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FIFTY YEARS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

By

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FIFTY YEARS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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I

The changes that have taken place in man's estate during the last 50 years are perhaps more far-reaching and profound than those in any comparable period of time in the past. Space travel, atomic energy, hydrogen bombs, rocketry and guided missiles, lighter alloys, man-made fibres, mechanization of agriculture, automation in industry, planned full employment with social security, control of tropical diseases and radio therapy, vitamins, hormones and anti-biotics, family planning, universal literacy, talkies and television, five-day week, steps towards world government in the form of international agencies like the FAO, WHO, World Bank and so on--these are but a random sample of man's recent achievements in the scientific, technological, economic, social and political fields. It is true that these changes have not yet become universal, some of them characterising only the most advanced societies. Nevertheless the fact is they are potentially within the grasp of the entire space. *7-11-47*

2. The last 50 years also provide two important benchmarks in the chronicle of social change: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Indian Independence of 1947, the latter heralding the freedom of colonial societies everywhere. The Russian Revolution, a disproof of Marx's prediction of socialism in mature economies, nevertheless brought to the fore the

contradiction between economic justice and laissez faire capitalism. The reconstruction of capitalism in the West with an altogether new emphasis on public services and even on planning is but an induced effect of this conflict which was, perhaps prematurely, resolved in Russia with the success of the revolution. On the other hand, changes now taking place in neonationalist, that is, post-colonial societies aim at updating these societies at a stroke from a competitive, paternalistic, traditional or even a mythical stage, some of these stages sometimes coexisting.

3. I therefore propose to study in Section II social change in three types of societies, neo-capitalist, socialist and neo-nationalist, with particular reference to the following eight categories, (i) economic structure (ii) industrialization (iii) urbanization (iv) demography (v) family (vi) education (vii) social barriers and (viii) innovation. In Section III I shall illustrate some of these changes with reference to two examples from my own country. And finally, in Section IV, I shall attempt to bring together the main trends of social change and outline their dynamics.

II

4. The most decisive social change during this period is the establishment of social control over the economic system, gradually but nevertheless inexorably in the capitalist countries and in one sweep in the socialist countries as well as in the newly independent countries of Africa and Asia. By the time the Russian Revolution took place the ills of laissez faire capitalism had become well known-business cycles with periodic fluctuations in production,

employment and incomes, an inequitous distribution of income and wealth and an inherent tendency towards monopolistic combinations with harmful effects on prices and production. But their remedies had not yet been fully established and it took the Soviet state 10 years before it could devise an effective method of economic planning. While economic planning was being given its first trial in Soviet Russia, the Western world was rocked by the great depression out of which were born the solutions of capitalist reconstruction. The New Deal with contracyclical fiscal policy in the 'thirties with anti-trust laws dating from an earlier period, the Keynesian rationalization of the whole process through a public policy of saving and investment in order to achieve full employment of the existing capacity of an economy and an equality-oriented distribution of incomes and wealth through progressive income taxes, estate duties, public consumption and public enterprises became new points of departure for capitalist countries. In fact, if we leave aside the two World Wars and the rise and fall of Nazism as irrelevancies thrust on an unwilling world, the real issue in the last 50 years of economic development in the industrialized nations of the world boils down to a choice of economic planning with or without private enterprise. In the neo-capitalist countries planning techniques are used by governments mainly for purposes of economic stability and growth while in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe they are in addition relied upon to ensure economic development in the sense of building up of the economic infrastructure as well as achieving the deepening and diversification of the processes of production.

5. In the neonationalist countries of Asia and Africa, through

not clear - but seems to mean cycles.

economic development alone can economic stability be realized, because the alternative to economic development is not economic stability but perpetuation of economic stagnation. And since economic development in the sense of building up of the economic infrastructure and training of new skills is beyond the competence of private enterprise, the state has naturally had to step in and carry out this task. In some countries there has been at the same time a tendency to build industries crucial to economic transformation as public enterprises and to use the public sector as the principal agent for espousing economic growth. Here elements of socialism in addition to economic planning as such have been built into the economic structure. In many countries these elements compete hard with the pre-existing capitalistic elements of the structure for resources and markets and only the future can tell which way these economies will ultimately tend. This form of mixed economy is however to be distinguished from that in some of the Western countries where economic planning and direction has fallen short of establishing public enterprises on a large scale. Taking the world as a whole, therefore, we find a continuum of economic systems with planning and exclusively or largely public enterprises at one end of it, economic systems with planning and exclusively or largely private enterprises following a strategy of harmonized cooperation between opposed interest groups at the other end of it, and economic systems with planning and a mixture of public and private enterprises in the middle of it.

