



A More Equal World

An Interview With Irving Louis Horowitz

HOROWITZ: You understand, of course, that it is exceedingly difficult to reply in a perfunctory manner to large-scale questions of general interest on which everyone can claim equal expertise—or lack thereof. So I'm sure some of my responses will seem rather abstracted; they are by no means definitive answers, and I would want to develop some of them further, as indeed I have elsewhere. But, with that understanding, let's begin.

To what do you attribute the current economic crisis—unemployment, inflation, lower industrial production—that has gripped the United States?

I have a hearty dislike for the word "crisis." It has a narcotizing effect. It's used altogether too much. Either there is no such animal as a general crisis or for some strange reason it has escaped my notice. The word is so badly overused that it leads to boredom, not to mention disbelief. It is true that there is higher unemployment than usual: the postwar American norm is 5 per cent; the current rate is more than 8 per cent. According to the polls, Americans are still more worried over inflation than unemployment. It is true that inflation and unemployment alike have eaten away at the Gross National Profit, causing a serious erosion of savings and investments. In certain sectors, such as the automotive industry, there is a serious lowering of industrial production, matched by severe technological inabilities to cope with imported vehicles for quality and performance. On the other hand, in some sectors, such as energy and chemicals, industrial output is far higher than it was only several years ago. What the United States is now experiencing is a considerable cooling-down and leveling-off process rather than an

economic crisis or catastrophe. The consequences are serious, especially for the working classes and the marginal sectors, but by no means can one speak of a general overall economic crisis; certainly not with demand steady and supply—that is, inventory—down. Hence it would be dangerous to speak of a general economic crisis. It would be more appropriate to speak of a specific series of sectoral crises in the American economy.

Would you say that we have, particularly in the United States, an overall global depression similar to what was experienced in the 1930's?

It would be profoundly erroneous to say that the United States is in the throes of a depression similar to the one that gripped the United States in 1929. Such key indicators as stock market performance, overall industrial stability, new innovations in research and development, all point in the other direction, or at least toward long-term stabilization. Beyond that, strict controls of speculative economic activities at both the banking and stock exchange levels and the extensive guarantees for the labor force in the form of social security, health and welfare measures, and unemployment insurance benefits make the situation entirely different in the capitalist mix of 1975 than in 1929. Even the social indicators—for example, the number of women in the labor force—have changed matters considerably. In an era when men alone worked in the economic marketplace unemployment was a household catastrophe. Now that women are participating almost to the same extent as men, unemployment of one partner may be serious, and may create a crunch at the personal level, but it need not become a household catastrophe. In other words, both sociologically and economically the inflated seventies is an entirely different period in American economic life than the depression thirties.

As you see it, what is the actual state of affairs in North American society? Does it confront a crisis in

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values? Is one able to speak of the decadence of the system—that is, of the American way of life?

Once again the question presupposes the answer. To speak of a crisis of American values and the decadence of the American system is a gratuitous formulation, to put it mildly. When is there not a crisis in national values? What system, pray tell, is not subject to charges of premature decadence? The main problems within American life revolve about the absolute demand for equity by all citizens. There is a total commitment, it is taken for granted, in all sectors in American society to the goals of democracy.

But there is a concomitant inability of the economic system to produce at that high level of performance that would permit the satisfaction of these expanding wants. All sorts of movements, from black power to women's liberation, rest ultimately on an acceptance, not a rejection, of the American way of life. This has been the most difficult bone of all for radical critics of the American system to swallow. The strains and tensions within the system derive not from economic decadence, or a crisis of values, but rather from an unwillingness, perhaps a constitutional incapacity, of any one sector to permit inequality to continue for much longer. This unwillingness to postpone parity and equality is the essence of the American dilemma at the moment, whether it be with respect to school busing, the extension of unemployment insurance, or a fair state tax system. Frankly, I know of no other society in which the expectations are so high; hence, there is no other society in which the tensions are as great. But this is a far cry from systemic collapse and/or moral decay.

What is the significance, and what are the repercussions in the evaluational scheme of North American society, of the Watergate crisis, and specifically the problems left in the wake of the Presidential renunciation of power?

