

# Extract: How the Intelligentsia Poisoned Modernity

*by Richard Pipes*

**T**he word “intelligentsia” entered the English vocabulary in the 1920s from the Russian. The Russians, in turn, adopted it from France and Germany, where “*intelligence*” and “*Intelligenz*” had gained currency in the 1830s and 1840s to designate educated and “progressive” citizens. It soon went out of fashion in the West, but in Russia it acquired great popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century to describe not so much the educated elite as those who spoke and acted on behalf of the country’s silent majority—a counterpart of the patrimonial establishment (bureaucracy, police, the military, the gentry, and the clergy). In a country in which “society” was given no political outlets, the emergence of such a group was inevitable. The term was never precisely defined, and pre-revolutionary literature is filled with disputes over what it meant and to whom it applied. Although in fact most of those regarded as *intelligent* had a superior education,

education in itself was not a criterion: thus, a businessman or a bureaucrat with a university degree did not qualify as a member of the *intelligentsia*, the former because he worked for his own profit, the latter because he worked for the profit of the Tsar. Only those qualified who committed themselves to the public good, even if they were semi-literate workers or peasants.

In practice, this meant men of letters—journalists, academics, writers—and professional revolutionaries. To belong, one also had to subscribe to certain philosophical assumptions about man and society derived from the doctrines of materialism, utilitarianism, and positivism. The popularity of the word derived from the fact that it made it possible to distinguish social “activists” from passive “intellectuals.” However, we shall use the two terms interchangeably since in Western languages the distinction has not been established.

As a self-appointed spokesman for all those not members of the establishment—that is, more than nine-tenths of the population—the Russian intelligentsia saw itself and was seen by its rivals as the principal threat to the status quo. The battle lines in the last decades of Imperial Russia were drawn between official Russia and the intelligentsia, and it was eminently clear that the victory of the latter would result in the destruction of the former. The conflict grew so bitter that anyone advocating conciliation and compromise was liable to find himself caught in a deadly cross fire. While the establishment counted mainly on its repressive apparatus to keep the intelligentsia at bay, the latter used, as a lever, popular discontent, which it aggravated with all the means at its disposal, mostly by persistent discrediting of tsarism and its supporters.

Although circumstances caused the intelligentsia to be especially important in Russia, it was, of course, not unique to that country. Tonnies, in his seminal distinction between “communities” and “societies,” allowed that in addition to communities linked by territorial proximity and ties of blood there existed “communities of mind” whose common bond was ideas. Pareto identified a “non-governing elite” which closely resembles the Russian intelligentsia. Because these groups are international, it is necessary at this point to engage in a digression from Russian history: neither the emergence of the Russian intelligentsia nor the impact of the Russian Revolution on the rest of the world

can be properly appreciated without an understanding of the intellectual underpinnings of modern radicalism.

Intellectuals first appeared in Europe as a distinct group in the sixteenth century in connection with the emergence of secular society and the concurrent advances of science. They were lay thinkers, often men of independent means, who approached the traditional questions of philosophy outside the framework of theology and the clerical establishment, which had previously enjoyed a monopoly on such speculation.

Montaigne was a classic representative of the type which at the beginning of the seventeenth century came to be referred to as “intellectualist.” He reflected on life and human nature without giving any thought to the possibility that either could be changed. To humanists like him, man and the world in which he lived were givens. The task of philosophy was to help man acquire wisdom by coming to terms with that changeless reality. The supreme wisdom was to be true to one’s nature and so restrain one’s desires as to gain immunity to adversity, especially the inevitable prospect of death: in the words of Seneca, “to have the weaknesses of a man and the serenity of a god” (“*habere imbecillitatem hominis, securitatem dei*”). The task of philosophy, as stated in the title of the book by the sixth-century writer Boethius, was “consolation.” In its more extreme forms, such as Chinese Taoism, philosophy counseled complete inactivity: “Do nothing and everything will

be done." Until the seventeenth century, the immutability of man's "being" was an unquestioned postulate of all philosophical thought, both in the West and in the East. It was considered a mark of folly to believe otherwise.

It was in the early seventeenth century that a contrary trend emerged in European thought. Its stimulus came from the dramatic findings of astronomy and the other sciences. The discovery that it was possible to uncover nature's secrets, and to use this knowledge to harness nature in the service of man, inevitably affected the way man came to view himself. The Copernican revolution displaced him and his world from the center of the universe. In one respect, this was a blow to man's self-esteem; in another, it greatly enhanced it. By laying bare the laws governing the motions of celestial bodies, science elevated man to the status of a creature capable of penetrating the deepest mysteries of nature: the very same scientific knowledge which toppled him from the center of the universe gave him the power to become nature's master.