6. Let us now turn to industrialization as a universal process.

In spite of differences in their outlook, the advanced neocapitalist and socialist economies are both subject to the same structural

transformation, namely, a greater emphasis on industries and services as against agriculture as the most important contributor to national income. In the neonationalist economies, on the other hand, while agriculture is being modernized and technologically changed its dominance is yet to be broken. While industrialization has become an autonomous process in the first two types of economy, in the latter it is still largely induced. Here industries have to be planted in naturally favourable regions sometimes in anticipation of the requisite cultural conditions.

7. Whatever may have been the ultimate cultural basis of modern autonomous industrialization in Western Europe, be it Calvinism or the gradual accumulation of technical innovations over 5 or 6 centuries preceding the industrial revolution, the change in social structure within the workshop resulting from this process is common to both the advanced neo-capitalist and socialist systems today. Increasing division of labour and a contractual labour-employer (labour-state in the latter case) relationship are its two principal characteristics—the latter in spite of the early authoritarian treatment of labour in the socialist states. In both systems, horizontal and vertical mobility has increased. Trade unionism, merely an instrument of government policy in Soviet Russia in between-the-war years has regained its independent status in advanced socialist countries while it has become pivotal in neo-capitalist countries. In the neo-nationalist countries, however, all this is still limited in scope. Mobility is still sluggish and trade unionism yet to achieve that degree of organization which can give a direction to the economy.

not as clear as it could be

8. Another process which has acted as a prime mover of social change in both capitalist and socialist systems is urbanization. Through an increasing network of industrial, administrative and educational centres, this process has helped the growth of the factory system, working-class consciousness, traffic techniques, mass and individual communication, raising in its wake problems of regional and town and country planning which can be tackled only within the framework of comprehensive planning. In the newly independent countries, on the other hand, while the process is yet to gain its momentum beyond the maritime centres of imperial commerce, the rate of urbanization in the metropolitan centres is faster than in the more developed countries. This adds to the difficulties and complexities of urban renewal and development programmes there.

9. One of the most important consequences of social control over the economic system has been in the demographic field. In this area the most spectacular event is the rapid fall in mortality both in the industrialized nations of the world and in the former colonies and dependencies which are relatively backward. The rapid fall in mortality in the industrialized countries was induced by an increasing level of living, better housing, sanitation and education as well as by advances in the science of medicine and public health. What is surprising is that a much more rapid fall in mortality should take place in the last 20 years or so in some of the economically underdeveloped countries of the world. This has been possible through the most intensive acculturation of the latest medical techniques for control of various kinds of diseases. While mortality rates have fallen steeply, the birth rates have

fallen to a lesser degree in the economically advanced countries and are yet to fall significantly in the developing countries.

In the former, this has given rise to the problem of old-age dependency while in the latter it has brought about a whole range of social problems centring round the increasing burdens or child dependency and younger populations. While in the advanced neo-capitalist and socialist countries birth rate is now more or less adapted to income, in most of the newly independent countries increases in income are nullified by a still unmanageable birth rate. It is for this reason that the latter are adopting family planning measures on a very large scale, measures which are in themselves an indication of a fundamental social and psychological change.

10. As a result of increasing social control over the economy, industrialization, urbanization and demographic control, the structure of family in the advanced countries has undergone a radical change. The large families, characteristic of the early phase of capitalism, are now yielding place to small conjugal families open to society, education having become a completely public responsibility. In developing countries, however, these are still closed to the influence of society in the sense that much of the processes of socialization such as education and employment are still carried on within the circle of the family. Here a three-generation family is still the rule even if the traditional kinship family is disappearing. But with the state coming forward to provide primary and secondary education on an ever increasing scale, and the need for child labour subsiding with the changing pattern of agriculture, the emergence of

are they really?

