

CONFLUENCE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

For this topic we are utilizing the format of our original issue. It will be introduced by a defining statement and conclude with a summarizing article. The article by M. Aron was sent to all contributors on "The Diffusion of Ideologies." The summarizing article will be by William Y. Elliott, Williams Professor of Government and History at Harvard University.

The Diffusion of Ideologies

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THE topic, "The Role of Ideologies in Political Change, the Method of Their Diffusion, and the Conditions of Their Acceptance," seems at first glance so broad as to discourage the author. The difficulty, indeed, lies not in conceiving the tasks which it suggests, but the limits of those tasks.

It is hardly possible to define the term "ideology" in such a way as to limit its application. On the philosophical level, one can distinguish between "idea" and "ideology" and use the latter term for a certain distortion of ideas. But the political observer or the sociologist, who is interested in ideas as they are thought or lived by individuals or groups, could hardly adopt such a distinction. Any idea or body of ideas, in the lives of men or of collectivities, loses its intrinsic qualities of exactness or demonstrable truth. The modern

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concept of the heliocentric system may be true, and the Ptolemaic system false: the masses who adhere to the former, after having abandoned the latter, do not proceed psychologically from an ideology to an idea, but change ideologies. A scientific truth, accepted by millions of men, no longer differs psychologically or socially from an accustomed mythological concept. We shall, therefore, call "ideologies" all ideas or bodies of ideas accepted by individuals or peoples, without regard to their origin or nature.

If we give the term "ideology" this broad meaning, it follows that the *methods of diffusion* and the *conditions of acceptance* will be infinitely varied. The first phrase covers all media, from scientific journals to radio, by which, in any period of history, ideas pass from one mind to another or from one region to another. The second applies to all aspects of social reality, for the correlation of the various elements of a society is such that, the conditions which determine the acceptance or the nonacceptance of ideas, include all the phenomena, demographic, economic, spiritual, and the history of the group under consideration.

We shall ask ourselves, at the outset, a simple question: What was the reason for the choice of this subject? What facts, what inquiries did those who suggested it have in mind? What are the specific features of the diffusion of ideologies at the present moment?

I

The facts which have struck observers are universally known. I shall formulate them as follows: An ideology, whose creator was the son of a middle-class Jewish family from the Rhineland, a refugee in London in the middle of the last century, has become the official doctrine first of a country of two hundred million people, then of a country of four hundred million, rich in the oldest, perhaps the highest, culture in the world. On the Gold Coast, on the other hand, parliamentary institutions modeled on those of Great Britain have sprung up, and in South Korea democratic institutions patterned after those of the United States. In a series of countries in Asia and

the Near East, ideas of Western democracy (elections, parties, parliaments, unions) have been introduced, as if they represented the normal way men must govern themselves.

This phenomenon presents, it seems to me, several original features in comparison with phenomena of the same type observed in the past. The diffusion of ideologies is accompanied by the transmission of institutions, the most important institutions in the lives of collectivities, namely those which establish the relationships between government and governed, and define the methods by which officials will be chosen. The ideology which is spreading in one part or another of the world is linked, in men's minds, with one or the other of the great powers. Its diffusion is associated with the hegemony exercised, or supposedly exercised, by the Soviet Union or the United States. The ideologies which are being disseminated all originate in Western societies; their spread is accompanied by more or less violent reactions against the West. The two main ideologies currently in process of dissemination appear in the form of an antithesis, often employing the same words and related symbols, but manifesting irreconcilable hatred for each other.

All these remarks are commonplace, and are presented as such. Their aim is simply to indicate a working principle. Although our topic fits into a larger framework, that of the spread of ideologies, of which the expansion of Christianity, Islam, Protestantism, and democracy are familiar examples, it assumes in these times a peculiar urgency. At the present moment, the same ideology (or at least apparently the same) is spreading in Western societies against legal governments and in societies which are fundamentally different from those of the West. The same institutions (or at least apparently the same) are developing in countries whose economic and social structures are as dissimilar as possible. The adaptation of political regimes to the economic and social substructure, which was fundamentally the common basis of most political doctrines of the last century, is belied by the facts.

The most varied methods of diffusion — from class to class, from civilization to civilization, by military conquest, apparently without

the intervention of force, by the action of the few, by the action of masses — are thus found in the case of the diffusion of the so-called Western ideologies as well as in that of the so-called Communist ideologies. In both cases, likewise, the diffusion of ideologies tends toward the diffusion of institutions. In both cases one can observe the individuals and the peoples who are the bearers of the new ideologies, and one ought to be able to analyze the social origins and the recruiting of these groups, as well as their relations with the privileged groups of the old social structure.