Francis Bacon was the earliest intellectual to grasp these implications of the scientific method and to treat knowledge—knowledge acquired through scientific observation and induction—as a means not only of gaining an understanding of the world but also of acting upon it. In his *Novum Organum* he asserted that the principles of physical science were applicable to human affairs. By establishing the methods through which true knowledge was

acquired—that is, by rejecting classical and scholastic models in favor of the empirical and inductive methodology employed in the natural sciences—Bacon believed himself to be laying the foundations of man's mastery over both nature and himself: he is said to have "epitomize[d] the boundless ambition to dominate and to exploit the material resources of nature placed by God at the disposal of man." That he was aware of the implications of the theory he advanced is indicated by the subtitle of his treatise on scientific methodology: *De Regno Hominis* (Of Man's Dominion).

Although scientific methodology progressively came to dominate Western thought, it took some time for man to view himself as an object of scientific inquiry. Seventeenth-century thought continued to adhere to the view inherited from antiquity and the Middle Ages, that man was composed of two discrete parts, body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*), the one material and perishable, the other metaphysical and immortal and hence beyond the reach of empirical investigation. This conception, expressed by Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* to explain his equanimity in the face of impending death, entered the mainstream of Western thought through the writings of St. Augustine. Related was a theory of knowledge based on the concept of "innate ideas," that is, ideas believed to have been implanted in the soul at birth, including the notions of God, good and evil, the sense of time and space, and the principles of logic. The theory of innate ideas dominated European thought

in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The political implications of this theory were distinctly conservative: the immutability of human nature posited the immutability of man's behavior and the permanence of his political and social institutions.

Bacon already had expressed doubts about innate ideas, since they did not fit his empirical methodology, and hinted that knowledge derived from the senses. But the principal assault on the theory of innate ideas was undertaken by John Locke in 1690 in his *Essay on Human Understanding*. Locke dismissed the whole concept and argued that all ideas without exception derived from sensory experience. The human mind was like a “dark room” into which the sensations of sight, smell, touch, and hearing threw the only shafts of light. By reflecting on these sensations, the mind formed ideas. According to Locke, thinking was an entirely involuntary process: man could no more reject or change the ideas which the senses generated in his mind than a mirror can “refuse, alter, or obliterate the images or ideas which objects set before it do therein produce.” The denial of free will, which followed from Locke's theory of cognition, was to be a major factor in its popularity, since it is only by eliminating free will that man could be made the subject of scientific inquiry.

For several decades after its appearance, the influence of Locke's *Essay* was confined to academic circles. It was the French philosophe Claude Helvetius who, in his anonymously published *De*

*l'Esprit* (1758), first drew political consequences from Locke's theory of knowledge, with results that have never been adequately recognized.

It is known that Helvetius studied intensely the philosophical writings of Locke and was deeply affected by them. He accepted as proven Locke's contention that all ideas were the product of sensations and all knowledge the result of man's ability, through reflection on sensory data, to grasp the differences and similarities that are the basis of thought. He denied as categorically as did Locke man's ability to direct thinking or the actions resulting from it: for Helvetius, his biographer says, “a philosophical treatise on liberty [was] a treatise on effects without a cause.” Moral notions derived exclusively from man's experience with the sensations of pain and pleasure. People thus were neither “good” nor “bad”: they merely acted, involuntarily and mechanically, in their self-interest, which dictated the avoidance of pain and the enhancement of pleasure.

Up to this point Helvetius said nothing that had not been said previously by Locke and his French followers. But then he made a startling leap from philosophy into politics. From the premise that all knowledge and all values were by-products of sensory experience he drew the inference that by controlling the data that the senses fed to the mind—that is, by appropriately shaping man's environment—it was possible to determine what he thought and how he behaved. Since, according to Locke, the

formulation of ideas was wholly involuntary and entirely shaped by physical sensations, it followed that if man were subjected to impressions that made for virtue, he could be made virtuous through no act of his own will.

This idea provides the key to the creation of perfectly virtuous human beings—required are only appropriate external influences. Helvetius called the process of molding men “education,” by which he meant much more than formal schooling. When he wrote “*l’éducation peut tout*”—“education can do anything”—he meant by education everything that surrounds man and affects his thinking, everything which furnishes his mind with sensations and generates ideas. First and foremost, it meant legislation: “It is ... only by good laws that we can form virtuous men.” From which it followed that morality and legislation were “one and the same science.” In the concluding chapter of *L’Esprit*, Helvetius spoke of the desirability of reforming society through legislation for the purpose of making men “virtuous.”

