determine the fate of underlying groups in the population: these decisions, because they will be based on "theoretical knowledge" and rarified expertise, will not always be understood or approved by these same underlying groups. In short, Bell fears that the intelligentsia in power will face a serious legitimacy problem. Clearly, what Bell yearns for, and what he fears may not occur, is rule by the princes of technocracy. Since there is no real way in which this rule can exist democratically, Bell is faced with a considerable dilemma. He attempts to sweep this dilemma under the rug with a long discussion of meritocracy, concluding finally that a meritocratic society, as long as opportunity to rise socially is really open and equal, is a just society. The difficulty with such a conclusion is that even a true meritocracy need not be a democracy.

Here we needn't subscribe to Bell's "forecasting" about the rise of the new intelligentsia to be sensitive to some of the issues he raises. With the rise of monopoly capitalism and, in connection with it, of the interventionist bureaucratic state, there is a very real tendency for major social decisions to be taken out of the mystifying settings of market and parliament. Economic decisions by huge corporations can be less and less hidden by the market, since it is the essence of monopoly power to be able to by-pass market considerations. Political decisions

by the representatives of such corporations and their allies can be less and less hidden by the obsolete liberal myth of a free political market place. In short, with the spread of monopoly capitalism, the economic and political power of big capitalist interests becomes more transparent. Despite the indefatigable efforts of such interests to keep ordinary people in a state of political somnolence, their rule becomes ever more likely to elicit conflictual responses from underlying social groups who feel victimized. Given the narrowing margin of manoeuvre of American capitalism in the world capitalist market it is likely that such responses will be greeted with less and less tolerance by the dominant class as time goes on. Marxists have long "forecast" such a scenario from advancing capitalism, predicting the development of increasingly illiberal political perspectives on the part of monopoly capitalist elites in the face of popular protest.⁶ It is interesting to note that Daniel Bell has become aware of some of these possibilities too, albeit from a rather distorted vantage point. It is even more interesting to note the anti-democratic implications of Bell's awareness.

If Bell lives in fear of the deleterious effects of "populism" and "resentment" on the unfolding of post industrial society—of which he is as much an advocate as an analyst, as must now be clear—he anticipates even more trouble arising from the cultural sphere. Although Bell's discussion of the culture is fragmentary (which permits us, in turn, to forego an extensive discussion on the usefulness of using "the culture" as a central analytical concept—what culture, whose culture, what is the role of culture, etc.) it is infused with much passion. Bell finds both the "high culture" and the mass culture of industrial societies appalling. In the realm of mass culture he sees an all-pervasive individualistic and selfish hedonism, which he clearly feels is debasing of the human spirit. He ascribes the historical origins of this hedonism to the shift of capitalism towards the mass production and distribution of consumer goods. With this shift, bourgeois self-restraint gave way to the ethic of *jouissez!* which Bell finds distasteful and anti-social. Bell has even more disgust for the "antinomianism" and nihilism of "modernist" high culture.

In his review of mass hedonism and the "counter" and "anti" culture of the literati, Bell comes very close to a vision of barbarians at the gate. More importantly, he is deeply worried that both phenomena will pose problems for the unfolding of post industrial society. People who want only to satisfy their own desires will hardly be willing to make the communal sacrifices needed to implement the "sociologizing" mode. And literati concerned with an illusory quest for human authenticity are not likely to bless the bureaucratic rule of enlightened technocrats. What is most interesting about Bell's discussion of the "cultural problem", however, is not his immoderate passion, but the structure of