With respect to the Watergate crisis and the renunciation of the Richard Nixon Presidency I have written extensively elsewhere. To my way of thinking this event represents the Europeanization of American political life in the healthy sense that a President is not an imperium. He can now be removed from office the way Italian and French premiers are deposed by parliamentary maneuvers. The American political system is clearly not geared up for such mid-term crisis and sudden shifts of personnel leadership. However, what has to be recognized is that for the first time in over a hundred years, certainly since the Civil War, Congress has come to play a decisive role in political affairs, even in that Presidential sandbox known as foreign policy. The tripartite system seems more vigorous than it was during the Nixon era.

Without minimizing the amount of corruption involved in the Watergate affair, or the dangerous threat that the Nixon private subbasement cabinet posed for American democratic processes, it is equally clear that the purging of Nixon and the promotion of Ford to the

Presidency led to organizational tranquillity, not to street riots. Indeed, a certain amount of middle echelon, bureaucratic self-reliance, absent in Washington since the New Deal, has been reinstated. It had to be for government to operate. What is important to take note of is not simply the Watergate crisis, but the post-Watergate resolution, which seems to have been undertaken with an eye upon the famous remark attributed to Thucydides: "When a citizen is in doubt, and when a system is in trouble, choose mediocrity."

With respect to the world situation, do you believe that the position of the petroleum-producing nations in OPEC has changed the international equilibrium?

Concerning developments in the international situation, specifically the relation of the OPEC nations vis-à-vis the OECD nations, there is a major change in the international equilibrium. Simply put, there has been a redistribution of real wealth within the non-socialist orbit. For the first time this has come about as a result of Third World pressure rather than intrawar rivalry between members of the advanced industrial powers. The OPEC nations have compelled a reconsideration of who gets what profits under contemporary capitalism. It has also changed the relationship between the Third World paying a great deal for finished commodity goods while selling raw materials cheaply. Now the raw materials have become expensive, and the finished commodity goods cheap and abundant. This is a partial function of commodity surplus, and also of raw material shortages.

To put it mildly, this is a revolution within the structure of capitalism. One would have to emphasize "within the structure of capitalism," for the bulk of OPEC investments, with the exception of 4 per cent in aid of the "poor" Third World areas, goes right back into the capitalist system. In an odd way, through the international circulation of capital this process of monetary redistribution may actually serve to strengthen capitalist relationships and broaden their base. This is not to say that the problems posed for the United States and Western Europe are not serious at the national level, rather that they do not involve a fundamental change in socioeconomic structures at the international level. They do involve a weakening of those multinational corporations dealing in finished industrial products and a strengthening of those national states able to control the flow of raw material exports.

What do you think are the actual conditions in international relations that will help to shape the new world order? What would be the characteristics of such a new order?

Once again your question presupposes the answer, what lawyers call a leading question and what sociologists describe as an ideological question. I see no advent of a new world order. Hence I cannot describe or forecast the characteristics or contours of such a new order. What I do observe is a sharpening of contradictions within the three worlds of development.

For example, between the United States and Western Europe there is a sharper differentiation of a tactical sort toward threats—real and imaginary—from other quarters. Likewise, the animus and difference between the Soviet Union and China have increased tenfold since their first announcement—but again, within the framework of a socialist tactical response to the West. In like manner a brand new sharp set of contradictions between oil-wealthy and food-poor Third World nations now exists as a *fait accompli*; however, overriding similitudes of the military, political, and social levels persist to sustain and even deepen the “thirdness” of the underdevelopment.