This is one of the most revolutionary ideas in the history of political thought: by extrapolation from an esoteric theory of knowledge, a new political theory is born with the most momentous practical implications. Its central thesis holds that the task of politics is to make man “virtuous,” and that the means to that end is the manipulation of man’s social and political environment, to be accomplished mainly by means of legislation, that is, by the state. Helvetius el-

evates the legislator to the status of the supreme moralist. He must have been aware of the implications of his theory for he spoke of the “art of forming man” as intimately connected with the “form of government.” Man no longer is God’s creation: he is his own product. Society, too, is a “product” rather than a given or “datum.” Good government not only ensures “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (a formula which Helvetius seems to have devised), but it literally refashions man. The logic of Helvetius’s ideas inexorably leads to the conclusion that in the course of learning about human nature man “acquires an unlimited power of transforming and reshaping man.” This unprecedented proposition constitutes the premise of both liberal and radical ideologies of modern times. It provides the theoretical justification for using politics to create a “new order.”

Such ideas, whether in their pure or diluted version, hold an irresistible attraction for intellectuals. If, indeed, human existence in all its manifestations obeys mechanical laws that reason can lay bare and direct into desirable channels, then it follows that intellectuals, as the custodians of rational knowledge, are man’s natural leaders. Progress consists of either the instantaneous or the gradual subordination of life to “reason,” or, as it used to be said in Russia, the replacement of “spontaneity” by “consciousness.” “Spontaneous” existence, as shaped by millennia of experience and embodied in tradition, custom, and his-

toric institutions, is, in this conception, “irrational.”

A life ruled by “reason” is a life ruled by intellectuals: it is not surprising, therefore, that intellectuals want to change the world in accord with the requirements of “rationality.” A market economy, with its wasteful competition and swings between overproduction and shortages, is not “rational” and hence it does not find favor with intellectuals. They prefer socialism, which is another word for the rationalization of economic activity. Democracy is, of course, mandatory, but preferably interpreted to mean the “rational” rather than the actual will of the people: Rousseau’s “general will” instead of the will made manifest through elections or referenda.

The theories of Locke and Helvetius permit intellectuals to claim status as mankind’s “educators” in the broadest sense of that word. They are the repository of reason, which they believe to be always superior to experience. While mankind gropes in darkness, they, the “illuminati,” know the path to virtue and, through virtue, to happiness. This whole conception puts intellectuals at odds with the rest of humanity. Ordinary people, in pursuit of their livelihood, acquire specific knowledge relevant to their particular occupation under the specific conditions in which they have to practice it. Their intelligence (reasoning) expresses itself in the ability to cope with such problems as they happen personally to confront: in the words of William James, in attaining

“some particular conclusion or ... gratify[ing] some special curiosity ... which it is the reasoner’s temporary interest to attain.” The farmer understands the climatic and other requirements for his crops: knowledge that may be of little use in another place and useless in another occupation. The real estate agent knows the value of properties in his area. The politician has a sense of the aspirations and worries of his constituents. Societies function thanks to the immense variety of the concrete kinds of knowledge accumulated from experience by the individuals and groups that constitute them.

Intellectuals and intellectuals alone claim to know things “in general.” By creating “sciences” of human affairs—economic science, political science, sociology—they establish principles said to be validated by the very “nature” of things. This claim entitles them to demand that existing practices be abandoned and existing institutions destroyed. It was the genius of Burke to grasp the premises and consequences of this kind of thinking, as expressed in the slogans and actions of the French Revolution, and to insist; in response to this experience, that where human affairs are concerned, things never exist in “general” but only in particular (“Nothing is good, but in proportion, and with Reference”), and abstract thinking is the worst possible guide to conduct.

**H**elvetius's theory can be applied in two ways. One may interpret it to mean that the change in man's social and political environment ought to be accomplished peacefully and gradually, through the reform of institutions and enlightenment. One can also conclude from it that this end is best attained by a violent destruction of the existing order.

Which approach—the evolutionary or revolutionary—prevails seems to be in large measure determined by a country's political system and the opportunities it provides for intellectuals to participate in public life.

