

Intellectuals, Bureaucrats, and the New Sacerdotalism

L.H. Gann

During the last two centuries or so, Western intellectuals have experienced a considerable rise in status and employment. A research fellow today normally occupies a more enviable position than the average author in the early eighteenth century, who commonly had to fawn on an aristocratic patron for his daily bread. From the second part of the eighteenth century the market for writers and teachers vastly expanded. The miseries once experienced by ill-paid scribblers in "Grub Street" in early Georgian London became a matter of legend. Education has now become one of the world's major growth industries.

In Great Britain—despite the country's economic difficulties—the annual rate of growth of educational expenditure has consistently exceeded the average annual growth of the Gross National Product. At present British educational expenditure amounts to more than 6 per cent of the GNP, more than the outlay for defense, and more than four times the outlay for law and order. In Africa and other parts of the "Third World" the development of education has been equally striking. In Nigeria, for instance, the number of teachers exceeds the number of all workers employed in industry and large-scale commerce, although a large proportion of school leavers cannot get jobs. In Kenya expenditure on education amounts to more than a third of all public expenditure—a striking tribute both to the mystique of scholastic education and the power of the pedagogic lobby.

Although the average income and the employment opportunities available to intellectuals have risen considerably during the last half-century, many intellectuals remain profoundly discontented, both with the world at large and with their own place in it. Obviously all generalizations are dangerous. The very term "intellectual" (used here in the sense of a diploma-bearing specialist engaged in the production, distribution, and exchange of ideas, who lives by selling his intellectual labor power) is

hard to define. The twentieth-century intelligentsia does not form a cohesive body. Intellectuals are found in many different positions in academe, in government, in advertising, in the news media, and so forth. They differ in opinions and prejudices, economic interests and social background. Nevertheless, we legitimately talk about a climate of opinion, however ill-defined. Certain attitudes recur in lecture rooms, in seminars, in the prestigious newspapers, in the correspondence columns of student publications, in the small talk at social gatherings. At present this intellectual climate of opinion inclines strongly toward public action. Probably the majority of intellectuals look to the state or to some other public agency to remedy the ills to which mankind has been subjected for so long.

The various creeds to which intellectuals have given their adherence during the last century or so have been analyzed at length in ideological terms. Comparatively little, however, has been made of the intellectual's economic interests as a member or would-be member of a salaried class. Over the last century or so an increasingly large number of intellectuals has come to look to the public purse for remuneration. This is hardly surprising. Few historians, for example, can now own their own means of production, in this case their own research library. Most academics, especially, depend on public employment, because private enterprise does not afford adequate scope for their highly specialized skills. The academic's income, like the income of civil servants and soldiers, thus comes out of the taxpayer's pocket. Salaried academics, like other public officials, thus often have a stake in an expanding public revenue and in rising taxes.

The growth of public employment may also be of indirect economic benefit to academia. Two hundred years ago kinship connections and aristocratic and political patronage played a major role in the selection of public administrators. These older means of selection were gradually replaced by new crite-

ria designed to make the selection and promotion process more rational, and to provide the civil service machine with more educated and technically qualified men. A similar process began in large-scale private business at a time when the scale of economic organization increased and industrialization required an increasing number of experts.

In the public sphere, however, the examination system was used even more widely than in industry; the system was gradually extended from the general administrative branches to the most aristocratic preserves, such as the diplomatic service. The development and elaboration of the examination system in turn provided more influence and more employment to the academics who trained the new administrators. (This proposition was self-evident, for instance, to critics of the so-called Northcote-Trevelyan reforms in mid-nineteenth-century England. This new system introduced personnel selection by examination instead of patronage, and was denounced by adherents of the old order as a "schoolmasters' ramp.") The extension of state action into the social and the economic sphere further increased the need for university-educated administrators, experts, and consultants, especially as their employment was increasingly justified by real or presumed social needs rather than by the standards of economic rationality.

Historical generalizations, the point bears repeating, must of course be treated with caution. Nothing is more deceptive than a uni-causal explanation of complex social processes. Nevertheless, there have been some links, however tenuous, between pedagogic lobbies and the development of state power in its various guises. Opposition to the 1978 Jarvis-Gann amendment limiting property taxes in California was heaviest among professors, school teachers, and civil servants. The same intellectual support for state power has also been apparent in the past in the support of movements as different in form and substance as colonialism, ethnic nationalism, and socialism, all of which had the unintended and usually unanticipated consequence of producing more avenues of public employment.

