

## From the Seventies to the Eighties

Jacques Ellul

For once, I shall not be dwelling on technology and social change. Rather, I wish to emphasize a displacement of problems. On the political level there is a series of ideological failures with a simultaneous increase in power for the same political units. There is a surprising correlation whereby increasing material power goes hand in hand with decreasing ideological power. This is not a sequel to Daniel Bell's "end of ideology." Ideologies have remained powerful—but they have changed. There has been a disappearance of political ideologies and a proliferation of substitution ideologies. All of this means that the reclassification of political powers is a most difficult endeavor. Within the communist world, Stalinism as an ideology has virtually disappeared. The Soviet Union is witnessing the loss of communist sentiment, of politically oriented religious feeling, the end of hope for an ideal and just society—criticism is multiplying within. Outside of the Soviet Union there is the surprising phenomenon of nationalist communism, Eurocommunism, the end of proletarian internationalism. This is a decisive crisis for Marxist ideology. The overall influence of communism was due to its ideological impact, and the Soviet Union's political preeminence was a result of the existence everywhere of communist parties strictly dependent upon the Soviet Union. The disappearance of this complex situation, which includes belief, obedience, worship, and dogmatism, represents a considerable loss of power for the Soviet Union within a long-term framework. Belief in communism is waning, and this ideology will not resurface in the eighties. Inversely, the Soviet Union has experienced an inordinate material growth, not only at the military level but in its internal organization and as an economic power. This growth in material power has not reached its climax, and any arms limitations agreements can scarcely be expected to make a dent. Such growth then becomes an end in itself, an unending expansion with power as its only goal. This creates a most dangerous situation due to the unpredictability of its consequences, whereas in the past provisions were possible in terms of known ideological goals.

The Western world is witnessing a set of comparable phenomena. Nobody believes any more—at the ideological level—in all that which has made the greatness of the West: democracy, human rights, the value of freedom, of dignity, the radiant future of progress through science. Economic liberalism is undergoing a crisis, while the Western powers are losing their prestige and influence in

the Third World. The West is constantly under accusation, it is denied all legitimacy; its history is scoffed at, viewed with hatred. Whites have become synonymous with evil. The West is undergoing a profound identity crisis. No longer believing in its own legitimacy, eroded from within by a disbelieving youth, the West doubts its vocation, no longer recognizes itself in the mirror held by the rest of the world, and is preparing to throw in the towel in the ideological struggle. The West no longer accepts the image of its own civilization, and seeks new answers in primitive models, Eastern religions, African music and art. None of the Western countries know anymore exactly who or what they are. Frames of reference and definitions have disappeared. There is a spiritual apathy matching social anomie. We are faced with an irreversible phenomenon which will find its way into the coming decade. We are out of breath, and it will be some time before we rediscover some meaning to life and action.

Like the Soviet bloc, the West is undergoing an unprecedented growth in material power. The technological progress and economic development of the past decade dwarf the economic crisis. This statement may seem surprising in light of the current Western obsession with the economy; yet while such a crisis cannot be denied, it is relatively unimportant when compared to the development of power. Growth may be somewhat slower, yet it continues, which means that the gap between the Third World and the West keeps widening and both wealth and power keep accumulating. There is a double phenomenon: the dangerous concentration of power in a few pockets (United States, Japan, West Germany) and Western expansion through multinationals and the technological model. The multinationals strengthen Western power throughout the world, covering with an abstract network even would-be revolutionary regimes, bringing the Third World and communist countries into the same orbit. This is brought about through a kind of collective consent, not through violence, and despite denunciations of imperialism. This consent is in line with the Third World's identification with the technological model. It is adopted by all, even while they reject the West. Third World intellectuals view the future of their countries exclusively in terms of technology. The ruling elites, intent upon self-enrichment, see technology and industrialization as the surest roads to such satisfaction. The poor hope that technology will lessen their poverty. But they all accept a specifically Western model. What the

West loses in prestige, it gains in disseminating its past. The same was true for Greece with regard to conquering Rome.

