

## *Indicator*

### "THE COMMITMENT OF THE INTELLECTUAL"

“(U)nder capitalism the intellect worker is typically the faithful servant, the agent, the functionary, and the spokesman of the capitalist system. Typically, he takes the existing order of things for granted and questions the prevailing state of affairs solely within the limited area of his immediate preoccupation.

...For ... the purpose of the intellect worker's work and thought is the particular job in hand. It is the rationalization, mastery, and manipulation of whatever branch of reality he is immediately concerned with... Putting it in negative terms, the intellect worker as such is not addressing himself to the meaning of his work, its significance, its place within the entire framework of social activity. In still other words, he is not concerned with the relation of the segment of human endeavor within which he happens to operate to other segments and to the totality of the historical process. His "natural" motto is to mind his own business, and, if he is conscientious and ambitious, to be as efficient and as successful at it as possible. For the rest, let others too, attend to their business, whatever it may be. Accustomed to think in terms of training, experience, and competence, the intellect worker regards dealing with problems of that totality as one speciality among many. This is to him the "field" of philosophers, religious functionaries, or politicians, even as "culture" or "values" are the business of poets, artists, and sages.

Not that every intellect worker explicitly formulates and consciously holds this view. Yet he has, one might almost say, an instinctive affinity to theories incorporating and rationalizing it. One of them is Adam Smith's time-honored and well known concept of the world in which everyone by cultivating his own garden contributes most to the flourishing of the gardens of all.  
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The other theory which reflects the condition and satisfies the requirements of the intellect worker is the notion of the separation of the means from ends, of the divorce between science and technology on the one side and the formulation of goals and values on the other...

Now I submit that it is in relation to the issues presented by the entire historical process that we must seek the decisive watershed separating intellect workers from intellectuals.\* For what marks the intellectual and distinguishes him from the intellect workers and indeed from all others is that his concern with the entire historical process is not a tangential interest but permeates his thought and significantly affects his work. To be sure, this does not imply that the intellectual in his daily activity is engaged in the study of all of historical development. This would be a manifest impossibility. But what it does mean is that the intellectual is systematically seeking to relate whatever specific area he may be working in to other aspects of human existence. Indeed, it is precisely this effort to interconnect things which, to intellect workers operating within the framework of capitalist institutions and steeped in bourgeois ideology and

\* (from previous page) To avoid a possible misunderstanding: intellect workers can be (and sometimes are) intellectuals, and intellectuals are frequently intellect workers. I say frequently, because many an industrial worker, artisan, or farmer can be (and in some historical situations often has been) an intellectual without being an intellect worker.

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culture, necessarily appear to lie in strictly separate compartments of society's knowledge and society's labor - it is this effort to interconnect which constitutes one of the intellectuals outstanding characteristics. And it is likewise this effort which identifies one of the intellectuals principal functions in society: to serve as a symbol and as reminder of the fundamental fact that the seemingly autonomous, disparate, and disjointed morsels of social existence under capitalism - literature, art, politics, the economic order, science, the cultural and psychic condition of people - can all be understood (and influenced) only if they are clearly visualized as parts of the comprehensive totality of the historical process.

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The desire to tell the truth is ... only one condition for being an intellectual. The other is courage, readiness to carry on rational inquiry to wherever it may lead, to undertake "ruthless criticism of everything that exists, ruthless in the sense that the criticism will not shrink either from its own conclusions or from conflict with the powers that be." (Marx) An intellectual is thus in essence a social critic, a person whose concern is to identify, to analyze, and in this way to help overcome the obstacles barring the way to the attainment of a better, more humane, and more rational social order. As such he becomes the conscience of society and the spokesman of such progressive forces as it contains in any period of history. And as such he is inevitably considered a "troublemaker" and a "nuisance" by the ruling class seeking to preserve the status quo, as well as by intellect workers in its service who accuse the intellectual of being utopian or metaphysical at best, subversive or seditious at worst.

The more reactionary a ruling class, the more obvious it becomes that the social order over which it presides has turned into an impediment to human liberation, the more its ideology taken over by anti-intellectualism, irrationalism, and superstition. And by the same token, the more difficult it becomes for the intellectual to withstand the social pressures brought upon him, to avoid surrendering to the ruling ideology and succumbing to the intellect workers' comfortable and lucrative conformity. Under such conditions it becomes a matter of supreme importance and urgency to insist on the function and to stress the commitment of the intellectual. For it is under such conditions that it falls to his lot, both as a responsibility and as a privilege, to save from extinction the tradition of humanism, reason, and progress that constitutes our most valuable inheritance from the entire history of mankind. ”

Extracts from Paul A Baran - "The Commitment of the Intellectual", originally published in Monthly Review, May 1961.