his argument itself. While giving lip service to the notion that popular hedonism originated in the shift of Western capitalism to the mass marketing of consumer goods Bell then conveniently forgets to follow this discussion through, subsequently fixing the blame for the continuation of mass hedonism *on the masses themselves* (after all, the culture is an independent sphere). And, of course, the blame for the antinomianism of the literati belongs with the literati. What Bell seems unable to confront is that the major period of bread-and-circuses consumerism in American social history is precisely that period in which Bell traces the beginnings of the transition to "post industrial society". The very advanced industrial society (read capitalism) pregnant with the new society which Bell sees as so desirable must also be held responsible for discovering the merchandizing utility of manipulating people's private and psychic lives. It is positively grotesque to claim, as Bell seems to, that culture is independent in advanced capitalism, given the barrage of corporate enticements to hedonism which greet us at every waking moment of our lives. Indeed, does Bell consider the large number of his colleagues in the social sciences who use their "theoretical knowledge" to discover new ways of force-feeding consumer goods to the American populace to be members in good standing of his cherished professional-technical-scientific caste? And what of the "theoretical knowledge" of the advertising industry? Approaching things the way he does, artificially dissociating culture from social structure, Bell facilitates the commission of yet another classic error of American sociology, "blaming the victim". Similar points might be made of Bell's disgust with "modernist" high culture. It is hardly surprising to see the most recent practitioners of the arts recoiling more and more strongly in horror from modern consumer capitalism. The flight from classic forms of artistic production into the highly privatized search for authenticity evident in abstract art, musical atonality, even the mocking frivolity of "pop" put-ons, must be seen, at least in part, as a reaction to the appropriation and debasement of more conventional forms of artistic expression by advanced capitalism for the purposes of selling and social control. Without doubt the spread of rule by bureaucrats and technocrats in Bell's "forecast" would further fuel the fires of modernism. Only a sociologist who ignores the connections between culture and social structure can be surprised at such cultural developments. Bell's cultural discussion lacks only a fervent defence of the culture of the professional-scientific-technical caste, the culture of the computer printout.

III

The Coming of Post Industrial Society is a systematic misperception of

American reality. What Bell immodestly claims to be "social forecasting" is, in fact, his projection backwards to the present from a utopian future—characterized by the domination of the professional-scientific-technical-intelligentsia—which he desperately hopes will come to pass. Such a procedure, the evaluation of the present from the perspective of a future fantasy, is bound to lead to a selective interpretation of things as they are. Because he wants the American future to be "post industrial", he must make the American present "industrial", which leads him to downplay the capitalist core of American life. Relegated to the status of annoying obstacles to the technocratic future (Bell has an interesting literary habit of including evidence which runs counter to his own argument which he then proceeds to ignore) are the deep economic troubles of an America which may have "service-sectored" itself out of part of the world capitalist market already (with layers of excess economic and social fat leading to declining productivity, technological lag in key areas, chronic inflation, balance of payments problems, etc.). Almost completely absent is a comprehensive understanding of the America we have seen engaged in recent paroxysms of neo-colonial warfare and oppression to maintain the "free world's" "free" access to markets and raw materials by refusing to allow any other people to opt for socialism.⁶

We can only speculate why Bell might have made such an argument. *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* is obviously a self-protecting and self-aggrandizing attempt to legitimate an American intelligentsia of which Bell is one spokesman (while taking the heat off American capitalism in the process). Bell's intelligentsia is a new stratum, as he points out, a product of the great educational research boom of the Cold War years. In a society which has traditionally regarded the adult inhabitants of universities as parasites and *fainéants* it is not surprising to find American intellectuals consumed with status anxiety. Bell's argument, however, ought to be situated much more precisely. The American intelligentsia took quite a beating in the 1960s. Student protest, a more generalized anti-war movement, and finally the militant New Left called attention to some rather disturbing things about American universities and intellectuals. In general, it became crystal clear that American universities were hardly the centres for dispassionate truth-seeking which they claimed to be. Rather they were deeply involved in performing important functions for the American corporate/military establishment. It was not simply that the American intelligentsia was engaged in reproducing the American bourgeoisie, its ideologies, and its trained technical helpers. Beyond this it had contracted itself out to America's rulers for small favours such as the development of new weapons systems, or the manufacturing of complex strategies for political and military counter-insurgency (pre-packaged

police forces for South Vietnam, for example, or the abortive Project Camelot in Latin America). Indeed, it soon came out that academic leaders in the "social forecasting" field were up to their ears in complicity with American imperialism (a case could be made that between Harvard University—the papacy of the American academic world and Daniel Bell's present employer—and the other institutions of Cambridge, Massachusetts, a goodly number of the main authors of the most infamous "venture in social forecasting" of them all, America's Indochina war, could be rounded up). Finally, it was discovered that many of America's great universities were endowed with investment portfolios which included not **only** a great many shares in America's largest private corporations, but also holdings in such things as the thriving economic life of South Africa or the oil fields of Portuguese Angola.

