

long *New Statesman* article of January 1974, gloatingly entitled "The Coming Class War"), but it is no less central for that.

It may seem incredible that a creed based on those two most destructive of emotions, envy and hatred, should have even aspired to, let alone gained, a moral ascendancy. The explanation is that it has been able to do so by default. For their neglect of the moral dimension of politics (and economics), the champions of the open society have only themselves to blame. Until that neglect is ended, and the moral initiative seized—and time is fast running out—they will continue to find themselves winning the economic battles, and losing the political war.

## PART IV

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### INTELLECTUAL DISSENT AND THE REVERSAL OF TRENDS\*

*The Duke of Edinburgh*

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## Intellectual Dissent and the Reversal of Trends

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### I

#### INTRODUCTION: KINDS OF PREDICTION

It is one thing to predict technological developments; it is rather more difficult to predict general social and political conditions. And there is a considerable difference between what is likely to happen and what we may want to happen. I am going to be concerned only with what I think may happen. What I would like to see happen is an entirely different story.

#### (i) OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS OF CAUSES: 1984

The objective approach to forecasting entails trying to comprehend the principal factors which have influenced the broad sweep of political and social history and then to continue the process on a speculative basis into the future. One could study the political, social, economic and moral circumstances which have led to the establishment of dictatorships and then try to identify any common denominators. One could then look at our own situation today, for instance, to see if any of those denominators are present and to make a forecast accordingly. The classic example is George Orwell's *1984*.

(ii) **EXTRAPOLATION OF TRENDS: CLUB OF ROME**  
 Another alternative for the forecaster is to bring scientific techniques to his aid. He can use a process of statistical extrapolation. He can work out trends from historic figures and then simply extend the trends. This technique has been made much easier by computers. Indeed, the Club of Rome stirred up quite a to-do when it published *The Limits to Growth*,<sup>1</sup> based on this type of computer-aided analysis and prediction.

One of the factors it analysed is the world's population statistics. Because the historical and present figures are reasonably well known, computers can be used to produce trends and predictions for as far ahead as anyone likes. And you do not have to look very far ahead to get a nasty shock. The computers tell us that the world's population will have doubled by the end of the century—only 22 years from now. However, even the relatively simple business of predicting population sizes is not always accurate. Almost every post-war prediction about the growth and structure of our own population has been wrong. One of the consequences has been the recent rather sudden run-down of teacher training colleges.

Computer-assisted prediction has attractions, but it is not without its flaws, as the critics of *The Limits to Growth* were quick to point out. It is obviously impossible to take every eventuality into account or to predict the unpredictable, and in any case you cannot feed values into a machine. Even an intelligent guess at

<sup>1</sup> [Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens, Potomac Associates, 1972 (Pan Books, London, 1974).—ED.]

the consequences of a disaster, such as a nuclear war or the explosion of a super nova in our galaxy, could be wildly inaccurate; and the future of the world's supplies of energy is not predictable with much accuracy either.

Furthermore, it does not admit the possibility of negative feedback. It is not possible to estimate accurately at what point sheer lack of food will begin to limit the rate of increase in population. Nor is there any way of knowing whether, and to what extent, deliberate attempts to limit population growth will have an appreciable effect. We know that, as the world's population increases, so does the total number of poor and under-nourished. The irony is that increased food production and distribution, and improved technology in the developing countries, tend to encourage increases in population.

You can raise the same sort of objections to the predictions based on statistical extrapolation, although even the most severe critics would acknowledge that, while they are not positively accurate, they are patently not entirely false. The world's population may not exactly double in the next 22 years, but it is certainly going to get very much bigger, virtually whatever happens.

## II

### THE FALLIBILITY OF THE FORECASTERS

#### DANGER OF WISHFUL THINKING . . .

Quite apart from the techniques of forecasting, there is the attitude of the forecaster to bear in mind. I suppose

it may be humanly possible to be utterly objective, but I rather doubt it. If you have grown up with or acquired a certain set of principles, they will inevitably colour your selection of historical factors and the emphasis you give to the conclusions you draw from them. In any event there is such a vast choice of material that the less scrupulous prophets find it easier to start with the conclusion they wish to reach and then simply search around for the appropriate cases to prove it. I cannot avoid selecting the historical factors, but I hope I have not fallen into the trap of pre-selecting my conclusions.