In societies which make it possible through democratic institutions and freedom of speech to influence policy, intellectuals are likely to follow the more moderate alternative. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and the United States, intellectuals were deeply involved in political life. The men who shaped the American republic and those who led Victorian England along the path of reform were men of affairs with deep intellectual interests: of some of them it would be difficult to say whether they were philosophers engaged in statesmanship or statesmen whose true vocation was philosophy. Even the pragmatists among them kept their minds open to the ideas of the age. This interplay of ideas and politics lent political life in Anglo-Saxon countries their well-known spirit of compromise. Here the intellectuals had no need to withdraw and form an isolated caste. They acted

on public opinion, which, through democratic institutions, sooner or later affected legislation.

In England and, through England, in the United States, the ideas of Helvetius gained popularity mainly from the writings of Jeremy Bentham and the utilitarians. It was to Helvetius that Bentham owed the ideas that morality and legislation were "one and the same science," that man could attain virtue only through "good laws," and that, consequently, legislation had a "pedagogic" function. On these foundations, Bentham constructed his theory of philosophical radicalism, which greatly affected the movement for parliamentary reform and liberal economics. The preoccupation of modern Anglo-Saxon countries with legislation as a device for human betterment is directly traceable to Bentham and, through him, to Helvetius. In the speculations of Bentham and the English liberals, there was no place for violence: the transformation of man and society was to be accomplished entirely by laws and enlightenment.

But even under this reform-minded theory lay the tacit premise that man could and ought to be remade. This premise links liberalism and radicalism and helps explain why, for all their rejection of the violent methods employed by revolutionaries, when forced to choose between them and their conservative opponents, liberals can be counted on to throw their lot in with the revolutionaries. For what separates liberals from the extreme left is disagreement

over the means employed, whereas they differ from the right in the fundamental perception of what man is and what society ought to be.

**I**n countries which excluded intellectuals from participation in public life—of which old-regime France and Russia were prime examples—intellectuals were prone to form castes committed to extreme ideologies. The fact was noted by Tocqueville:

In England, writers on the theory of government and those who actually governed cooperated with each other, the former setting forth their theories, the latter amending or circumscribing these in the light of practical experience. In France, however, precept and practice were kept quite distinct and remained in the bands of two quite distinct groups. One of these carried on the actual administration while the other set forth the abstract principles on which good government should, they said, be based; one took the routine measures appropriate to the needs of the moment, the other propounded general laws without a thought for their practical application; one group shaped the course of public affairs, the other that of public opinion. Thus, alongside the traditional and confused, not to say chaotic, social system of the day there was gradually built up in man's minds an imaginary ideal society in which all was simple, uniform, coherent, equitable, and rational in the full sense of the term.

It is always dangerous to seek in historical analogies explanations for historical events: the model of the French Revolution employed by Russian radicals brought no end of grief to them and many others. However, in at least one respect the example of eigh-

teenth-century France is applicable to twentieth-century Russia—namely, in the realm of ideas, which are less affected by concrete historic circumstances than are political and social conditions. The intellectual atmosphere of late Imperial Russia closely resembled that of *ancien régime* France on the eve of the Revolution, and the circles of *philosophes* anticipated those of the Russian intelligentsia. The analogy emphasizes to what extent intellectual trends can be self-generated: it reinforces the impression that the behavior of the Russian intelligentsia was influenced less by Russian reality than by preconceived ideas.

A brilliant if little-known French historian, Augustin Cochin, first showed the peculiarly destructive intellectual atmosphere that had prevailed in France in the decades immediately preceding the Revolution. He began his inquiries with a study of Jacobinism. Seeking its antecedents, he was led to the social and cultural circles formed in France in the 1760s and 1770s to promote “advanced” ideas. These circles ... were made up of literary associations, Masonic lodges, academies, as well as various “patriotic” and cultural clubs. According to Cochin, these *sociétés de pensée* insinuated themselves into a society in which the traditional estates were in the process of disintegration. To join them required severing connections with one's social group and dissolving one's class (estate) identity in a community bound exclusively by a commitment to common ideas. Jacobinism was a natural product of this phe-

nomenon: in France, unlike England, the movement for change emanated not from parliamentary institutions but from literary and philosophical clubs.

These circles, in which the historian of Russia recognizes many of the features of the Russian intelligentsia of a century later, had as their main mission the forging of a consensus: they achieved cohesion not through shared interests but through shared ideas, ruthlessly imposed on their members and accompanied by vicious attacks on all who thought differently:

Prior to the bloody terror of '93, there existed, between 1765 and 1780, a dry terror in the republic of letters, of which the Encyclopedia was the Committee of Public Safety and d'Alembert was Robespierre. It mowed down reputations as the other did heads: its guillotine was defamation ...

For intellectuals of this kind, the criterion of truth was not life: they created their own reality, or rather, sur-reality, subject to verification only with reference to opinions of which they approved. Contradictory evidence was ignored: anyone inclined to heed such evidence was ruthlessly cast out.

