The Carter Administration: Myth and Reality
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Perhaps the most striking feature of the new Administration is the role played in it by the Trilateral Commission. The mass media had little to say about this matter during the Presidential campaign -- in fact, the connection of the Carter group to the Commission was recently selected as "the best censored news story of 1976" -- and it has not received the attention that it might have since the Administration took office. All of the top positions in the government -- the office of President, Vice-President, Secretary of State, Defense and Treasury -- are held by members of the Trilateral Commission, and the National Security Advisor was its director. Many lesser officials also came from this group. It is rare for such an easily identified private group to play such a prominent role in an American Administration.

The Trilateral Commission was founded at the initiative of David Rockefeller in 1973. Its members are drawn from the three components of the world of capitalist democracy: the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. Among them are the heads of major corporations and banks, partners in corporate law firms, Senators, Professors of international affairs -- the familiar mix in extra-governmental groupings. Along with the 1940s project of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), directed by a committed "trilateralist" and with numerous links to the Commission, the project constitutes the first major effort at global planning since the War-Peace Studies program of the CFR during World War II.

The new "trilateralism" reflects the realization that the international system now requires "a truly common management," as the Commission reports indicate. The trilateral powers must order their internal relations and face both the Russian bloc, now conceded to be beyond the reach of Grand Area planning, and the Third World. In this collective management, the United States will continue to play the decisive role. As Kissinger has explained, other powers have only "regional interests" while the United States must be "concerned more with the overall framework of order than with the management of every regional enterprise." If a popular movement in the Arabian peninsula is to be crushed, better to dispatch US-supplied Iranian forces, as in Dhofar. If passage for American nuclear submarines must be guaranteed in Southeast Asian waters, then the task of crushing the independence movement in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor should be entrusted to the Indonesian army rather than an American expeditionary force. The massacre of over 60,000 people in a single year will arouse no irrational passions at home and American resources will not be drained, as in Vietnam. If a Katangese secessionist movement is to be suppressed in Zaire (a movement that may have Angolan support in response to the American-backed intervention in Angola from Zaire, as the former CIA station chief in Angola has recently revealed in his letter of resignation), then the task should be assigned to Moroccan satellites forces and to the French, with the US discreetly in the background. If there is a danger of socialism in southern Europe, the German proconsulate can exercise its "regional interests." But the Board of Directors will sit in Washington....

The Trilateral Commission has issued one major book-length report, namely, The Crisis of Democracy (Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki, 1975). Given the intimate connections between the Commission and the Carter Administration, the study is worth careful attention, as an indication of the thinking that may well lie behind its domestic policies, as well as the policies undertaken in other industrial democracies in the coming years. The Commission's report is concerned with the "governability of the democracies." Its American author, Samuel Huntington, was former chairman of the Department of Government at Harvard, and a government adviser. He is well-known for his ideas on how to destroy the rural revolution in Vietnam. He wrote in Foreign Affairs (1968) that "In an absent-minded way the United States in Vietnam may well have stumbled upon the answer to 'wars of national liberation.'" The answer is "forced-draft urbanization and modernization." Explaining this concept, he observes that if direct application of military force in the countryside "takes place on such a massive scale as to produce a massive migration from countryside to city" then the "Maoist-inspired rural revolution may be "undercut by the American-sponsored urban revolution." The Viet Cong, he wrote, is "a powerful force which cannot be dislodged from its constituency so long as the constituency continues to exist." Thus "in the immediate future" peace must "be based on accommodation" particularly since the US is unwilling to undertake the "expensive, time consuming and frustrating task" of ensuring that the constituency of the Viet Cong no longer exists (he was wrong about that, as the Nixon-Kissinger programs of rural massacre were to show). "Accommodation" as conceived by Huntington is a process whereby the Viet Cong "degenerate into the protest of a declining rural minority" while the
regime imposed by US force maintains power. A year later, when it appeared that "urbanization" by military force was not succeeding and it seemed that the United States might be compelled to enter into negotiations with the NLF [National Liberation Front] (which he recognized to be "the most powerful purely political national organization"), Huntington, in a paper delivered before the AID-supported Council on Vietnamese Studies which he had headed, proposed various measures of political trickery and manipulation that might be used to achieve the domination of the U.S.-imposed government, though the discussants felt rather pessimistic about the prospects.