Pre-selection is really nothing better than wishful thinking, but it is particularly popular with political salesmen. Many people have imagined a state of Utopia where everything is ideal. Having presupposed that it is practically and humanly possible to achieve such a state, it only remains for them to devise a means of reaching it. Once the first moves are made along this primrose path, the consequences are never exactly what was originally envisaged. Indeed, I think it could be shown that Utopian legislation almost always has exactly the opposite effect to what was originally intended.

Consequently, Utopia remains as far away as ever and the community finds itself landed with a whole crop of new and unexpected problems. It is one of the characteristics of Utopia salesmen that they are convinced that their doubtless laudable ends justify whatever means they choose to employ. They can only assume that organised violence and terror are a means to a better end but, unfortunately, the community has to suffer the means while the Utopian end is never likely to be achieved.

### ... AND LACK OF REALITY

Devotion to an idea to such an extent that it blinds one to reality is the equal and opposite danger to the refusal to recognise reality because it may be unpleasant. In the first case, the most frightful horrors are condoned because they are justified by the greatness of the idea. Such are the Inquisition, revolutionary terrorism and the Gulag Archipelago. In the second case, the most appalling conditions are allowed to continue because it is so easy to ignore them. Such were slavery, abject poverty and slum housing.

The trouble is that reality is like a lettuce: you have to peel off a lot of leaves before you get to its heart. But you must get to reality, or to the nearest possible approximation to it, if you are going to have any chance at all of looking into the future. The computer analysis is a good example. If, for whatever reason, you feed the wrong factors into a computer, or if you give them the wrong emphasis, or if you leave out vital factors, the machine will still give you an answer, but completely misleading.

### PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES IN PREDICTION

There are also two purely practical problems about predicting what life might be like in these islands in the year 2000.

### INTELLECTUAL FASHION: AT HOME . . .

First, every so often popular attention seems to become focussed on some entirely novel and unexpected consideration, and this naturally tends to confuse earlier predictions. Some years ago the issues of starvation,

malnutrition and world population gave rise to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign. This was followed by a sudden concern for the conservation of nature and the environment. More recently, interest switched to energy resources and alternative sources of energy. Each has had quite a significant influence on popular attitudes. Who knows what will be next to attract public attention? Perhaps it will be the problems of a changing world climate, or it may be a revival of interest in religion. Whatever it is, it is bound to make predictions based on current attitudes turn out to be less accurate, if not completely wrong.

#### ... AND ABROAD

Secondly, we cannot exist totally isolated from the rest of the world. There is no way of knowing what ideas and attitudes will sweep into this country from abroad, or what political or practical events will have repercussions here. The waves of international subversion and terrorism are already lapping our shores and may have all sorts of unpredictable consequences.

### III

#### FACTORS IN FORECASTING

One of the most important factors we should take into account before trying to look into the future is ordinary human nature. If we are going to consider the future in these islands, we should examine it as it appears in the British character.

#### (i) PRIMACY OF HUMAN NATURE

We know certain fundamentals. Most people react to circumstances from the point of view of their own self-interest. A farmer's reaction to higher food prices is obviously going to be different from that of the housewife. That very observant and down to earth 18th-century economist, Adam Smith, put it in a nutshell:

"It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interests . . ."

Attitudes in general tend to be coloured by the point from which a view is taken. Take the discussion about the economy and unemployment. Governments and academic economists tend to be concerned with the figures of unemployment and official job-creation schemes. Employers are concerned with wealth-creation for the benefit of those involved: investors, managers and the workforce. Consequently, governments see investment in new industrial plants as a way of increasing employment, whereas employers see its value in the prospect of increasing productivity or output, and giving a reasonable return on the investment. Trade unions, on the other hand, are inclined to see automation and increase in productivity naturally as a threat to existing jobs. From yet a different point of view, more efficient production could be said to release relatively unproductive workers for more promising employment in new enterprises.

But these are all group reactions. Each individual has his own attitude depending on the situation in which he finds himself and the sort of person he is.