This kind of thinking led to a progressive estrangement from life. Cochin's description of the atmosphere in the French *sociétés de pensée* of the late eighteenth century perfectly fits that prevailing in intelligentsia circles in Russia a century later:

Whereas in the real world the arbiter of all thought is proof and its issue is the effect, in this world the arbiter is the opinion of others, and

the aim their approbation. All thought, all intellectual effort here exists only by way of concurrence. It is opinion that makes for existence. That is real which others see, that true which they say, that good of which they approve. Thus the natural order is reversed: opinion here is the cause, and not, as in real life, the effect. Appearance takes the place of being, speaking, doing... And the goal ... of that passive work is destruction. It consists, in sum, of eliminating, of reducing. Thought which submits to this initially loses the concern for the real, and then, little by little, the sense of the real. And it is precisely to this deprivation that it owes its freedom. It does not gain in freedom, orderliness, clarity except to the extent that it sheds its real content, its hold on that which exists.

It is only with the help of this insight that we can understand the seeming paradoxes in the mentality of the genus intelligentsia, and especially its more extreme species, the Russian intelligentsia. Theories and programs, on which Russian intellectuals spent their waking hours, were indeed evaluated in relation not to life but to other theories and programs: the criterion of their validity was consistency and conformity. Live reality was treated as a perversion or caricature of "genuine" reality, believed to lurk invisible behind appearances and waiting to be set free by the Revolution. This attitude would enable the intelligentsia to accept as true propositions at total variance with demonstrable fact as well as common sense—for example, that the living standards of European workers in the nineteenth century were steadily declining, that the Russian peasant in 1900 was on the verge of starvation, that it was legitimate, in the name of democracy,

to disperse in January 1918 the democratically elected Constituent Assembly, or that, more generally, freedom meant bowing to necessity. To understand the behavior of the intelligentsia it is imperative to keep in mind at all times its deliberate detachment from reality: for while the revolutionaries can be ruthlessly pragmatic in exploiting, for tactical purposes, the people's grievances, their notion of what the people desire is the product of sheer abstraction. Not surprisingly, when they come to power, revolutionary intellectuals immediately seize control of the means of information and institute a tight censorship: for it is only by suppressing free speech that they can impose their "sur-reality" on ordinary people bogged down in the quagmire of facts.

The habit calls for the creation of a special language by means of which initiates of the movement can communicate with one another and, when in power, impose their fantasy on the population at large. This language, with its own vocabulary, phraseology, and even syntax, which reached its apogee in the stultified jargon of the Stalinist era, "describes not reality but an ideal conception of it." It is severely ritualized and surrounded by lexical taboos. Long before 1917, Russian revolutionary polemics were carried out in this medium.

Nowhere is this penchant for creating one's own reality more apparent—and pernicious—than in the intelligentsia's conception of the "people." Radicals insist on speaking for and on acting on behalf of the "people" (some-

times described as "the popular masses") against the allegedly self-seeking elite in control of the state and the nation's wealth. In their view, the establishment of a just and free society requires the destruction of the status quo. But contact with the people of flesh and blood quickly reveals that few if any of them want their familiar world to be destroyed: what they desire is satisfaction of specific grievances—that is, partial reform, with everything else remaining in place. It has been observed that spontaneous rebellions are conservative rather than revolutionary, in that those involved usually clamor for the restitution of rights of which they feel they have been unjustly deprived: they look backward. In order to promote its ideal of comprehensive change, the intelligentsia must, therefore, create an abstraction called "the people" to whom it can attribute its own wishes. According to Cochin, the essence of Jacobinism lay not in terror but in the striving of the intellectual elite to establish dictatorial power over the people in the name of the people. The justification for such procedure was found in Rousseau's concept of "general will," which defined the will of the people as what enlightened "opinion" declared it to be:

For the doctrinaires of the [French revolutionary] regime, the philosophes and politicians, from Rousseau and Mably to Brissot and Robespierre, the true people is an ideal being. The general will, the will of the citizenry, transcends the actual will, such as it is, of the greatest number, as in Christian life grace dominates and transcends nature. Rousseau has said it: the general

will is not the will of numbers and it has reason against it; the liberty of the citizen is not the independence of the individual and suppresses it. In 1789, the true people did not exist except potentially, in the consciousness or imagination of “free people,” of “patriots,” as they used to be called ... that is to say, a small number of initiates, recruited in their youth, trained without respite, shaped all their lives in societies of philosophes ... in the discipline of liberty.