Radical critics of the empire used to denounce British colonialism as a means of providing outdoor relief for the upper classes. But in fact, the British colonial empire was largely a middle-class creation, and its administrative services came to be staffed largely by middle-class graduates. Not surprisingly, colonialism found a great deal of support among the educated, both in Britain and on the Continent. In Germany, France, and Portugal especially, imperial ideologies made a special appeal to journalists, professors, teachers, and academically trained civil servants, who played a major role in pro-colonial lobbies (see for instance, Henri Brunschwig's *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français, 1871-1914* [Paris, 1960]; Mildred Wertheimer's *The Pan-German League, 1890-1914* [New York, 1924]; Hans-Ulrich Wehler's "Sozialimperialismus" in Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., *Imperialismus* [Cologne, 1970]). French colonial propagandists such as Paul Leroy-Beaulieu hoped therefore that colonialism would create new cultural opportunities for French intellectuals, as well as markets for French businessmen. Gustav Schmoller, an

outstanding German sociologist of the Wilhelminian period, believed that colonial expansion would, among other things, help to cure academic unemployment by providing jobs for trained lawyers and academics unable to make a living in the Fatherland. King Leopold II of Congo fame defended empire-building as a device for creating employment to benefit the educated members of the bourgeoisie.

The rise of Eastern European nationalism during the nineteenth century, to give another example drawn from a very different context, likewise had far-reaching economic consequences for intellectuals, as well as for other members of the community. Among the standard-bearers of national revolution within the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires were many peasant-born intellectuals—schoolteachers, lawyers, and professors—who took a particularly active part in promoting the cause of the so-called "non-historic" nationalities. Such people found their best means of economic advancement, not in trade or in industry, but in the bureaucracy or a school system. These intellectuals thus commonly affected a suspicion of commerce and tended toward nationalism. They became increasingly conscious of their national language, not merely as a means of cultural self-expression, but also as a weapon in the struggle for bureaucratic advancement, as a means of excluding unwelcome competitors, and as a rationale for extending the scope of the state machinery.

In addition, socialism in its many guises had a wide appeal to intellectuals. Its appeal derives from many sources—political, ethical, and cultural. Socialism above all has far-reaching economic implications. The creation of a socialist or quasi-socialist state entails, among other things, an extension of the state machinery. New state planning agencies are created; party offices and cultural guidance commissions spring into being. All these require trained personnel and therefore provide employment for intellectuals in search of salaried posts. Even in nonsocialist societies the demand for state jobs tends to increase as universities turn out more graduates than can be employed in the private sector.

In postcolonial Africa, for instance, governments have been under constant pressure to expand the number of available government and party posts. The role of the state in the economy has tended to increase. The struggle for government posts, in turn, has often exacerbated ethnic tensions, as ethnic affiliation has once again come to be used as a weapon in the scramble for bureaucratic positions and as control of the state machinery has become increasingly necessary for economic survival within a state-controlled economy. In addition, resentment toward private enterprise has grown apace, even in situations where private enterprise has displayed greater economic efficiency than public enterprise. In Tanzania, for instance, cooperatives were usually not equal to the competition of Indian traders. In the short run traders may give better service to the producer than cooperatives. In the absence of monopoly, competition among them is keen, and they have long experience in commerce. "However, the cooperatives are...African

institutions," as Hans Ruthenberg notes. "Their members learn through failures, set-backs and difficulties, and gain commercial knowledge and experience in dealing with economic power. In the long run this advantage is certainly more important than any possible losses due to lower efficiency. Obligatory sales may be regarded as unavoidable protective measures for the emerging cooperative movement" (*Agricultural Development in Tanganyika*, [Berlin, 1964]).