I do foresee an economic universe in which the newer welfare-affluence model is replaced by an older scarcity model. It will be a period in which those nations rich in mineral wealth and foodstuffs can be considered wealthy apart from their membership in either the First, Second, or Third Worlds. Those who have one or the other—food or energy—are in a sort of middle range. This may extend from Japan on the industrial level to Saudi Arabia at the mineral wealth level. Finally, those nations like Bangladesh, and many nations in sub-Saharan Africa, poor in both energy and food, are poor in absolute terms. Whether this fourfold table of international wealth and poverty adds up to a new world order, I cannot say. It does add up to a return to a more fundamental, if dismal, economic view of the world; a rejuvenation of traditional economic models of scarcity, and away from neo-Keynesian models built on abundance. In abundance models the only problems were how fast and how far rather than whether it is even possible to fuel the world or feed the world. Again, if the word “order” is being used in terms of social systems, I do not see much change in any short-term sense. However, if the word “order” refers to affluence versus scarcity in the economy, then I do see considerable changes even in the short term.

Do you believe that the producing countries of primary materials can utilize groupings and tactics similar to those used by OPEC to defend their prices?

I seriously doubt it will be possible for the Third World to replicate the oil shortage phenomenon in other primary minerals. To be theologically blunt, Mohammed lives, and Christ does not. For years Latin Americans have dreamed of a “pot of gold” in raw materials: first in rubber, then sugar, then copper, and so forth, only to find each time the evaporation of the pot, not to mention the failure to realize the gold. Rubber trees can be implanted in any warm climate. Sugar can be grown in many sectors of the world, or, failing that, artificial sugar can be created. Copper can be substituted for, or displaced by, other metals. For many raw materials there is a considerable amount of interchangeability. The creation of alternatives, such as plastics and other polyethylenes, makes the pot-of-gold approach hard to realize as a general rule.

The same will ultimately occur with respect to oil.

But for the short run this is the one prime material that has actually produced a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for the producing nations. I seriously doubt, despite OPEC desires to set up a countervailing force to OECD nations, that a similar monopolization can occur in other raw material areas to impose artificially high price levels on the consuming nations. Of course, tactically this linkage of oil with other forms of raw materials is a good position for the Third World to assume. But one must seriously question its feasibility in economic or technological terms.

What is your opinion of the conduct of current American foreign policy? I refer specifically to the diplomacy characteristic of Secretary of State Kissinger.

The foreign policy of the United States, specifically the diplomatic efforts of Secretary of State Kissinger, with respect to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Cyprus, Ireland, and so forth, is a curious blend of power politics and diplomatic retrenchment. In each instance the United States diplomatic posture has shifted from the Dulles-Acheson model of belligerence at all costs to Kissinger's model of playing the role of honest power broker. One increasingly gets the feeling that Kissinger's policy is built on the premise of the State Department as middleman: someone whose payoff derives from the adjudication and arbitration of disputes rather than from partisan participation through military effort and engagement.

The presumption of American foreign policy at this point is that by performing such honest broker services the United States will grow strong and indispensable, the way an independent judiciary is indispensable in settling negligence cases. Whether this model is successful or not depends on the capacity of the arbitration to make each side in each dispute feel victorious. The essential task of the Secretary of State is to stimulate feelings and sentiments of success without committing United States troops to battle. This requires an absolute degree of artful and intelligent planning. It also presumes that international conflicts are not fundamental, or at least can be kept in a condition of stable equilibrium, and can in all instances be adjudicated. What, in fact, the outcome of these main areas of contention will be depends on whether they have built-in negotiable components. The meliorative model of Kissinger is certainly open to doubt; and perhaps it is the necessary role for the United States to play at a time when its citizenry has turned neoisolationist in the wake of the debacle in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Of course, playing the role of broker rather than partisan itself reveals the incapacities and limitations of American involvement in world affairs. This, at any rate, is a far cry from interventionist gunboat diplomacy of an earlier epoch.

Specifically, what do you believe, in broad outlines, is the foreign policy of the United States toward Latin America? Do you believe that the new dialogue proposed by Kissinger is effective? What would you say concerning the intervention of the North American

government? For example, the activities of the CIA and the various tools of the military coups d'état which removed President Allende from office in Chile.