## (ii) UBIQUITY OF SELF-INTEREST: ETHICALLY NEUTRAL

Self-interest is certainly the most powerful characteristic in most people, and it does not only apply in the strictly economic sense. Politicians, bureaucrats, social snobs and even churchmen have a primary interest in the activity that occupies their attention. Like all the facets of life, ambition and self-interest are neither good nor bad in themselves. They become good or bad only in the way individuals give them expression.

The unscrupulous pursuit of ambition and self-interest without restraint, whether by individuals or groups, for whatever purpose, has always ended in disaster.

In practice the freedom to pursue self-interest, whether by individuals or groups, has always been accompanied by some form of restraint. The oldest and crudest is simply fear of retaliation or revolution, but this leads to conflict and eventually to a balance of weakness. Then there is the law, but that is only as good as the legislators make it, as sensible as the judges interpret it, as effective as its enforcement. The only completely certain restraint is self-control based on the voluntary acceptance of certain moral and ethical standards and principles.

## (iii) SELF-IMPOSED LAW

This has been a country in which individuals have been inspired by or, to put it another way, have had their behaviour modified by the "Christian ethic". If there is one thing which can be predicted with any certainty, it is that if we abandon the Christian doctrine of loving

our neighbour and the personal responsibility of each individual for his actions, we shall most certainly revert to a state of jungle warfare. Expediency will be the only criterion for decisions.

A distinguished English judge, speaking 50 years ago, put it this way:

"to my mind the real greatness of a nation, its true civilisation, is measured by the extent of this law of obedience to the unenforceable. It measures the extent to which a nation trusts its citizens, and its existence and area testify to the way they behave in response to that trust. Mere obedience to law does not measure the greatness of a nation . . . The true test is the extent to which individuals can be trusted to obey self-imposed law".

Therefore any remotely objective estimate of what life is going to be like, as opposed to mere prophecies of doom, depends to a very large extent on an assessment of the ethical, moral and spiritual values which people are likely to adopt.

## (iv) MORAL PRINCIPLES AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

History shows that, without a deep moral conviction, how easy it is for practical circumstances and human attitudes to react with each other to produce wholly irrational and unpredictable situations. It was the combination of the doctrines of Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party—more commonly known as Nazi—with a latent popular prejudice against Jews, which produced the concentration camps and gas chambers. This ghastly inhumanity was certainly not in keeping with the normal behaviour of the German people and quite beyond the range of expectation. But it is a latent danger in every country.

So any assessment of the future depends on an estimate of which way the battle for minds is going to go; by which ethical, moral and spiritual principles personal and public attitudes are going to be influenced. For it seems to me that the criterion for a civilised society is not its technological standards nor even its material prosperity; it is the degree of humanity and sense of well-being among its people. The factor which governs this well-being is not more and more legislation—but the understanding of and commitment to unenforceable law.

#### IV

### HUMAN RIGHTS OR STATE PRIVILEGES

This raises a fundamental issue of principle on which the whole nature of a civilisation depends. Are there any such things as inherent human rights, or is all power vested in the state whose officials concede privileges to individual citizens? If the state is all-powerful, who is to see that its powers are not abused? Furthermore, who is to decide what constitutes an abuse in the first place?

The glib answer is that in a democracy the people decide, but can the people decide absolutely everything? If so, what happens to individual human rights?

The alternatives are starkly clear. Reduced to extremes, the choice is between a philosophy which holds that all individual citizens must serve the general public interest, which means, in effect, that the individual

becomes a servant of the state, or, alternatively, a philosophy which asserts that the individual is of paramount importance and that therefore the state exists to preserve and protect his human rights to liberty and integrity. But if we accept that the individual is of paramount importance, we must also accept that individuals, whatever their job or occupation, must have a common moral code to guide their attitudes and actions. Without this essential qualification a free society would be reduced to anarchy.

This is not a new choice. Every generation in every community has to make this decision at some time or another. The obvious choice would be in favour of the philosophy of the individual. Unfortunately, such a system depends upon individual restraint and good sense, and it is really too much to expect that everybody will behave like an angel all the time. It is this human weakness which is always seized upon by the zealous reformers and those who always know better, to justify their ambition to order the lives of their fellow citizens.