There are many different reasons for the growth of the modern cooperative movement, of course, as for the growth of the state machinery as a whole. Nothing would be more simplistic than to explain current *étatiste* ideologies as nothing but the ideological superstructure of a diploma-bearing intelligentsia in search of salaried and tenured public employment. But the development of state trading organizations, control commissions, planning boards, and similar organizations does have the often unanticipated consequence of providing posts to public officials whose material interests may or may not be identical with those of the public at large. The needs of a cooperative manager may indeed be at variance with those of a cultivator. Peasants want low taxes or no taxes. They benefit from low marketing costs; they suffer when they are forced to sell their crops to official monopolies at artificially depressed prices. On the other hand officials, like academics, depend on revenue derived from the public at large. They are apt to gain from the expansion both of the state machinery and of the public revenue, even if this should involve raising the peasants' taxes or marketing costs.

Intellectuals, including academically trained civil servants, may also acquire an economic stake in nationalization of the means of production. This is particularly true in economically backward countries, where the development of the educational industry has outstripped the ability of the private sector to provide sufficient jobs to graduates. Again, generalizations are dangerous; nothing would be more absurd than to explain the growing popularity of socialist ideologies or the growing distrust of foreign-owned enterprises among the intelligentsia of backward countries purely by reference to academic unemployment or underemployment. Nevertheless, public control over private business may have the unannounced consequence of enabling the newly certified élite produced by the universities to be employed and rewarded according to their economic aspirations rather than their economic productivity (see for instance, A. T. Porter, "University Development in Africa," in *African Affairs*, [January, 1972]; and A. R. Waters, "A Behavioral Model of Pan-African Disintegration Again" in *African Studies Review* [September, 1971]).

Material interests in turn may be reinforced by a moralistic folklore. According to this mythology, profits derived from business appear somehow despicable, whereas the income derived from a salaried position in the public service or the pedagogic professions is said to be "honorable." These notions are as familiar to African party functionaries and to students and teachers on modern American

campuses as they were to the gentlefolk of Jane Austen's day or to the Indian colonels of the Kipling era.

These notions assume many different guises, sometimes secular, sometimes quasi-clerical. Some academics indeed assume an almost sacerdotal role. They see themselves as the chosen censors of society, a "free-floating stratum" untainted by narrow class interests and thus supremely fitted to play the role of prophet or priest. Others claim institutional privileges of a kind once reserved to the ecclesiastical estate. Medieval clergymen used to claim special immunities for the church—the right of sanctuary, freedom from the jurisdiction of secular courts, the right to impose an interdict on wicked princes. These claims find some curious parallels on modern campuses. These assumptions also operate on a more practical level. One small example out of many: A solid administrator like Stanford University's vice president for business and finance, a man with both feet on the ground who makes no spurious claim to moral superiority, defends his university against the unwelcome attentions of outside local government planning authorities in terms that would have been perfectly intelligible to a medieval churchman. Stanford, he argues, is a national and international resource whose boundaries are not confined to "narrow jurisdictional limits." Stanford, moreover, is a "perpetual" institution whose horizons are measured in centuries rather than in decades (*Stanford Daily*, January 8, 1974).

This form of secular sacerdotalism, however, is open to serious criticism. Universities should not necessarily be treated in a manner different from other major institutions. Professors are not among the specially chosen; they are no better and no worse than their fellow citizens when it comes to defending their economic interests: Academics will fight as doggedly as truck drivers, and cannot lay claim to a greater degree of unselfishness than any other section of the community. There is, moreover, nothing in the past record of intellectuals that indicates that—as a group—they are braver, or more public-spirited, or more greatly endowed with insight than their fellow countrymen.

Some intellectuals have fought bravely and unswervingly for freedom; others have sung the praise of tyrants. Frederick II of Prussia never wanted for supporters among the *philosophes* in the drawing rooms of Paris. Stalin derived intellectual backing from a most distinguished cast of intellectual admirers, including Gide, Bernard Shaw, the Webbs, Sartre, Lion Feuchtwanger, Theodore Dreiser, and many others (see David Cauter's *The Fellow-Travelers: A Postscript to the Enlightenment* [New York, 1973]). Many German intellectuals, including one-time members of the avant garde expressionist movement, men like Hanns Johst and Arnold Bronnen, became Nazis (see Helmut F. Pfanner's *Hanns Johst: Vom Expressionismus zum National Sozialismus* [The Hague, 1970]). Intellectuals, to sum up, are as much subject to the limitations of history and of economic interest as any other group in society. They should resist, therefore, the temptation to play the part of priests and prophets. Whatever they do, they must not confuse the lectern with the pulpit or the laboratory with the altar.