

IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

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This paper¹ constitutes one of the early chapters of a study which deals with the fundamental structural features of the various forms of ideology—from religious and moral discourse to politics and to art—taken individually as well as in their manifold interconnections; with the material and social conditions and mechanisms that determine the emergence and subtle transformations of particular ideologies; with the complex instruments and institutions required to secure the more or less enduring impact of ideological systems; and, last but not least, with the intricate relationship between ideology and social science considered both as specific modes of discourse and as determinate social complexes which fulfil a multiplicity of important functions in the global framework of social practice.

Since several aspects of the problems we are concerned with cannot be adequately discussed at this stage of the enquiry, the present paper undertakes no more than a brief survey and critique of some characteristic approaches to our subject matter, attempting at the same time the formulation of a few—very tentative—criteria for the assessment of ideology and social science. However, these criteria, it must be stressed, are intended simply as guide-lines to further analysis and research—and not as a set of firm conclusions.

With this in mind, let us now turn to an area of debate whose complexities no one is likely to deny—at least not today.

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The astonishing thing is that so many people did so in the by no means distant past. Thus, generations of students—particularly in the post-war period—were led to believe by a considerable number of Fund-sponsored social scientists that ideology had been done away with altogether and that it had been replaced, for good, by the sound and sober systems of strictly factual social science.

That such boasts themselves were disguised manifestations of a peculiar kind of ideological “false consciousness”—one which arbitrarily labels its adversary as an “ideologist” so as to be able to claim

to itself, by definition, full immunity from all ideology: i.e. one which "proved" both vice and virtue by begging the question—escaped the attention not only of the theoretically and politically naive but often even of those who should have known better. This is how as serious and critical a scholar as Robert L. Heilbroner hailed in *The Reporter* Daniel Bell's notorious book, *The End of Ideology*, at the time of its publication:

"A book of unusual interest . . . we find here more than a commentary on 'the exhaustion of political ideas in the fifties'; we also have *revealed* to us *the appearance of social reality once the ideological glasses of the past have been removed.*"

A sad submission to sheer mystification!

Economy of space requires that we confine ourselves to quoting one single example in order to test the claims of this ideology-free, solidly factual and unprejudiced "social science". As we shall see, however, even this single example is abundantly revealing about the approach which was supposed to have "revealed to us the appearance of social reality" in its purity, thanks to the removal of the "ideological glasses of the past". The example I have in mind comes from page 385 of *The End of Ideology*:

"The NEP was an extraordinary step for Lenin. For he had to admit that there was nothing in the 'old books' to prepare the party for such a radical step as the partial restoration of capitalism. In an essay written just before his death—an essay which demonstrates the doctrinal cast which had ruled Lenin's mind—he declared ruefully: 'It did not even occur to **Marx** to write about the subject; and he died without leaving a single precise quotation or irrefutable instruction on it. That is why we must get out of the difficulty entirely by our own efforts.' "

Now the unpalatable truth is that Daniel Bell's great non-ideological "revelations" are nothing but grave violations of the most elementary conditions of scientific research and analysis—but of course violations committed in the name of "genuine social science" as radically opposed to "outmoded ideology".

If we take the time-consuming trouble of checking the alleged facts—as, unfortunately, not enough people do, thus often allowing the diffusion of even the most tendentious distortions as incontrovertible evidence²—we find not only that there is absolutely nothing to support Bell's contentious judgements but also that the Lenin quote in question (that is, Lenin's own text and not Bell's distorted version of it) demonstrates the exact opposite of what we are given to believe in a "truly scientific" fashion. For this is how Lenin's actual text *goes*:

"On the question of state capitalism, I think that generally our press and our Party make the mistake of dropping into intellectualism, into liberalism; we philosophise about how state capitalism is to be interpreted, and look into old books. But in those old books you will not find what we are discussing; they deal with the state capitalism that exists under capitalism. Not a single book has been written about state capitalism under communism. It did not occur even to **Marx** to write a word on this subject; and he died without leaving a single precise statement or definite instruction on it. That is why we must overcome the difficulty entirely by ourselves. And if we make a general mental survey of our press and see what has been written about state capitalism, as I tried to do when I was preparing this report, we shall be convinced that it is missing the target, that it is looking in an entirely wrong direction."