The same correlation between loss of meaning and growth of power is found in the Third World. The Third World appears as the face of the future, emerging like a giant. China faces the Soviet Union. The oil-producing powers, having caused the worst of the economic crisis, are apparently able to bring the West to its knees in exchange for a rigorous and coherent policy. We are dealing with an unfathomable accumulation of wealth and a weapon of warfare—an irreversible situation for the decade to come. The Arab countries are penetrating the Western world through their wealth, continually purchasing property and stocks. How many enterprises have indirectly come into their hands? Nobody knows. While multinationals invade the outside world, Arab sheiks buy Western manufacturing enterprises. The Third World seems to be victorious everywhere. The African and Asian peoples have succeeded in driving out their colonizers. Political decolonization was accomplished in this decade, and a bold Third World polity seems to have emerged with the Tricontinental and the movement of nonaligned countries.

The picture becomes even more weighty and menacing if we consider Third World demographic growth, all the more disquieting in light of the Western trend toward population decline. But the Third World is also following the same process taking place in the rest of the world: its material growth moves hand in hand with an ideological, cultural, and spiritual collapse—a disintegration of civilization. China, for example, is effecting a turnabout with the abandonment of Maoism. There is nothing left of the specificity and originality of the revolution which was the joy of intellectuals in the sixties. Mao's death and the liquidation of the band of four represented the abandonment not only of Maoism but of communism as a reality. All that remained was hollow rhetoric and institutional appearances. Communism has made way for technology and industrialization following the Western model. We are witnessing a complete loss of theoretical rigor and doctrinal movement. All that remains is a taste for power and national expansionism.

The Arab countries do not follow a policy of Third World support but of personal success, which only underscores the fragility of the whole setup. Stretching the point to its limit, there is no Third World; it only exists as opposed to the West. The oil crisis is far more serious for the African countries, yet the oil-producing nations have shown no generosity toward them. As to the rest of the Third World, almost all (except three) of the African countries have failed: they were successful in eliminating the colonizers, but not in building peoples, nations, coherent states. For the past decade there has been a kind of discontinuity in decolonization, which occurs in spurts and brings about military dictatorships in Africa and chaos in South East Asia—drawing a disastrously weak picture

of the Third World from an organizational and ideological point of view.

All of this becomes even more serious when we consider the whole bloc's internal divisions. In Africa there are divisions and hostilities from country to country; one cannot say socialist countries against the others because there is no African socialism. It is only a word (even for Tanzania or Ethiopia). There is hatred among tribes, and we are back to the fifteenth century. There are also divisions and possibly soon rifts within the nonaligned countries: two orientations expressing opposing ideological choices and signifying the end of the specific ideology of nonaligned nations. In other words, there is a collapse of all sectors and spheres of the Third World, regarding goals, beliefs, projects, doctrines, thought. The trend, then, that has characterized the seventies and will continue into the eighties is the growth of material power together with the disappearance of motivations (ideological, cultural, spiritual). This represents a complete displacement of the problems we faced in the sixties.

The situation is explosive and fraught with serious dangers. The menace lies not so much in the expression of a deliberate will of revolution or conquest, as in the risk of an unbridled unleashing which would bring about chain reactions. The former possibility is unlikely, owing to the enormous increase in international economic interdependence. The Soviet Union is very worried by the economic crisis of the West, and is in no way seeking to profit from it. The African elites, while violently anti-Western and anti-imperialistic in their utterances, are aware that their future depends upon the improvement of their relations with the West, which in turn must inevitably spread around its "progress" at the risk of smothering in it. Economic solidarity leads to a certain prudence which is even beginning to manifest itself among the oil-producing nations. The new problems emerging for the eighties are characterized by a discontinuity: it is almost impossible to prolong the guidelines for the seventies. Most preceding trends are obsolete. China as a model for the Third World, and much of the Left generally, has crumbled. No longer having a model, the Left everywhere is in great disarray. The sudden awareness of ecological problems in the early seventies has shifted to more "serious" issues in light of the economic crisis. Ecology was a luxury and a means of propaganda. Now the emphasis is on pure economic activity—the search for full employment, growth, productivity, a return to technology above all. It is to be feared that this trend should continue into the eighties, and that after the crisis, ecology may reappear as a very old fad no longer in the running or at best subordinate to the economy.