It is only by reducing people of flesh and blood to a mere idea that one can ignore the will of the majority in the name of democracy and institute a dictatorship in the name of freedom.

This whole ideology and the behavior to which it gave rise—a *mélange* of ideas formulated by Helvetius and Rousseau—was historically new, the creation of the French Revolution. It legitimized the most savage social experiments. Although for personal reasons Robespierre despised Helvetius (he believed him to have persecuted his idol, Rousseau), his entire thinking was deeply influenced by him. For Robespierre, the mission of politics was the “reign of virtue.” Society was divided into “good” and “bad” citizens, from which premise he concluded that “all those who do not think as we do must be eliminated from the city.”

Tocqueville was perplexed by this whole phenomenon when late in life he turned his attention to the history of the French Revolution. A year before his death, he confided to a friend:

There is something special about the sickness of the French Revolution which I sense without being able to describe it or analyze its causes. It is a virus of a new and unfamiliar kind. The

world has known violent revolution: but the boundless, violent, radical, perplexed, bold, almost insane but still strong and successful personality of these revolutionaries appears to me to have no parallel in the great social upheavals of the past. From whence comes this new race? Who created it? Who made it so successful? Who kept it alive? Because we still have the same men confronting us, although the circumstances differ, and they have left progeny in the whole civilized world. My spirit flags from the effort to gain a clear picture of this object and to find the means of describing it fairly. Independently of everything that is comprehensible in the French Revolution, in its spirit and in its deeds, there is something that remains inexplicable. I sense where the unknown is to be found but no matter how hard I try, I cannot lift the veil that conceals it. I feel it through a strange body which prevents me from really touching or seeing it.

Had he lived into the twentieth century, Toqueville might have found it easier to identify the “virus,” because its peculiar blend of ideas and group interests has become commonplace since his day.

**I**ntellectuals can acquire influence only in an egalitarian and open society, in which estate barriers have broken down and politics are shaped by opinion. In such a society they assume the role of opinion-makers, to which end they employ the printed word and other media as well as educational institutions. Although the intelligentsia likes to see itself as selflessly dedicated to the public good, and hence a moral force rather than a social group, the fact of its members sharing common

values and goals inevitably means that they also have common interests—interests which may well clash with their professed ideals. The intelligentsia has difficulty admitting this. Its profound aversion for sociological self-analysis—in such contrast to its penchant for analyzing all other social groups and classes, especially its main obstacle to power—the “bourgeoisie”—has resulted in a striking paucity of works on the subject. The sparse literature on the intelligentsia as a social and historic phenomenon is entirely disproportionate to that group’s importance.

Although they can flourish only in societies free of estate privileges, with egalitarian citizenship such as have arisen in the West in modern times, such societies place intellectuals in an ambivalent position. While they enjoy immense influence on public opinion, they constitute socially a marginal element, since they control neither wealth nor political power. A good part of them make up an intellectual proletariat which barely manages to eke out a living: even the more fortunate representatives of this group are economically and politically insignificant, often forced to serve as paid spokesmen of the nation’s elite. This is a painful position to be in, especially for those who regard themselves as far more deserving of the prerogatives of power than those who actually wield it by virtue of accident of birth or economic exploitation.

Capitalism benefits the intelligentsia by increasing the demand for its services and giving its members opportu-

nity to practice the profession of opinion-molding.

The cheap book, the cheap newspaper or pamphlet, together with the widening of the public that was in part their product but partly an independent phenomenon due to the access of wealth and weight which came to the industrial bourgeoisie and to the incident increase in the political importance of an anonymous public opinion—all these boons, as well as increasing freedom from restraint, are by-products of the capitalist engine.

“Every society of the past,” writes Raymond Aron,

has had its scribes ... its artists or men of letters ... and its experts ... None of these three species belongs strictly to our modern civilisation, but the latter has nonetheless its own special characteristics which affect the numbers and status of the intellectuals. The distribution of manpower among the different professions alters with the progress of economic development: the percentage of manpower employed in industry grows, the proportion employed in agriculture decreases, while the size of the so-called tertiary sector, which includes a multitude of professions of varying degrees of prestige—from the quill-driver in his office to the research worker in his laboratory—is enormously inflated. Modern industrial societies comprise a greater number of non-manual workers, absolutely and relatively, than any society of the past. The three categories of non-manual workers—scribes, experts, and men of letters—develop simultaneously, if not at the same rate. Bureaucracies offer outlets to scribes with inferior qualifications; the management of labor and the organization of industry require more and more specialized experts; schools, universities, and various mediums of entertainment or communication employ men of letters, artists, or

mere technicians of speech and writing, hacks and popularizers.... Though its significance is not always fully recognized, the growth in the number of jobs remains a crucial fact.