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conjugal families open to society with a shift of emphasis from dominance to companionship and from contractual relationship to emotional ties cannot be postponed for long even in these societies.

11. The inherent needs of a technological society have also brought about a profound change in the field of education.

Mass literacy is a common feature of all advanced countries, be they capitalist or socialist, while in many of them school education is compulsory and under state auspices. The most important feature of education in these societies is the increasing emphasis on the teaching of sciences including social sciences. In their early phase socialist states adopted a completely regimented system of education. This has somewhat been relaxed in recent years in the more advanced among them and a polycentric view of forces influencing the human mind is now gaining ground even in these societies. The progress of the postcolonial societies in this regard in the last 20 years, although impressive, is not yet decisive. In most of them mass literacy, adult literacy, and universal primary education are still the immediate targets while high school, technological and university education is confined to a small percentage of the eligible age groups.

12. In the face of changes in the economic structure, family life and education, social barriers are falling. These exist not only in neonationalist societies which still have an old stratified social structure. The colour bar in the United States, the prejudice against the Jews in certain parts of the Western world, the apartheid in Africa are all instances of one or another form of such barriers. Whatever may be the

form of these barriers and wherever they might be, they are under attack not only by the most conscientious, intellectual minorities of these societies, but also in some cases by an increasing section of their common people as well as their governments. In a very quiet manner India has been struggling over the last 20 years to assimilate nearly 25 per cent of its population consisting of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the main stream of common life, as struggle which aims at reversing the course of the last 3,000 years of its recorded history. A similar struggle is on in the United States to put the Negroes on an equal footing with the rest of the community. Widely separate in their context and content, the two are nevertheless instances of a universal tendency towards achievement of equality and justice evident everywhere. It is no wonder that religious forms are also losing their rigidities. Religion is not only increasingly becoming a matter of individual faith but even as an institution it is becoming more and more democratised. There is a marked tendency towards syncretism not only within the same religion, but also among different religious creeds. International, interreligious, interracial and interligual marriages are on the increase portending a significant fall in social barriers. These tendencies characterise not only the industrially advanced societies but also those which are relatively backward.

12. The various universal processes of social change I have outlined above could not materialize without a continuous and swelling stream of innovations in these diverse fields. The acceleration of innovations has therefore become in itself a universal process of social change calling for an explanation.

Aut Apart from the fact that every increase in the fund of innovations of all kinds increases the probability of further innovations arising out of it, the real reason why this probability is being increasingly realized is to be found in the changing character and size of the class of innovators in society today. The mythical society adapted itself to outside change while the traditional society accepted the malfunctioning of the system without protest. Paternalistic societies of the past achieved innovations through the exercises of authority while under laissez faire capitalism it was the entrepreneur who innovated and imparted a dynamism to the system, a process beautifully rationalized by Schumpeter. The number of people actually involved in innovations was therefore strictly limited, restricting the range of possible innovations. In societies of today, however, whether of reconstructed capitalism, socialism or even postcolonial nationalism, innovations are increasingly becoming the prerogatives of scientists, administrators and the political elite, an open class which is numerically growing. Right from childhood there is a search for talent for this class which is sought to be recognized and given adequate facility for self-expression, a phenomenon extremely rare 50 years ago.

14. As a result of this basic change in the character and size of the innovating class the group characteristics of the elite as well as the leadership are changing significantly. Among the elite or the top decision makers in economic, military, political and other fields, the number of inventors, that is, those who formulate new ideas or ideals, and of founders, that is, those who institutionalize activities for the realization of those ideals is slowly but steadily increasing as compared to the number of continuators,

that is, those who run the institutions. This is another way of saying that the constructive, the critical, the technical or the organizational elements of the elite are gaining preponderance. As a result of this, the leadership in society, the most active power holders, is becoming more and more open to infiltration by members of the creative and organizational elite. This change in the nature of elite and leadership is in evidence not only in the neocapitalistic societies of the West, but also in the socialist societies of the East and in the neonationalist societies of Asia and Africa. In socialist societies, the revolution threw out the old elite and brought in a new elite. In neonationalist societies, the old elite supporting and supported by imperial rule has also bowed out and a nationalist elite has taken its place. The demand for further nationalization of the elite in these societies is still heard while a second transformation of the elite through infiltration from the relatively more backward sections of the society, whether by an evolutionary process or by revolution, cannot be long forestalled. The rumblings of the discontent are already audible. In any case, the changers rather than the no-changers are in ascendancy. This is but natural because where change becomes a central value, those who are capable of changing society will be in power rather than those who are only able to maintain it at a given level.