These specific characteristics of the spread of ideologies in the twentieth century cannot be the direct object of inquiry. But, in drawing the lines of our discussion, we must keep these characteristics in mind, so that as a group they may furnish answers to the questions which dominate the subject as a whole. What factors explain the global dissemination of the Western ideologies in our times? What is the precise role of ideologies in this spread of the forms of civilization? How are the ideas and the institutions which have ripened in Western societies implanted in untilled soil?

II

Let us examine as one aspect of the general problem the diffusion of ideologies through Point Four. Point Four, or the extension of Western skills and technical resources to so-called underdeveloped countries, has within the space of a few years become one of the officially recognized and proclaimed objectives of American policy. If there are differences of opinion as to the amounts which the United States can devote to Point Four, there is hardly any controversy, it seems to me, over the effectiveness of that assistance in the world struggle against Communism. It is an article of faith with American opinion that fortunate peoples, that is, those with a high standard of living, are hostile to Communism, as to any other form of despotism. The best barrier against Communism, so the argument goes, is prosperity or, at least, economic progress.

It is not my intention to question the guiding ideas of American

policy. The spread of Western techniques seems to me both inevitable and, from a humanitarian standpoint, desirable. To be sure, the expression "underdeveloped countries" is shocking to the historian. Indeed, this concept takes in the black tribes of Central Africa and some of the highest cultures humanity has ever known (in China or the Indies). The only common feature of these underdeveloped countries is, of course, their backwardness in the ways of industrial civilization, which is of Western origin. But, at the present moment, a rejection of that civilization would not insure the preservation of values which are perhaps incompatible with science and Western technology; it would instead condemn those countries, with their ancient cultures, to helplessness and dismemberment.

The following remarks, which are not a dogmatic pronouncement but an introduction to a concerted investigation, are intended to call attention to a fundamental question: In what political circumstances is the extension of technical skills and resources possible? What will the probable results of that assistance be, as determined by the methods employed and by the ideological and political atmosphere?

Out of a hundred articles concerning Point Four which have appeared in the American press, I do not believe that one can be found which analyzes its political conditions. And yet, is it not obvious that the rationalizing of an economy presupposes a certain judicial and political environment? Everyone knows that the exportation of the most modern machines serves no practical purpose if the factory in which these machines are installed is not managed in a spirit similar to that of the Western economies. The spread of technological methods within enterprises carries with it that of modes of thought and organization. What conditions must be fulfilled in order that private capital will be prepared to invest in a given territory? What guarantees must the leaders of underdeveloped countries give that government capital invested in them will produce satisfactory results (*a*) on the economic level and (*b*) on the political level?

These questions are very broad, but our inquiry bears particularly on *the urgent need to study them*.

We have witnessed for a century what is probably the most extraordinary spread of political ideologies and institutions in history. European civilization, with its North American extension, has circled the globe and compelled recognition of its superiority (in control over nature and men, at least) by the peoples of other continents. Chinese, Hindus, Moslems have been subjugated, humiliated, and exploited by the makers of machines. Prestige goes with power. The institutions of the conquering country seem endowed with singular virtues. English fortunes in the nineteenth century contributed to the diffusion of parliamentary institutions. European fortunes gave democratic ideas and representative institutions such a luster that the five continents sought to imitate them. The idea of democracy and the creation of elected parliaments passed for models of modern political science.

We have no thought of inviting a discussion of the merits and demerits of democracy, but only of recalling the problematical element in its expansion. In Europe, democracy was the term of a long evolution; the states were strong, the nations unified by centuries of community life, before the exercise of power was constitutionalized and the executive itself finally chosen by electoral process. The introduction of a parliamentary democracy in the former Dutch empire, baptized Indonesia, is a much more hazardous venture.

My second question would be expressed therefore in the following terms: May it not be time for the political scientist to make it understood that a parliamentary democracy, like any other regime, must be adapted to environment and traditions, that it cannot be implanted just anywhere, that it is not an absolute value, but one form of government among others, whose diffusion may be desirable everywhere but is not possible everywhere?

III

The expansion of the political ideologies and institutions of the West appears at the moment in the form of an irreconcilable conflict between Western democracy and Russian Communism.

American power and prestige tend more and more to link Western democracy to American influence. American and Soviet ideologies are both revolutionary, directed against European domination of the peoples of Africa and Asia (a domination discredited by the word "colonialism"), against the traditional caste systems and the inequitable distribution of wealth. Both ideologies promise happiness in this world by the application of science and technology to production, by the overthrow of despotic governments, by the liberation of peoples or masses or proletariats. Despite their rivalry (perhaps we should say *because* of it), they appear in the Near East and in Asia, it would seem, as two forms of the same Western industrial civilization, which, although of European origin, is represented especially today by the two heir-states.

