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EGALITARIANISM AND INFLATION

The classic example of vicious irresponsibility is the story of Emperor Nero who fiddled, or sang poetry, while Rome burned. An example of similar behavior may be seen today in a less dramatic form. There is nothing imperial about the actors, they are not one single bloated monster, but a swarm of undernourished professors, there is nothing resembling poetry, even bad poetry, in the sounds they make, except for pretentiousness - but they are prancing around the fire and, while chanting that they want to help, are pouring paper refuse on the flames. They are those amorphous intellectuals who are preaching egalitarianism to a leaderless country on the brink of an unprecedented disaster.

Egalitarianism is so evil - and so silly - a doctrine that it deserves no serious study or discussion. But that doctrine has a certain diagnostic value: it is the open confession of the hidden disease that has been eating away the insides of civilization for two centuries (or longer) under many disguises and cover-ups. Like the half-witted member of a family struggling to preserve a reputable front, egalitarianism has escaped from a dark closet and is screaming to the world that the motive of its compassionate, "humanitarian," altruistic, collectivist brothers is not the desire to help the poor, but to destroy the competent. The motive is hatred of the good for being the good - a hatred focused specifically on the fountainhead of all goods, spiritual or material: the men of ability.

The mental process underlying the egalitarians' hope to achieve their goal, consists of three steps: 1. they believe that that which they refuse to identify, does not exist; 2. therefore, human ability does not exist; and 3. therefore, they are free to devise social schemes which would obliterate this non-existent. Of special significance to the present discussion is the egalitarians' defiance of the law of causality: their demand for equal results from unequal causes - or equal rewards for unequal performance.

As an example, I shall quote from a review by Bennett M. Berger, professor of sociology at the University of California, San Diego (The New York Times Book Review, January 6, 1974). The review discusses a book entitled More Equality by Herbert Gans. I have not read and do not intend to read that book: it is the reviewer's own notions that are particularly interesting and revealing. "[Herbert Gans] makes it clear from the start," writes Mr. Berger, "that he's not talking about equality of opportunity, which almost nobody seems to be against any more, but about equality of 'results,' what used to be called 'equality of condition.'... What he cares most about is reducing inequalities of income, wealth and political power... More equality could be achieved, according to Gans, by income redistribution (mostly through a version of the Credit Income Tax) and by decentralizations of power ranging from more equality in hierarchical organizations (e.g., corporations and universities) to a kind of 'community control' that would provide to

those minorities most victimized by inequality some insulation against being consistently outvoted by the relatively affluent majorities of the larger political constituencies."

If being consistently outvoted is a social injustice, what about big businessmen, who are the smallest minority and would always be consistently outvoted by other groups? Mr. Berger does not say, but since he consistently equates economic power with political power, and seems to believe that money can buy anything, one can guess what his answer would be. And, in any case, he is not an admirer of "democracy."

Mr. Berger reveals some of his motivation when he describes Herbert Gans as a "policy scientist" who suffers from a certain "malaise." "Part of this malaise is a nightmare in which 'the policy scientist' - not poorly prepared, but in full possession of the facts, reasons and plans he needs to promote persuasively the changes he advocates... - is frustrated, defeated, humiliated by Congressional committees and executive staffs politically beholden to the constituencies and the patrons who keep them in office." In other words: they did not let him have his way.

Lest you think it is only material wealth that Mr. Berger is out to destroy, consider the following: "Decentralization of power, for example, doesn't necessarily produce more equality...Even the direct democracy of the New England town meeting... does very little to rid the local political community of the excessive influence exercised by the more educated, the more articulate, the more politically hip." This means that the educated and the ignorant, the articulate and the incoherent, the politically active and the passive or inert should have an equal influence and an equal power over everyone's life. There is only one instrument that can create an equality of this kind: a gun.

Mr. Berger stresses that he agrees with Mr. Gans's egalitarian goal, but he doubts that it can be achieved by the open advocacy of more equality. And, with remarkably open cynicism, Mr. Berger suggests "another strategy": "The advocacy of equality inevitably comes into conflict with other liberal values, such as individualism and achievement. But...the advocacy of 'citizenship' does not, and the history of democracy is a history of political struggles to win more and more 'rights' for more and more people to bring ever larger proportions of the population to fully functioning citizenship....in the 20th century there have been struggles to remove racial and sexual impediments...to win rights to decent housing, medical care, education - all on the grounds not of 'equality,' but on the grounds that they are necessary conditions for citizens, equal by definition, to exercise their responsibility to govern themselves. Who knows what 'rights' lie over the horizon: a right to orgasm, to feel beautiful? I think these will make people better citizens." In other words, he suggests that egalitarian goals can be achieved by blowing up the term "citizenship" into a totalitarian concept, i.e., a concept embracing all of life.

If Mr. Berger is that open in advising the setting up of an ideological booby trap, who are the boobs he expects to catch? The underendowed? The general public? Or the intellectuals, whom he tempts with such bait as "a right to orgasm" in exchange for forgetting individualism and achievement? I hope your guess is as good as mine.

I will not argue against egalitarian doctrines by defending individualism, achievement, and the men of ability - not after writing Atlas Shrugged. I will let reality speak for me - it usually does.