By filling the ranks of the “tertiary sector” of the modern economy, intellectuals turn into a social group with its own interests, the most important of which calls for the increase in the number and prestige of white-collar jobs—an objective best promoted by centralization and bureaucratization. Their interests further require untrammelled freedom of speech, and intellectuals, even while helping put in power regimes which suppress liberties, have always and everywhere opposed restraints on free expression: they often are the first victims of their own triumphs.

Paradoxically, therefore, capitalism and democracy, while enhancing the role of intellectuals, also increase their discontent. Their status in a capitalist society is far beneath that of politicians and businessmen, whom they scorn as amateurs in the art of social management. They envy their wealth, authority, and prestige. In some respects it was easier for intellectuals to accommodate to pre-modern society, in which status was fixed by tradition and law, than to the fluctuating world of capitalism and democracy, in which they feel humiliated by lack of money and status: Ludwig van Mises thought that intellectuals gravitate to anti-capitalist philosophies “in order to render inaudible the inner voice that tells them that their failure is entirely their own fault.”

As previously pointed out, intellectuals can avoid these humiliations and rise to the top only under one condition: if society becomes “rationalized”—that is, intellectualized—and “reason” replaces the free play of economic and political forces. This means socialism. The main enemy of the socialists, in their peaceful (“utopian”) as well as violent (revolutionary) guise, has always been “spontaneity,” by which is meant laissez-faire in its economic as well as political manifestations. The call for the abolition of private property in the means of production on behalf of “society,” common to all socialist programs, makes it theoretically possible to rationalize the production of goods and to equalize their distribution. It also happens to place those who claim to know what is “rational”—intellectuals—in a commanding position. As in the case of other class movements, interest and ideology coincide just as the bourgeoisie’s demands for the abolition of restraints on manufacture and trade in the name of public welfare served its own interests, so the radical intellectuals’ call for the nationalization of manufacture and trade, advanced for the sake of the masses, happens to work to its own advantage.

The anarchist leader, and Marx’s contemporary, Michael Bakunin, was the first to note this coincidence and insist that behind the intellectuals’ yearning for socialism lay ordinary class interests. He opposed Marx’s vision of the socialist state on the grounds that it

would result in Communist domination of the masses:

According to Mr. Marx, the people should not only not abolish [the state], but, on the contrary, fortify and strengthen it, and in this form turn it over to the full disposal of their benefactors, guardians, and teachers, the chiefs of the Communist Party—in other words, to Mr. Marx and his friends, who will then proceed to liberate [them] in their own fashion. They will concentrate the reins of government in a strong hand, because the ignorant people are in need of strong guardianship. They will create a central state bank, which will concentrate in its hands all commercial-industrial, agricultural, and even scientific production. They will divide the mass of the people into two armies, the industrial and the agricultural, under the direct command of state engineers, who will form the new privileged political-scientific class.

Another anarchist, the Pole Jan Machajski, depicted socialism as an ideology formulated in the interest of the intelligentsia, “an emergent privileged class,” whose capital consisted of higher education. In a socialist state they would achieve dominance by replacing the old class of capitalists as administrators and experts. “Scientific socialism” promises the “slaves of bourgeois society happiness after they are dead: it guarantees the socialist paradise to their descendants.”

This was not a message likely to appeal to intellectuals. And so it was no accident that Marx defeated Bakunin and had him expelled from the First International, and that in the modern world anarchism is but a faint shadow of socialism. Historical experience indicates that any movement that questions

the ideology and interests of intellectuals dooms itself to defeat, and that any intellectual who challenges his class condemns himself to obscurity.

Socialism is commonly thought of as a theory which aims at a fairer distribution of wealth for the ultimate purpose of creating a free and just society. Indisputably this is the stated program of socialists. But behind this program lurks an even more ambitious goal, which is creating a new type of human being. The underlying premise is the idea of Helvetius that by establishing an environment which makes social behavior a natural instinct, socialism will enable man to realize his potential to the fullest. This, in turn, will make it possible, ultimately, to dispense with the state and the compulsion which is said to be its principal attribute. All socialist doctrines, from the most moderate to the most extreme, assume that human beings are infinitely malleable because their personality is the product of the economic environment: a change in that environment must, therefore, alter them as well as their behavior.