### CHOICE IN THE POLITICAL MARKET

Whichever choice is adopted or imposed it is always easy to find fault with it. But, provided there is open competition to find fault and to offer remedies, all is reasonably well. However, this freedom of choice in the political market can only be maintained by individuals who see its value as a guarantee of their personal freedom and who make their judgement of political programmes against a clear understanding of the likely consequences. If the choice is made simply on the basis of what looks most attractive and expedient at the time,

or from a short-sighted view of self-interest, the consequences are usually disastrous.

#### CONTROLS AND BUREAUCRACY SHIFT POWER

Corrections of real or imagined faults lead to controls; controls lead to more faults and even more control. Then, as the controls mount up, the costs and the bureaucracy required to operate them begin to escalate and the emphasis is no longer on the welfare of the individuals but on the economic viability of the State. Gradually—and always with the very best intentions and almost unnoticed by the people—the power of decision passes from the individual to a ruling group. And the more power a ruling group gathers to itself the more it seeks to protect its position against individual opposition and criticism.

Once the law ceases to protect the rights of the individual from the gang—any gang—freedom is lost. There is a large and growing number of countries which have got into this situation, and there is ample evidence of the restrictive way of life which has developed within them, even to the extent of forcibly preventing their citizens from leaving the country if they should try to do so.

In the event the choice is never presented to people in such simple terms because, even though freedom is indivisible, each individual only sees it from his point of view. The media will fight if the freedom of the press is threatened; the law will fight for its independence; the business man will fight for his right to exercise his initiative; the worker will struggle for his right to join or not to join a union; and so on; but few of them

recognise that an attack on the liberty of any one of them is an attack on the liberty of all of them. Once a determined government begins the process of eroding human rights and liberties—always with the best possible intentions—it is very difficult for individuals or for individual groups to stand against it.

#### INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS

On freedom of expression, George Orwell said:

“The big public do not care about the matter one way or the other. They are not in favour of persecuting the heretic and they will not exert themselves to defend him. They are at once too sane and too stupid to acquire the totalitarian outlook.”

He would probably have agreed that the big public is neither sufficiently interested nor sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to foresee the likely consequences of certain policies in the face of endlessly repeated assurances that they are for its own ultimate benefit.

If the choice is to be made in favour of the State remaining the servant of the individual, a very large proportion of the population, including those with political ambitions, must make a definite commitment to that choice as a matter of principle.

It means, amongst other things, that the national interest must include the interests of the individual and not be limited to the self-interest of the ruling group or any other organisation exercising power on behalf of a sectional interest. It means that economic policies must include the welfare of individual enterprises and not be based entirely on a statistical analysis and national averages. Above all, it means taking a

realistic view of human nature—with all its faults and with all its virtues—and trusting the majority of individuals to pursue their own interests to the benefit of their fellow citizens and consequently to the benefit of the State as a whole.

#### REVERSING THE TREND

Extrapolation from the recent past suggests that the State, which means in practice its professional administrators and political party officials, will have achieved almost complete responsibility by the end of the century. On the other hand, a backward look at the broad sweep of history suggests that the people of this country allow certain trends to go so far and then almost at the last moment begin to appreciate where they are being led and, by an obstinate refusal to co-operate, the trend is gradually reversed. This has happened in a number of periods of British history.

#### DISSENTING INTELLECTUALS: A NEW TREND?

History suggests that the reversal of trends usually begins with dissenting intellectuals. The present trend towards the nebulous concept of social justice began in the universities some 40 years ago in the depression of the 1930s. It was the liberal-intellectual dissent, combined with other factors, that led to the Russian revolution, which today is itself being criticised by a new generation of liberal-intellectual dissidents. It should come as no surprise to find that the majority of the current crop of international terrorists come from prosperous, liberal-minded, middle-class families.

In this country, there are a number of centres of dissent from the conventional economic policies of the

post-war years. Whether the dissenters are right or wrong and whether this represents the beginning of a new trend I would not like to say. What is more important is that, for those people who are prepared to take an interest, the alternatives are there, and, of course, the future direction of events will depend on the choices we make during the next few years.

