

IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICA

I came here to study in 1931 as a boy of nineteen intending to stay only for two years before going to my final destination, Germany. Various circumstances have kept me here ever since then, and now I count myself among those privileged who consider both eastward and westward crossing of the Pacific as trip home. My association in this country, however, has been limited to only two states, Wisconsin and Massachusetts, and further still to one sector, academic circles. It certainly is not fair to the country, as vast as America, if I pretend to speak of my impressions of America. Of course, I could mention occasional items of novelty, such as: an old lady eating alone in the restaurant; a man asking for a nickle for a cup of coffee; a shoe-shine boy on the street; a heavy-set, amiable (infinitely more so in comparison with ours) policeman; a high school student hitch-hiking to his football practice; an endless radio far into the night; the Broadway which makes one feel the cheapness of a human being; and so on. But these are only fragments on the surface; I wish instead to search for a more fundamental observation of the



country and the people. And here the best I can do is to start thinking aloud, hoping that probably in this way I may gain a better grasp of my second home.

During the course of my intellectual association with Americans, I have observed two seemingly contradictory attitudes among them towards social questions that kept on baffling me for some time. One is to ask, e.g., what the future of democracy is as if it were a meteorological question, or as if it could be decided independently of one's participation. The other is to believe that any ism, e.g. socialism, is like a cloak to be doffed or mantled by an individual according to his taste and that when 51% of the population don the cloak of socialism the country becomes one. Now I have come to realize that they are but two sides of one shield. The shield is an attitude, born and nurtured in on this American soil, that defies drawing of analogy between a cell to a human body and a man to a society. A cell is subservient to a system function of an organism. But a man, it is said, is a free agent, at least so in America; short of dictatorial ukase or providential design a society cannot have macrodynamic laws which transcend individual awareness.

In other words, little focus is given upon all those intermediate links between individuals and social

milieu which appear to make individual actions pre-determined. The lacuna is co-ordinate with the abstractness with which grandiose concept of social policy, like democracy and socialism, is discussed. Abstract not because it is devoid of content but because it is divorced from objective social conditions which supply more than half of the answer to such a question as the future of democracy and at the same time make it impossible to ask it as a meteorological question because they reveal objective limitations and possibilities of an individual.

When I talked about this matter with an American friend of mine, he suggested that America might be different because here public opinion consisting of free expressions of people is given a chance to operate effectively. But, as I said to him, awareness in lack of restraint is not indeterminacy. American public opinion like any other must be susceptible of scientific analysis. (I do not mean the Gallup poll, of course!) In terms of the analogy already alluded to, a society is like a human body composed of millions of cells each of which has its function determined relative to the whole body but at the same time visualizes on the plane of consciousness its role in the whole system with a varying degree of objectivity. The objective aspect, or the former, persists, irrespective of subjective knowledge of or desire for it. (E.g. one can be a reactionary against

his will or without his knowledge.) The subjective aspect, or the latter, where truth is often irrelevant, is no less an efficacious cause, and as such is made use of to bring about an objective change. (E.g. any propaganda) The relative weight one must attach to either of the two aspects in the explanation of a social event differs by countries. In America the subjective aspect asserts itself more than in other countries; and perhaps for this very reason it is given weight which seems to me unwarranted in the analysis <sup>of social</sup> events, often to the extent of becoming a fetish which plays havoc with helpless people. For example, individual opinions are respected first of all because it is an inalienable right to utter them, and only secondly because of their wisdom. People are thus confronted with one dimensional plane of opinions among which they are not trained through experience to distinguish for wisdom. Name calling and catchwords thrive on such a soil.

I am well aware that in my eagerness to be specific I risked oversimplification both in scope and in trend. (Progress of Lincoln Steffens from the stage of asking "Who is to blame?" to asking "What is to blame?" is known not be an exception.) Again it may be that the fetishism itself is a virtue when ~~is~~ subsumed under a greater good. Often he who exposes it is called a cynic and he who fights

it a fanatic neither of which one would like to be.  
And yet I feel fairly certain that America will some day  
face this problem in a more tangible form.

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