Marx pursued philosophical studies mainly in his youth. When, as a twenty-six-year-old émigré in Paris, he immersed himself in philosophy, he at once grasped the political implications of the ideas of Helvetius and his French contemporaries. In *The Holy Family* (1844-45), the book which marked his and Engels's break with idealistic rad-

icism, he took his philosophical and psychological premises directly from Locke and Helvetius: “The whole development of man,” he wrote, “depends on education and environment.”

If man draws all his knowledge, sensations, etc., from the world of the senses and the experience gained in it, the empirical world must be arranged so that in it man experiences and gets used to what is really human.... If man is shaped by his surroundings, his surroundings must be made human.

This, the *locus classicus* of Marxist philosophy, justifies a total change in the way society is organized—that is, revolution. According to this way of thinking, which indeed inexorably flows from the philosophical premises formulated by Locke and Helvetius, man and society do not come into existence by a natural process but are “made.” This “radical behaviorism,” as it has been called, inspired Marx in 1845 to coin what is probably his most celebrated aphorism: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point, however, is to change it.” Of course, the moment a thinker begins to conceive his mission to be not “only” observing the world and adapting to it, but changing it, he ceases to be a philosopher and turns into a politician with his own political agenda and interests.

Now, the world can conceivably be “changed” gradually, by means of education and legislation. And such a gradual change is, indeed, what all intellectuals would advocate if their exclusive concern were with improving the human

condition, since evolution allows for trial and error, the only proven road to progress. But many of those who want to change the world regard human discontent as something not to be remedied but exploited. Exploitation of resentment, not its satisfaction, has been at the center of socialist politics since the 1840s: it is what distinguished the self-styled “scientific” socialists from their “utopian” forerunners. This attitude has led to the emergence of what Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu called in 1902, in a remarkably prescient book, the “politics of hatred.” Socialism, he noted, elevates “hatred to the heights of principle,” sharing with its mortal enemies, nationalism and anti-Semitism, the need “chirurgically” to isolate and destroy the alleged enemy. Committed radicals fear reform because it deprives them of leverage and establishes the ruling elite more solidly in power: they prefer the most savage repression. The slogan of Russian revolutionaries—“*chem khuzhe, tem luchshe*” (“the worse, the better”)—spelled out this kind of thinking.

There are, of course, many varieties of socialists, from the most democratic and humane to the most despotic and cruel, but they differ over means, not ends. In tracing the attitude of Russian and foreign socialists toward the brutal experiments of the Bolsheviks, we will have occasion to see their inconsistencies: revulsion at Bolshevik atrocities combined with admiration for their undeviating commitment to the common cause and support for them when-

ever they were threatened. As we will show, the Bolsheviks could neither have seized power nor have kept it were it not for the support, active and passive, given them by the democratic, nonviolent socialists.

We have it on the authority of Leon Trotsky that the architects of the October 1917 coup d'état looked far beyond correcting the inequities of capitalism. Describing the future in the early 1920s, he predicted: "Communist life will not be formed blindly, like coral reefs, but it will be built consciously, it will be tested by thought, it will be directed and corrected. Having ceased to be spontaneous, life will cease to be stagnant."

Having dismissed all of human history until October 1917 as an era of "stagnancy," Trotsky proceeded to depict the human being whom the new regime would create:

Man will, at last, begin to harmonize himself in earnest.... He will want to master first the semi-conscious and then also the unconscious processes of his own organism: breathing, the circulation of blood, digestion, reproduction, and, within the necessary limits, will subordinate them to the control of reason and will. Even purely physiological life will become collectively experimental. The human species, the sluggish *Homo sapiens*, will once again enter the state of radical reconstruction and will become in its own hands the object of the most complex methods of artificial selection and psychophysical training.... Man will make it his goal to master his own emotions, to elevate his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent to create a higher sociobiological type, a superman, if you will ... Man will become incomparably stronger, wiser, subtler. His body will become more harmonious, his

movements more rhythmic, his voice more melodious. The forms of life will acquire a dynamic theatricality. The average human type will rise to the heights of an Aristotle, Goethe, Marx. And beyond this ridge, other peaks will emerge.

These reflections, not of an adolescent daydreamer but of the organizer of Bolshevik victories in October 1917 and in the Civil War, provide an insight into the psyche of those who made the greatest revolution of modern times. They and those who emulated them aimed at nothing less than reenacting the Sixth Day of Creation and perfecting its flawed product: man was to remake himself "with his own hands." We can now understand what Nicholas Chernyshevskii, a prominent Russian radical of the 1860s and a major influence on Lenin, had in mind when he defined his "anthropomorphic principle" to mean "*Homo homini deus*" ("Man is god to man").

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