The argument is not about intentions. All suggestions for political and social reforms are made with the ultimate intention of making life more tolerable and satisfying for the greatest number of people. "The greatest good for the greatest number." Political argument is seldom about ends, it is about the means required to achieve them. All the political catchwords like liberty, equality, fraternity, social justice and human rights can be applied to justify almost any theory or programme intended to benefit the people. Unfortunately, good intentions do not justify the failure in practice of particular theories and programmes.

#### DEMOCRACY: RULE OF MAJORITY?

We have developed a theory of democracy which holds that the will of the majority shall always prevail. This is very different from the concept of democracy as a system for arriving at a consensus of opinion and of finding a compromise between conflicting points of view: where simple head counting is only used for special purposes.

Quite important consequences flow from the new theory of democracy. In an industrialised country, the proportion of people living in cities and working in the major industries is much larger than those living in small towns and villages and working in small companies

or on the land. Furthermore, the proportion of unskilled workers in industry is much larger than the total of skilled, managerial, self-employed and professional people combined. And a new factor which will become increasingly significant is that the people employed directly and indirectly by local and central government may soon outnumber all other groups put together.

Applying the rule of self-interest in human nature, it is not very difficult to estimate the trend of decisions in a modern democratic state. But legislative decisions can be thwarted by minorities. The early trade unions demonstrated very effectively how determined action by groups, united by genuine grievances, could impose their will on a hostile majority. While this sort of action can be justified in exceptional cases, it might create new problems if it led to a sort of gang warfare between different minority interest groups.

## V

### PREDICTIONS

#### REDUCED CHOICE

It looks as if we can expect to see an increasing bureaucratic involvement in virtually every aspect of the lives of individual citizens. If the experience of other countries is anything to go by, this will mean a gradual reduction in the freedom of choice and individual responsibility, particularly in such things as housing, the education of children, health care, the ability to acquire or inherit personal property, to hand on commercial enterprises, and the ability to provide for old age

through personal savings and, perhaps most important of all, the freedom of the individual to exploit his skills or talents as suits him best.

Judging from the experience of other countries, individual initiative in commerce and industry will become considerably restricted, although the opportunities for marginally legal and illegal activities will increase as a consequence of the growing volume of legislation which it will not be possible to enforce. The situation will also be aggravated if there is any further decline in moral standards and what the judge described as "self-imposed law".

#### MORE BLACK MARKETS

The major financial and commercial markets will decline, but black markets will begin to flourish. Consumer products will tend towards an average standard, with the gradual elimination of items of better quality. The social services, particularly the Health Service, will suffer as government finds it progressively more difficult to meet the rising costs and as it comes up against the rule that the bigger the organisation the more difficult it is to manage.

#### LESS TAKE-HOME PAY, MORE JOB DISCIPLINE

The take-home element of wages and salaries will become relatively less important as all the major necessities will be provided "free"—in other words, out of taxation—and also because fringe benefits associated with employment and trade unions will increase. This dependence on fringe benefits for even the basic elements of existence will ensure a very high degree of

job discipline. The loss of a job will not be cushioned by the accumulation of savings or property. Employment direction may make unemployment benefits more difficult to obtain. Slavery is no more than a system of directed labour and fringe benefits.

#### MORE NATIONALISM—LESS FREEDOM

Whereas individuals recognise an affinity with individuals in similar occupations in other countries, the existence of an exclusive nation is the vested interest of national governments. The more powerful governments become, the more they tend to encourage a spirit of exclusive nationalism and a hatred and suspicion of anything foreign or multi-national. Official nationalism will lead to increasing state responsibility for cultural, sporting and economic activities and the gradual suppression of anything which does not suit national economic policies or which does not appear to do justice to the national cultural ideal.

#### UNTHINKABLE?

These predictions sound almost fanciful in the British context. Some of the things I have said may seem unthinkable in this country with its tradition of freedom and tolerance. There were people in many other countries who felt the same way, but the unthinkable happened to them. The Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn said:

“It is not how the Soviet Union will find a way out of totalitarianism, but how the West will be able to avoid the same fate.”

## Epilogue

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### CAN CONFRONTATION BE AVOIDED?

*Ralph Harris*