We are at a crossroads. It is impossible to predict which, among opposing trends, is likely to take over. Will it be the structured, reasonable, consensual character of organized political life with its democratic institutions, or anarchic, disorganized trends rejecting the social order and manifesting themselves through violence, drugs, rejection of work? There appears to be a contradiction

between institutions and the social body, expressed in the disaffection of workers with regard to their trade unions, of youths for work, of leftists for their parties, of the citizenry for its municipalities. There is a defiance and a loss of interest which leads to questioning the legitimacy of those organizations. Yet what other form is to be found when institutionalization itself is called to task? We are also witnessing an awareness of the insolvability of some of the issues brought to the fore, such as equality in freedom. The choice is crucial: either freedom while accepting its attendant inequalities, or the forced establishment of true social equality, paying the price of a suppression of freedom. This is not an abstract problem to be solved philosophically, but a terribly concrete choice.

Emerging from the seventies, but a landmark for the eighties, is the North/South rift; more precisely, developed versus underdeveloped countries—Europe, the United States, Japan, and the Soviet Union vis-à-vis the rest of the world. But this is not a new problem. The subject has been debated since 1950, airing well-meaning indignation at the vast famine and reduced revenues accruing to the Third World. The new element is that, owing to the economic crisis, two contradicting trends have emerged: within each developed country there has been a more intense struggle for prosperity and equality, an intolerance for the least reduction in consumption, while at the same time pursuit of the attenuation that is the greatest

inequality of all—that suffered by the Third World, which in the present climate is perceived as a growing scandal.

The decade of the eighties will be characterized by a double crisis. A moral, psychological, spiritual crisis, and that derived from the energy problem. These two crises are contradictory, irreconcilable, and yet cumulative and superimposed. They attack society at two different levels, they have opposing motivations, and cannot be treated in the same manner. It is a mistake to attempt to resolve these crises, to attempt to expel them either by denying the former or organizing remedies for the latter. Both involve a need for social change. Instead of believing that we are dealing with abnormal and transitory events, we must recognize that these crises point to fundamental aberrations in our society; and instead of seeking to return to the “health” of the fifties, we must accept present conditions as the new normal state of affairs within which to find the best *modus vivendi*. Just as Pascal wrote on the good use of illness, we must find the good use of the crisis and its implications in terms of human and social change. □

—Translated by Danielle Salti

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## Commentaries: Entering the Eighties

# Meaning of the Seventies

Daniel J. Elazar

**T**he key to the meaning of the 1970s is the passage of the United States and the world as a whole from the post-World War II generation into a new generation, the second of the postmodern era. This transition is not simply a figure of speech. It reflects the continuation of a very real generational rhythm in human affairs, a recurring pattern of relationships linking people and the passage of time far more systematically than is always recognized.

### Generational Rhythm

Students of society have noted the succession of generations since biblical times. In 1789, Thomas Jefferson, searching for a constitutional structure that would provide the maximum degree of individual liberty, reckoned the succession of generations as the basis for determining the duration of valid legislation at 19½ years—half a genera-

tion or the length of time it takes for a new majority to emerge in the polity. Nineteenth-century philosophers, sociologists, and historians were the first to articulate systematic theories of generational progression and its influence on human development. Auguste Comte, for example, viewed the duration of human life, and most particularly the thirty-year term of full activity in adulthood, as decisive in shaping the velocity of human evolution, suggesting that “the unanimous adherence to certain fundamental notions” transforms the aggregate of individuals alive at a particular time into a social cohort. John Stuart Mill, influenced by Comte and convinced that “history does, when judiciously examined, afford empirical laws of society,” added the idea that in every generation, the “principal phenomena” of a society are different, suggesting that the differences appear at gener-