The impact of American foreign policy toward Latin America has perhaps been least effective and least convincing to the "host nations" concerned. The leverage factor within Latin America does not yet exist, although the growing sense of a cohesive Latin American bloc outside the Organization of American States may create the economic conditions for exactly that sort of dialogue. The United States is not desirous of modifying its role, especially in the light of economic and political competition elsewhere in the Third World, but it must necessarily move toward accommodation if it is to maintain any role within the Hemisphere. One difficulty with the proposal of Kissinger for a new dialogue is the absence of any statement of the equity terms of that dialogue. What in fact the United States considers negotiable seems to be postponed for the short run. The impulse toward accommodation is the enormous growth of a national bourgeoisie within Latin America. We witness the phenomenon in Latin America of anti-Americanism much more than of anticapitalism, of strong nationalism without any strong impulses toward socialism. Cuba, of course, is the great exception, but perhaps the very existence of a socialist regime on a small island with a single-crop economy, exhibiting all sorts of dependencies upon the Soviet Union, has only strengthened the resolve of the national sectors within Latin America to be cautious about adopting a socialist model, or at least the Soviet model, no less than of overemphasis on the American model.

The second part of your question concerns the aid of the United States to the military coups that overthrew President Allende in Chile, and that undoubtedly played a role in other nations of Latin America, such as Brazil, Bolivia, and Argentina, not to mention Mexico. These are indeed sad chapters in American foreign policy. The use of CIA agents represents a breakdown of a foreign policy based on diplomatic initiatives and economic innovations. Such a return to a more primitive approach based on terror is foredoomed. That is the great lesson of *Playa Giron* [Bay of Pigs]. Yet one would have to stretch the imagination considerably to assert that Allende would have survived his military and class opposition, whether or not the CIA involved itself, given the alignment of socioeconomic forces in contemporary Chile. The various proposals put forth by ITT and the CIA for intervention in Chile were rejected even by the Nixon Administration.

It is exceedingly important not to create a simplistic conspiratorial theory of American foreign policy, not to assume that the existence of a CIA automatically means the absence of national sovereignty or the presence of national consensus. To be sure, in countries like Mexico and Cuba the efforts of the CIA served to strengthen the national resolve, and to make an easy

overthrow of the ongoing social system impossible. Thus the activities of the CIA are effective only when national cohesion does not exist or rapidly deteriorates as a result of internal political weakness. They are remarkably ineffective when a national consensus does exist. External factors rarely account for counter-revolutionary successes, unless paired with internal factors that usually are decisive in matters of maintaining state power.

Finally, what do you believe is the future of international relationships generally—confrontation, interdependence, or isolation?

When you speak of future international relations as characterized by options based on interdependence, independence, or isolation, perhaps the most persuasive, if most evasive, answer is: all of them. There is always a combination of confrontation, subordination, and superordination in the affairs of states. The question at all times is the mix. Beyond that, whether such relationships are based on superordination, equality, or subordination depends on which national, subnational, or supernational units we have reference to. My own guess, and this is perhaps because I remain an optimist, is that the same demands for economic equity and social parity that pushed their way forward within the United States are now at work at the international level. Every person and each nation seemingly take seriously the idea that all people are created equal. The concomitant approach that no nation and no person can count for more than one or less than one is a harder lesson to absorb.

Equity has become the fundamental spinal cord organizing the relationships of the smallest units with the largest units: Albania with the Soviet Union, Bahrain with the United States, and, for that matter, Nicaragua with Mexico. Sovereignty, like the person in Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence, is a legal entity. It demands equity in relationships based on rather powerful constraints of law. This serves to underwrite and underscore a continuing trend toward nationalism. On the other hand, equity demands also compel a powerful drive toward democracy. Thus the dealings of nations with each other have increasingly been characterized by greater flexibility and sensitivity. These impulses may in part be thwarted by other phenomena such as militarism: the prima facie strength of powerful nations with respect to weak nations. But if there is to be a future international relations without war, then certainly equity is the touchstone and the hallmark of such a future. For the first time the revolution of rising expectations in the Third World has been understood to entail a revolution in falling profits in the advanced nations of the First and Second Worlds. This shock of recognition that benefits for some invoke costs for others is a mark of maturation in foreign affairs, even though it involves sources of potential confrontation within each advanced nation. But this capacity to absorb new challenges and creatively resolve old dilemmas is the benchmark of surviving civilizations.