15. All this has brought interesting changes in the nature of power and the manner in which it is exercised in all the different kinds of society we are considering. Power is relationship by means of which man can realize possibilities existing outside himself or can impede the realization of those possibilities. When

it's always been this way

stability rather than change is the rule, the exercise of negative power, particularly political power, is much more common than the positive. When change becomes the order of the day, the exercise of positive and pervasive power becomes necessary. In all societies today, exercise of positive power is much more widespread, power pockets are more various and the practitioners of power are more numerous than in the past. This is true not only of the neocapitalist societies which are mostly democratic, but also of socialist societies many of which are dictatorial and of neonationalist societies some of which are authoritarian. The vast increase in the levels of administration and political organization as well as in the number of professional groups is a proof of this tendency. Society is becoming an ever-increasing power lattice with an increasingly finer mesh.

III

16. We have surveyed the different categories of social change in different kinds of societies. I shall now give two small illustration of such change from a relatively backward part of the world. The first is that of a village called Sugur which is at a distance of 50 kms. from Shimoga, a town in the Mysore State in India. The village is near the confluence of the rivers Tunga and Bhadra which have been made famous by the Tungabhadra dam. In the last few years the village has been connected by a metalled approach road following the construction of the Tunga left bank channel passing through the village. It has become the headquarters of the Panchayat, that is, the village council, and the cooperative society. It has now got a middle school to which children from the neighbouring three or four villages come. The population of the village increased from 532 in 1951 to 870

in 1961, the increase being largely due to the immigration of 25 working class families which came for the construction of irrigation channels and stayed on as permanent members of the village.

17. While the occupational structure in Sugar has not materially changed, there has been a significant development in its agricultural economy as a result of the supply of irrigation water through the Tunga anicut.. Before this the village depended mostly on dry cultivation. With assured irrigation the cropping pattern has changed with paddy becoming the most important crop, and a second crop is also now raised. With the cultivation of paddy, fertilizers have been introduced along with seed treatment, plant protection and so on. In the last few years a youth club, a ladies club and a village choir have come into existence. Consumption of tea and coffee has increased as well as expenditure on movies and clothes. Fifteen years ago there were three cycles and only 10 wrist watches in the village and no radio. At present there are 50 cycles, 5 radios and 150 wrist watches in the village. Compulsory primary education which was introduced three years ago has met with a good response. The number of literates increased from about 200 in 1951 to double that figure in 1961 with 10 matriculates and two graduates. The leadership is vested in the traditional upper castes. The village community spent about Rs. 30,000 for building a temple while it complained for lack of funds for a primary school.

18. The other illustration is from another village called Madpur in Ludhiana district in the Punjab State, about

2,500 kms. from Sugar. In the last 10 years or so the approach road to the village has been soled with bricks. The population has remained practically stable at about 1,500 between 1951 and 1961. The number of owner cultivator families increased from 90 to 111 over the last 10 or 12 years while that of tenant cultivators went down from 30 to 19. The number of contractual agricultural labourer families increased from 15 to 25 and that of daily worker families from 30 to 55. The number of people who joined military service increased from 90 to 110 while the number of persons owning trucks increased from 1 to 5 and that of other transport workers from 8 to 16.

19. The consolidation of land holdings in Madpur led to increased investment in sinking of wells which rose from 34 to 58 in number and installations of pump sets which are four in number. Additional irrigation facility has led to increase in area under sugarcane crop which has increased four times most of which is crushed in the village and processed into khandsari (brown sugar). The village was electrified in 1962-63 and it has a small flour mill. There is a fertilizer depot in the village and threshing of crops is done mechanically. Maize, sugarcane, cotton and wheat are the important crops of the village. Hybrid varieties of improved maize have been adopted. American cotton has been introduced. Fertilizer consumption has gone up from 16 tons of nitrogen and one ton of phosphate to 75 tons and 26 tons respectively.