The situation which developed was a very uncomfortable one for Bell and colleagues.⁷ The sins of the government and its universities provoked a massive student revolt. Irony of ironies, the responsibility for this student revolt was laid by ambitious politicians and part of the public at the door of—who else but—Professor Bell and his peers. This was not because the universities had ventured too deeply into collaboration with the **military/industrial** complex and thereby prompted rebellion, but because these same universities and their faculties had coddled the young in an overly "permissive" way, even poisoning their minds with foreign thoughts. Memories of this recent period hang like a pall over *The Coming of Post Industrial Society*. In a great many ways the book appears to have been produced from the fear and vulnerability of the very caste of intellectuals which Bell hopes will inherit the earth. For what *The Coming* really attempts to do is to create a new mythology of dispassionate independence for the same group which was caught *in flagrante delicto* in the 1960s with its fingers in the till of American imperialism.

A great deal of turbulent history lies between *The End of Ideology* and *The Coming of Post Industrial Society*. *The End of Ideology* was part of the world of the "Great American Celebration", as C. Wright Mills called it. The intellectual production of that time (including Bell's) radiated social stability, peace, economic growth, legitimated institutions, controllable problems, and, above all, confidence. Politically, pluralist America reigned as the embodiment of democracy (even if the tugging and pulling between different groups for political gains seemed to involve only elite interests, while the low level of participation and commitment to "tolerance and exchange" of ordinary Americans did cause the more astute **pluralists** to wonder—and worry a bit about—what might occur if the populace began to care **about politics**).⁸

The world of *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* is a very different,

and much less secure, one. Bell can scarcely hide his deep political pessimism, for example. His political world is still pluralist, but afflicted by "populism" and *ressentiment*. The tranquillity of 1950s elite pluralism seems to have been rudely upset by the political claims of all sorts of non-elite groups (blacks, students, women, workers, etc.). While to a naive observer it might seem that such claims would make the American system more open and democratic, Bell fears them and their "unwisdom". No longer vaunting the virtues of America as democracy embodied, Bell clearly prefers rule by the elites, with, of course, an increase in the political clout of his cherished intelligentsia. Not even his lengthy polemic in favour of a just meritocracy can hide the fact that, politically, Bell has become much more illiberal. And we need say little more of Bell's cultural nightmares. The philistines and barbarians—in the persons of assorted consumer durable fetishists, TV addicts, "counter cultural" erotomaniacs and antinomian abstract painters—already have their feet in the door. Bell's deepest fear is more general. Quite simply put, it is that the elites of "post industrial society" (read advanced capitalism) will have ever increasing difficulties in legitimating their rule. Bell senses that people will tend more and more to withhold consent as their lives increasingly fall under the control of the professional-scientific-technical caste (in particular, we might add, insofar as this caste is merely fronting for monopoly capitalist corporations).

Bourgeois ideology has always advocated democracy and loved the people when the bourgeois ruling class could count on having its own way. Such was the case in the American 1950s. *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* demonstrates how much things have changed by the early 1970s. Bell's pessimism, his open elitism, and his fear of the people, have to be considered the Left's promise. But a promise given is not a promise redeemed. The anxiety of American bourgeois ideology found in Bell's book must also be seen as a warning of turbulent times ahead.