Under the heading of "Allende's Legacy," an article in The Wall Street Journal (April 19, 1974) offers some concrete, real-life examples of what happens when income, wealth and power are distributed equally among all men, regardless of their competence,

character, knowledge, achievement, or brains.

"By the time the military acted to overthrow the Allende government, prices had soared more than 1,000% in two years and were climbing at the rate of 3% a day at the very end. The national treasury was practically empty." The socialist government had seized a number of American-owned industrial firms. The new military government invited the American managements to come back. Most of them accepted.

Among them was the Dow Chemical Company, which owned a plastics plant in Chile. Bob G. Caldwell, Dow's director of operations for South America, came with a technical team to inspect the remains of their plant. "'What we found was unbelievable to us,' he recalls. 'The plant was still operable, but in another six months we wouldn't have had any plant at all. They never checked anything. We found valves that hadn't been maintained leaking corrosive chemicals that would have eventually eaten away practically everything.'...Worse yet, the highly inflammable chemicals handled at the plant were in imminent danger of blowing up. 'Safety went to pot,' Mr. Caldwell says. 'The fire-sprinkler system was disconnected and the valves taken away for some other use outside. Then they were smoking in the most dangerous areas. They told us, 'You didn't have any fires while you were here before, so it must not be as dangerous as you said.'"

I submit that the mentality represented by this last sentence, a mentality capable of functioning in this manner, is the loathsomely evil root of all human evils.

Apparently, some mentalities in the new Chilean government belong to the same category: they have the same range and scope, but the consequences of their actions are not so immediately perceivable, though not much farther away. In order to avoid labor disputes, the new government has frozen all labor contracts in the form and on the terms established under the Allende regime. For example, the Dow Company's contract includes a "requirement that all the plant's plastic scrap be given to the union, which then sells it. 'We hope to get that one changed,' a company official says, 'because it's a clear incentive to produce almost nothing but scrap.'"

Then there is the case of a big Santiago textile firm. "Its contract with 1,300 workers virtually guarantees bankruptcy. The textile firm's employees get a certain amount of cloth free as part of their wages and can buy unlimited quantities at a 37% discount; at those prices the firm loses money. Under President Allende the workers sold the cloth on the black market at huge profits, and it was an important factor in assuring their backing for the Allende government."

How long can a company - or a country, or mankind - survive under a policy of this sort? Most people today do not see the answer, but some do. Material shortages are the consequence of another, much more profound shortage, which is created by egalitarian governments and ignored by the public - until it is too late. "Chile's experiment with Marxism has also left the country with a shortage of engineers and technicians that could reach serious proportions. Thousands of them left during the Allende regime. Despite incentives offered by the junta, they haven't been coming back, and many more key people continue to leave for higher-paying jobs abroad....'Here in Chile [says a business executive] we must get used to the fact that good people must be paid well.'"

But here in the United States, we are told to get used to the idea that they must not.

There is no such thing as "good people," cries Professor Berger - or Professor

Gans, or Professor Rawls - and if some are good, it's because they're exploiting those who aren't. There is no such thing as "key people," says Professor Berger, we're all equal by definition. No, says Professor Rawls, some were born with unfair advantages, such as intelligence, and should be made to atone for it to those who weren't. We want more equality, says Professor Gans, so that those who devise sprinkler systems and those who smoke around inflammable chemicals would have equal pay, equal influence, and an equal voice in the community control of science and production.

The term "brain drain" is known the world over: it names a problem which various governments are beginning to recognize, and are trying to solve by chaining the men of ability to their homelands - yet social theoreticians see no connection between intelligence and production. The best among men are running - from every corner and slave-pen of the globe - running in search of freedom. Their refusal to cooperate with slave drivers is the noblest moral action they could take - and, incidentally, the greatest service they could render mankind - but they don't know it. No voices are raised anywhere in their honor, in acknowledgment of their value, in recognition of their importance. Those whose job it is to know - those who profess concern with the plight of the world - look on and say nothing. The intellectuals turn their eyes away, refusing to know - the practical men do know, but keep silent.

One can't blame the dazed brutes of Chile, who swoop down on an industrial plant and cavort at a black-market fiesta, for not understanding that the plant cannot run at a loss - if their social superiors tell them that they are entitled to more equality. One can't blame savages for not understanding that everything has its price, and what they steal, seize or extort today will be paid for by their own starvation tomorrow - if their social superiors, in management offices, in university classrooms, in newspaper columns, in parliamentary halls, are afraid to tell them.

What are all those people counting on? If a Chilean factory goes bankrupt, the equalizers will find another factory to loot. If that other factory starts crumbling, it will get a loan from the bank. If the bank has no money, it will get a loan from the government. If the government has no money, it will get a loan from a foreign government. If no foreign government has any money, all of them will get a loan from the United States.

What they don't know - and neither does this country - is that the United States is broke.

Justice does exist in the world, whether people choose to practice it or not. The men of ability are being avenged. The avenger is reality. Its weapon is slow, silent, invisible, and men perceive it only by its consequences - by the gutted ruins and the moans of agony it leaves in its wake. The name of the weapon is: inflation.

(To be continued.)

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