20. Four persons in Madpur have installed oil engines. The head of the panchayat has installed one small flour mill, cotton ginning and carding machines, maize sheller, wheat thresher, chaff cutter, oil crusher and sugar-making machine.

Another person who was previously working as a blacksmith and carpenter on customary payments has since put up similar units.

A third person owns a 14-HP Russian tractor which along with oil engines is let out on hire.

21. The village has a government primary school and the number of students increased from 138 in 1950-51 to nearly 200 in 1961. There are two cooperative societies in the village. One library and a middle school for girls have been opened in Madpur while a community listening set has been purchased. A craft training centre for girls as well as a demonstration centre for shoe making and calico printing has been run. A sports stadium is now being built. Surprisingly the head of the panchayat is a Ramgarhia by caste which is lower in social hierarchy than the Jats who outnumber the others in the village.

22. These two illustrations belong to the same social setting. And yet they represent two different stages of social development. In the first the traditional pattern of agriculture has just been broken with an innovation, namely, canal irrigation, but the occupational structure and social leadership are still traditional. In the second this stage has been passed. There has developed a small group of creative elite with the change in the occupational structure and the social leadership has lost its caste character. In fact the entire neofeudalist world is made up today of such small societies of different stages levels of development, all moving in the same direction but with different speed. The point I am trying to make is that the whole world comprising the neofeudalist, the socialist and the neofeudalist countries presents a similar picture of societies, at different stages and levels of development,

moving at different speed but in the same direction. I have, with reference to the eight selected categories of social change, sought to indicate the direction in which they are all moving. If the world is one or becoming one today, it is only in this sense of a thousand and one different departures from different latitudes and longitudes of development, all guided by the same winds of change in the same direction.

23. We have considered a variety of social changes that have taken place in the world in the last fifty years. It is not possible to specify within the scope of this paper all the dynamic factors responsible for these changes. I can only mention here some of the psychological traits which are favourable to change and others which are not. Following Professor Ponsioen, a broadening of the concept of anomie, which was originally used by Durkheim for explaining criminal or anti-social behaviour, to include any behaviour deviating from generally accepted ends or generally accepted means would be useful for this purpose.

24. From this point of view, four different forms of anomie, namely, a spirit of rebellion, reform, innovation and non-conformism are positive factors for social change. Rebellion which amounts to a rejection of existing standards and values for new ones in relation to both ends and means is the most favourable attitude to change. The spirit of reform accepts existing means while rejecting the existing ends. A converse case is innovation which accepts the existing ends but rejects the existing means for new ones. A somewhat weaker attitude is that of non-conformity which denotes acceptance of the existing ends but non-attachment to the existing means.

25. Two other forms of anomie, namely, anarchism and anti-social behaviour, are rather uncertain in their effect in relation to social change. Anarchism amounts to the rejection of existing standards and values in relation to the ends and non-attachment to the existing standards in relation to the means. A converse case of this is anti-social behaviour which means non-attachment to the existing ends and rejections of the existing means.

26. The real enemy of social change is conformity, ritualism and apathy. Conformity may be seen as the acceptance of existing standards and values in relation to both ends and means. Similarly, ritualism denotes non-attachment to the existing ends but an acceptance of the existing means. Finally, apathy which denotes non-attachment to existing standards and values in relation to both ends and means resists change in a passive manner.

27. While social changes are brought about everywhere through a combination of the spirit of rebellion, social reform, innovation and non-conformism, once these changes are through, every society tends unconsciously to fall a prey to conformity, ritualism and apathy. Let us first take the case of neocapitalist societies. It is important to realise that both the spirit and the form of laissez faire capitalism of the 19th century is now practically dead beyond recall. Even in the last bastion of capitalism, the United States, a spirit of reform and innovation have combined over the last three or four decades to turn it into a society oriented to the achievement of social welfare and security. As a consequence, the state has become primarily a machinery for conciliation of opposed group interests and of countervailing power. In the economic, social, educational and technological fields these same attitudes of reform and innovation hold sway. This is true

