

Editorial Foreword

CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, AND POWER. The role of technological change is seldom neutral, nor is technology understandable apart from its relationship to power and the structure of hegemony. Although technological changes commonly narrow the gaps between competing social groups, advances in technological refinement mean that those who control the new forms will dominate the arena of conflicting forces (Skinner, 18:1). Richard Du Boff's analysis indicates how political centralization reached higher forms of development in a nineteenth-century Europe which saw dissident groups at the mercy of the power and centralized knowledge possessed by the state through its hold on telegraphic communication. In America, by contrast, the decentralized character of federalism worked against political suppression; but the monopolistic facets of American economic growth meant that access to market intelligence via telegraphic communication was eventually controlled and created by a business hegemony which broadened the gap between competing business elements (compare De Haas, 21:3; Bailes; Brown; Rogger, all 23:3). Thomas Smith's analysis brilliantly displays the cultural construction of Japanese factory workers under the Meiji—near outcasts who aspired to transform status from a personal expression to a collective expression. The change in image was not due to unionizing or managerial benevolence but was rather the coherent expression of collectivist activities which these factory workers utilized to gain new status. Yet, the negative image of factory workers lasted until World War II, when the Japanese army became a powerful equalizing force in which ascribed status and caste markers were converted to an ideal based on personal achievement (compare Dore, 11:4; Spaulding, 14:4; Levine, 18:1). Just as factory workers were despised in Meiji Japan, the brokers of early twentieth-century China were also the objects of public contempt. Susan Mann traces the intricate complex wherein brokers performed their tasks as middlemen and traders, operating through a multitude of local-level organizations, functions, and processes. She shows how their gradual suppression by government regulation only delivered small-scale farmers into higher forms of taxation and political subjugation (compare Solinger, 21:2; Dumett, 25:4). Nikki Keddie points out how historians of the Middle East can use the interactions of material and socioeconomic factors in creating economies and societies for the understanding of cultures. This is a further contribution to the many articles on comparative methods (among them are Bock in 8:3, Skocpol and Somers in 22:2; Cohn, 22:2, and Wilson, 25:3).

REFLECTIONS ON POLITICAL THEORY. History and theory have been compared as representing not only two different types of intellectual activity, but also two separate forms of understanding. Theorists in history, political science, sociology, and anthropology have eschewed particularistic interpretations as bases for initiating universal or generalizing comparisons for the sake of prediction and explanation. Historians, meanwhile, see the aim of theory as limited since the hermeneutic can seldom be accomplished on such broad and highly general terms. Yet, no one accepts the idea that theories are purely scientific, objective, and devoid of their historical and societal moorings. In Marx's concept of society, class, and the mode of production, the development of "political theory" is understood by Richard Ashcraft to mean that society provides the context in which theory emerges and in turn that it is that unique combination, i.e., society as an historical emergent, which is the test of the theory (compare Hoselitz, 6:2; Seigel, 24:1). As Ashcraft notes, it is in the practical concerns of workers and interest groups that the theory is grounded, and consequently the pragmatics of social reality constitute the test of the theory. If we conclude that Marx was doing history and not theory, we must understand to what extent was the framework generalizable, and thus it is all the more imperative that we understand what Marx envisioned in the study of issues such as feudalism, the Asian mode of production, and the concept of primitive society as expressed in his ethnological notebooks. Like Ashcraft, Robert Kelley demonstrates, in his highly interesting and provocative comparative essay on the United States and the Soviet Union (see also Rimlinger, 4:1; Rogger, 4:3, 23:3; Bailes, 23:3), that the ideological question in both cases is expressed in the structure of society and in the dominance of selected interest groups as core communities which have vigorously championed nationalism as well as national authority. Ashcraft and Kelley show that the social and ideological roots of political processes cannot be generated from theoretical constructions which might be methodologically sound but are historically vacuous.

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