The American ideology as such is moderate. It recommends reforms, does not promise the Kingdom of God on earth, and is concerned with political liberties and personal rights as much as with production. But in its institutional embodiment it is radically hostile to authority—as long as the Communist menace does not incline it toward conservatism—since it grants the new masters (the elected governments) only limited and precarious powers. The Communist ideology as such is extremist, since it promises a paradise on earth and in the meantime demands death for those who obstruct the path which leads to that paradise. But, translated into institutions, it immediately helps replace the destroyed state, the old order, with a new state and a new caste system. The new masters are all-powerful, and bring with them a technique of enrollment of the masses and a justifying belief in the state.

In other words, American influence tends to overthrow the old structure of societies and states, and, by way of constructive accomplishment, brings personal liberties. Soviet influence is revolutionary, but it immediately fills the void with institutions which we consider despotic but which work.

Does not the error lie in forgetting that freedoms (personal, electoral, the right of labor to organize, etc.), desirable as they may be, do not create the state and can not flourish in simply *any* environ-

ment? Is that not the explanation of the fact, so often observed, that American influence, incapable of supporting leaders in accord with the true American ideology, is reduced to supporting any available *de facto* potentate (whom the leftist intellectuals and the fellow travelers hasten to denounce as feudal or fascist)?

American opinion has a tendency to explain these reverses in terms of the poverty of the country or the inadequacy of economic aid. Overpopulation, the ineffectiveness of agricultural methods, and poverty, as well as the sapping of traditions, are, as a matter of fact, at the bottom of the crisis which the societies of the Near East and Asia are experiencing. The question is to what extent these disturbances can be quelled merely by improvement of the economic situation. One can hardly risk a generalization in the matter in view of the different circumstances of each country.

It can be noted, however, that Communist action, despite party doctrine, gives pre-eminence to political considerations, whereas American action is often taken as though the pre-eminence of economics were an accepted fact. The Communists direct their efforts to the seizure of power, and once in power they think first of all of consolidating the state and industrial and military strength; improvement of the standard of living is postponed until a subsequent phase. The American ambition, laudable from a humanitarian point of view, seems to be to cure the revolutionary virus by the active improvement of living conditions. But is this improvement possible everywhere? Is it possible without the establishment of a firm power and an effective administration? Even in those cases where this improvement is possible, will it be enough to calm revolutionary ardor?

Certain applications of Point Four (improvement of agricultural methods, land reforms, etc.) have perhaps an immediate soothing influence. The same is not true of other applications, the construction of industries, for example. The workers in the first factories, even with a higher standard of living, are often more rebellious than peasants integrated in traditional communities. It has long been

recognized that the first phases of industrialization tend to inaugurate a period of disturbances.

The strength of Communism lies in creating, for this dangerous period, the tyrannical apparatus of the party. The weakness of the Western democracies lies in entrusting to representative institutions the task of presiding over these painful transformations. The question would take somewhat this form: Is it possible to spread simultaneously the economic and the political institutions of the Western democracies? Is it not necessary at least, for this simultaneous introduction to be possible, that the hierarchy and beliefs of the old regime should not be shaken too much? In those cases where the traditions and beliefs of the past remain more or less intact, representative institutions could be introduced gradually along with specific liberties.

The old democracies of Europe have difficulty in achieving a practical reconciliation of the socialistic tendency toward equality and leveling and the preservation of personal and political liberties. Does not this reconciliation exceed even more the means of underdeveloped countries, that is, of countries which are only at the beginning of both their democratic and their industrial careers?

IV

We must obviously not form judgments in advance or emphasize one aspect of our problem unduly. It seems proper, however, to suggest a few guiding ideas. The particular part played by ideas in effecting political change cannot be the object of investigation: the distinction between ideas, organizations, institutions, is too nebulous. If the introduction of ideas does not always carry with it immediately the introduction of institutions, the diffusion of these latter never occurs without a transformation of modes of thought. The question therefore is much less one of succeeding in determining the particular role of ideas as opposed to that of force, of organization of institutions, or of economic conditions, than it is of deter-

mining the precise way in which this dissemination is wrought in our times.

As to the practical consequences which could eventually be drawn from such inquiries, hardly any effort of imagination is needed to discern them. The obsession of our Western societies with economics has led international bodies to spend millions of dollars on analyses of the conditions of economic progress. It does not seem as though anyone has realized that economic progress (in the sense in which we understand it) is possible only under certain political conditions. The finest products of industrialization are vain if governments do not create the atmosphere in which those projects may be carried out. To what extent may the transmission of Western political institutions go hand in hand with the transmission of economic institutions? To such a question this inquiry may well bring the beginning of a reply.