As we can see then, Bell's version not only lifts Lenin's words out of their context—if he did not do so no one could take seriously for a moment his claims and accusations—but also it assumes the form of a translation which turns "a single precise *statement* or *definite* instruction" into the doctrinal "single precise *quotation* or *irrefutable* instruction" (whatever on earth an "irrefutable instruction" might mean).

There is no trace whatsoever, in the original quotation, of a "*rueful*" behaviour on Lenin's part. Nor indeed of "*admitting*" under the constraint of quite unique circumstances that this time the "old books" cannot help. In point of fact he often took—from his early youth onwards—"extraordinary steps" of adapting his theoretical position to the changing socio-historical conditions. (As is well known, he has been accused more than once of being merely a "clever realist" by critics who thought that he ought to be censured for *lack* of doctrinal *purity*.) On the contrary, he most emphatically insists that "intellectualism" and "philosophizing" about the problems at stake with references to old books is totally mistaken: the press that follows such procedure "*is missing the target, is looking in an entirely wrong direction*". Also, in his closing speech to the debate he reproaches Preobrazhensky for arguing in terms of "*pure scholasticism*" in that he bases his analysis on old books and past events while "this is the first time in human history that we see anything like it" and therefore "*we must not look to the past*".⁴

And all this is supposed to be proof of "*the doctrinal cast which had ruled Lenin's mind*"—proof, that is, in the eyes of the supremely objective "social scientist" who has succeeded in definitively freeing himself from the "ideological glasses of the past" to such an extent that he can not only announce "*The End of Ideology*" but also see things in Lenin's text which are simply not there for us ideologically bespectacled lesser mortals.

But irony apart, Daniel Bell's allegedly scientific text is scandalously

misleading even in its minor details. It states that the quote comes from an "essay" written by Lenin "just before his death". As a matter of fact, it comes from a speech delivered at the eleventh party congress and published on the basis of a stenographic record. More important in case one wants to trace the debated quotation: it was not written by Lenin "just before his death" but almost two years prior to his death: the opening speech was delivered on the 27th March of 1922, and his reply to Preobrazhensky one day later, to be precise. As to the source, we are told that the quotation can be found on page 338 of Lenin's "Selected Works, vol. XIV, cited in Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*". But even this secondhand reference is ludicrously misleading. For Draper gives volume IX—not XIV—as his reference.⁵ (The interested reader can find Lenin's text in volume XXXIII of his *Collected Works*.)

Such is then the actual performance of this non-ideological, objective, factual and rigorously scholarly social science. And since this "science" can conjure up its ideological adversary in the shape and form it pleases, it can also dispose of problems of extreme complexity with the greatest ease. Ideology? That is the other side. And even on the other side it represents only the past, since we now all live in a delightful "post-capitalist" and purely "industrial" society. Consequently, the problems of ideology simply do not exist any longer. Conflict and complexity are readily replaced by simple and sound "social engineering", and we all continue to live happily ever after.

Most annoyingly, however, social reality refuses to take any notice of the revolutionary solutions of this "social science" and insists on the actuality of conflicts and crises which escape the streamlined simplicity of wishfully prefabricated models and schemas. Thus our former champions of the "post-capitalist industrial society" are forced to make a spectacular turn-about. Daniel Bell, for instance, is now engaged in theorizing about the so-called "*post-industrial* society". Indeed, he now goes as far as talking about the "dismal record" of recent social science (not of his own, of course), adding that:

"In the areas of education, welfare, social planning, there has been little knowledge that one can draw upon for policy purposes. Social scientists have reluctantly begun to admit that the problems are more 'complex' than they thought."⁶

Yet, the reluctant admittance of dismal failure is far from amounting to an identification of the ideological roots of such failure. On the contrary: since the original assumptions of the "ideology-free" posture remain unquestioned, the fundamental construction stays as it used to be. Only the façade gets a topical veneer which is meant to emphasize the building's adequacy to the more turbulent present-day circum-