of certain other countries of reconstructed capitalism in Western Europe also in different degrees, more in some and less in others. The danger within these societies is, however, from a different direction, namely, their political thinking. It is in these fields that the attitudes of conformism, ritualism and apathy are in evidence. The characteristic pragmatism of these societies in the economic field seems to desert them in the political and a dogmatic worship of their own political thinking, often leading to suspicion and abhorrence of anything alien, takes over. McCarthyism, the Suez crisis, Bay of Pigs and Vietnam are possible instances of this moralistic - rigouristic attitude, although a spirit of rebellion is now apparently breaking through in the universities. Ultimately, if the societies under reconstructed capitalism fail, it will not be because of their economic contradictions as Marx predicted - the sharp edge of these contradictions has now been blunted - but because of their conformism and ritualism in political matters.

28. The same spirit of conformism and ritualism is in evidence in the politics of socialist societies today and is a source of an equal danger, although it must be said that except in China this has considerably weakened in the last decade. At long last, with the passing of Stalinism, these societies are gradually learning to live within themselves. The early thrust of the spirit of rebellion which recreated their economies is also passing. An acceptance of the fact of co-existence with different degrees of cold war are switched on and off in order to gain political advantages here and there is an indication of this. The craving for freedom which an improvement in the standard of living invariably brings is likely to relax the economic, social and cultural structure of these societies, if not their political framework.

29. It is the emerging societies of the neonationalist world which are facing the greatest uncertainty today. Divided in their political thinking between democracy and dictatorship, in their economic thinking between capitalism and socialism, and in their cultural thinking between modernism and traditionalism, they are the most unstable elements in the world today. This instability is all the greater because the other two types of advanced societies are actively interested in imposing their own images upon these nascent societies. What is important is to realise that the same universal forces of social change are at work in these societies as have shaped the more advanced ones. If the differences between the two advanced types of societies are really diminishing rather than increasing or staying the same, then the case for an active policy of international interference and tension loses its rationale. I have tried to show that this is so and I therefore believe that while the third world should be materially and morally helped to fulfil its destiny, it should be left to work out its own course regarding the choice of its working arrangements.

30. In the last analysis, social change is the outcome of the two-way traffic that takes place in the system of values, relations and culture of societies. Changes in values lead to new conceptions of rights and duties of individuals and the adoption of new codes of conduct. These latter bring in their wake fresh ideas and attitudes, leading to unprecedented behavior patterns, crystallising in new types of institutions.

Changes in culture bring about changes in social relations, social organizations and spontaneous social structures.

Finally, changes in social relations give rise to changes in values, thus closing the circuit. Depending on whether one is an idealist or a materialist, the process of change is seen to lead from values through culture to social relations or from social relations through culture to values.

31. While the above is a somewhat simplified description of the process of social change, and endogenous theory of social change would seek to explain it in terms of a conflict between the values and the culture of a society, the ends and the means, the conflict working itself out through the relational system. The values of a people are not merely their common feelings and desires, but they form a variegated tapestry of their desires, yearnings, beliefs and judgement. Institutions are, on the other hand, social configurations of set behaviour serving as stabilisers of a given culture. When values can no longer be accommodated in the existing institutions, the conflict is transmitted to the realm of ideas which are but concepts useful for making events meaningful to the human mind. A change in ideas may lead to a change in the organizational pattern of society, that is, the system of roles for efficient and purposeful behaviour of the various groups composing it. When this is changed, society is changed.

32. I believe that some such process is at work in all societies today. In studying the profile of social change under the three reference systems, I have stressed certain

universal processes which are at work to bring the different types of societies closer in time. I have deliberately ignored those specific processes which keep these societies divided. This I have done not only because I believe that the entire race has a common destiny towards which it is being inexorably led through economic, social, political and cultural interdependence and acculturation, an approximation of values and a converging philosophy of life, but also because I believe the divisive forces to be a relic of the past. Myth-making, of which a society is never really free, can be such a divisive force. So can be jingoism, and imperialism, behind whatever name it may hide itself for the time being, and war. I have no doubt in my mind that these forces are weakening day by day and the other forces, the universal processes of planned and controlled social change, led by scientific and technological advances, that tend to bring the world together and make it a happier place to live in, are gaining ground. But the going is very hard indeed and it would be a folly to minimise the risks of accidents and the stresses and strains involved in the journey of universal transformation.