NOTES

1. Norman Birnbaum, *The New York Times Book Review*, 1 July 1973. *The Coming of Post Industrial Society* has been reviewed almost endlessly in the USA over the past year. Indeed, sampling these reviews and reading the book would constitute quite a good introductory course in American sociology. For anyone interested, a good beginning would be as follows: Christopher Lasch (polemically Leftish) *New York Review of Books*, 18 October 1973 (with rejoinder by Daniel Bell, *NYRB* 24 January 1974); Robert Heilbroner (liberal pessimist), *Dissent*, Spring 1973; a symposium in *Contemporary Sociology*, March 1974, with reviews by Establishment sociologists Reinhard Bendix and Amitai Etzioni, Marxist Stephen Berger plus

- yet another rejoinder by Bell; finally Richard Hill (a solid Left Liberal) does a good job in *The Insurgent Sociologist*, Spring 1974.
2. Bell's own use of the term "industrial" and "post industrial" society are a dead giveaway of his own position in this discussion. "Industrial society" is a category used by those who hold that the commonalities (bureaucracy, technology) of capitalist and socialist industrialized societies are vastly more important than their differences. We must, of course, keep in mind that the use of "industrial society" is not devoid of polemical intent, whatever its scientific value. In American sociology it is designed to separate its "realistic" user from the "ideologues" who insist upon distinguishing capitalism from socialism.
 3. The interested reader would do well to consult "Corporate Ownership and Control: the Large Corporation and the Capitalist Class", by Maurice Zeitlin, in *The American Journal of Sociology*, March 1974. Among its other great virtues (lucidity, exhaustiveness and a great respect for hard evidence) this article contains a complete list of references to the long debate on such questions.
 4. In a long chapter on "The Subordination of the Corporation" Bell espouses many of the theses of the "Managerial Revolution" advocates. He sees the Western corporation progressively divesting itself of those aspects of its behaviour which justified the label capitalism, becoming a bureaucratic monolith whose responsibility to private capitalist owners is already minimal. Because of this, the motivation to maximize profits is less and less compelling. To Bell, however, profit maximization is still the somewhat atavistic rule. In his eyes, the arrival in power of the scientific-technical-professional caste will provide the needed new ethic to move the corporation away from its last capitalist yearnings. Thus, to Bell, the "managerial revolution" theorists were premature but thinking along the right lines. Mainly they were premature because they chose the wrong group to infuse the modern corporation with a new ethic.
 5. One might be tempted to use the term "class conflict" with reference to the protest in question, rather than Bell's chosen term of "populism", which, after all, is a political rather than a sociological term. Bell himself is quite careful not to do so, of course, disposing of the notion of class conflict quite early in his work. Class conflict is a feature of "industrial" society to Bell, part of a situation in which the blue collar work force and the business *élite* square off. In "post industrial" society, with its declining blue collar work force (which is, apparently, to Bell, the only possible locus of class conflict) the "labour issue" remains, but encapsulated in a routinized industrial relations system with little influence in polity and culture. One wonders whether Bell has not gone a bit too far in generalizing from the American experience of the past 25 years. Had he taken a more comparative perspective which included Europe, he would have had more difficulty in discarding the utility of class conflict. For that matter the concept is not without utility for understanding the USA either, certainly of more utility than "populism".
 6. Bell subscribes to a view that the making of foreign policy follows from the ideological and power political concerns of the political executive. He does not deign to dignify with discussion the massive and often convincing *neo-marxist* literature from the 1960s arguing the connection between economic motives and imperialism.
 7. It is only fair to note that the experience of the 1960s provoked a variety of responses from the American intelligentsia. Many intellectuals were forced to choose between support for, or opposition to, American imperialism. A small percentage opted for the Left. One wonders whether Bell would consider *Noam Chomsky* as a "populist" motivated by "resentment".
 8. Pluralism became the great *cliché* of American political science. The evidence of much pluralist research, that political conflict between *Bite* groups and interests

was rife in America, came as no surprise to anyone familiar with **Marxian** understanding of capitalist political processes. Since one of the major functions of the capitalist state is to adjudicate disputes between divergent capitalist interests, such conflict was to be expected. One thing which Marxists would not do, however, when confronted by such evidence, would be to suggest that such group conflict amounted to democracy.