The Second Coming of Daniel Bell

Abstract

The Coming of Post Industrial Society by Daniel Bell is subtitled a "venture in social forecasting". Since the book has been greeted as a major turning point in sociological analysis by many, we might do well to recall for a moment one of Bell's earlier "ventures in social forecasting", The End of Ideology. Appearing at the end of the 1950s, The End of Ideology was an important document, but hardly because of the astuteness of its "forecasting". In fact, the book's central thesis, that radical ideologies had lost their appeal in the West, was rapidly disproved by events. In retrospect, The End of Ideology was significant because it communicated an understanding of 1950s America widely held by the American liberal intelligentsia. In this perspective an economically powerful America had solved, or could solve, the very social problems which had, in earlier times, prompted "ideological" or "utopian" thinking. Because of this in America the social basis of "ideological" thinking no longer existed. This was even more the case because all experiments at acting out "utopian ideologies" elsewhere-and particularly in the Soviet Union-had led to more social unpleasantness than they had originally set out to remedy. As "social forecasting", then, The End of Ideology was ideology, the wishful thinking of a generation of intellectuals, scarred by the battles of the '30s and '40s, who had become respected and important figures in the prosperous Cold War America.
Daniel Bell’s The End of Ideology is one of the Times Literary Supplement’s “100 most influential non-fiction books published since the Second World War.” Bell, who died in late January at the age of ninety-one, never dishonored the intellectual’s motto: when you meet a problem, make a distinction. But the TLS’s distinction is peculiarly apt. "Have the Communists come to appear so preposterous to our Western intellectuals that it is no longer conceivable that they could be effectively subversive?" Shils wondered. "Is it now thought that there is no longer any danger of the working classes in the advanced Western countries falling for their propaganda?" The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand; A shape with lion body and the head of a man, A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun, Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds. The darkness drops again but now I know That twenty centuries of stony sleep Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle, And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? Following the two most similar drafts given in the Parkinson and Brannen edited edition of the manuscripts, I have put a stanza break there. (Interestingly, both of those drafts have thirty centuries instead of twenty.) He is the. United States''. The coming of post-industrial society. 9 percent of domestic oil refining and an even. smaller percentage of, company could present its smaller percentage of production, Size clearly. case to the public that size was immaterial, Size, clearly, is not a good predictor Of market. long as the corporation displayed those hallmarks Market control is measured by, comprehensive discussion of the contemporary degree. of concentration see M. A. Adelman, "The Two Faces. of Economic. ohn Kenneth. John Kenneth Galbraith, American Capitalism: The of Economic Concentration," The Public Interest, no. Concept of Countervailing Power (Boston, 1952), pp. . 21 (Fall 1970). 91,93. Copyright © 2001 All Rights Reserved.