In short, Huntington is well-qualified to discourse on the problems of democracy. The report argues that what is needed in the industrial democracies "is a greater degree of moderation in democracy" to overcome the "excess of democracy" of the past decade. "The effective operation of a democratic political system usually requires some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups." This recommendation recalls the analysis of Third World problems put forth by other political thinkers of the same persuasion, for example, Ithiel Pool (then chairman of the Department of Political Science at MIT), who explained some years ago that in Vietnam, the Congo, and the Dominican Republic, "order depends on somehow compelling newly mobilized strata to return to a measure of passivity and defeatism... At least temporarily the maintenance of order requires a lowering of newly acquired aspirations and levels of political activity." The Trilateral recommendations for the capitalist democracies are an application at home of the theories of "order" developed for subject societies of the Third World.

The problems affect all of the trilateral countries, but most significantly, the United States. As Huntington points out, "for a quarter century the United States was the hegemonic power in a system of world order" -- the Grand Area of the CFR [Council on Foreign Relations]. "A decline in the governability of democracy at home means a decline in the influence of democracy abroad." He does not elaborate on what this "influence" has been in practice, but ample testimony can be provided by survivors in Asia and Latin America.

As Huntington observes, "Truman had been able to govern the country with the cooperation of a relatively small number of Wall Street lawyers and bankers," a rare acknowledgement of the realities of political power in the United States. But by the mid-1960s this was no longer possible since "the sources of power in society had diversified tremendously," the "most notable new source of power" being the media. In reality, the national media have been properly subservient to the state propaganda system, a fact on which I have already commented. Huntington's paranoia about the media is, however, widely shared among ideologists who fear a deterioration of American global hegemony and an end to the submissiveness of the domestic population.

A second threat to the governability of democracy is posed by the "previously passive or unorganized groups in the population," such as "blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women -- all of whom became organized and mobilized in new ways to achieve what they considered to be their appropriate share of the action and of the rewards." The threat derives from the principle, already noted, that "some measure of apathy and noninvolvement on the part of some individuals and groups" is a prerequisite for democracy. Anyone with the slightest understanding of American society can supply a hidden premise: the "Wall Street lawyers and bankers" (and their cohorts) do not intend to exercise "more self-restraint." We may conclude that the "greater degree of moderation in democracy" will have to be practiced by the "newly mobilized strata."

Huntington's perception of the "concerned efforts" of these strata "establish their claims" and the "control over... institutions" that resulted is no less exaggerated than his fantasies about the media. In fact, the Wall Street lawyers, bankers, etc., are no less in control of the government than in the Truman period, as a look at the new Administration or its predecessors reveals. But one must understand the curious notion of "democratic participation" that animates the Trilateral Commission study. Its vision of "democracy" is reminiscent of the feudal system. On the one hand, we have the King and Princes (the government). On the other, the commoners. The commoners may petition and the nobility must respond to maintain order. There must however be a proper "balance between power and liberty, authority and democracy, government and society." "Excess swings may produce either too much government or too little authority." In the 1960s, Huntington maintains, the balance shifted too far to society and against government. "Democracy will have a longer life if it has a more balanced existence," that is, if the peasants cease their clamor. Real participation of "society" in government is nowhere discussed, nor can there be any question of democratic control of the basic economic institutions that determine the character of social life while dominating the state as well, by virtue of their overwhelming power. Once again, human rights do not exist in this domain.

The report does briefly discuss "proposals for industrial democracy modeled on patterns of political democracy," but
only to dismiss them. These ideas are seen as "running against the industrial culture and the constraints of business organization." Such a device as German co-determination would "raise impossible problems in many Western democracies, either because leftist trade unionists would oppose it and utilize it without becoming any more moderate, or because employers would manage to defeat its purposes." In fact, steps towards worker participation in management going well beyond the German system are being discussed and in part implemented in Western Europe, though they fall far short of true industrial democracy and self-management in the sense advocated by the libertarian left. They have evoked much concern in business circles in Europe and particularly in the United States, which has so far been isolated from these currents, since American multinational enterprises will be affected. But these developments are anathema to the trilateralist study.

Still another threat to democracy in the eyes of the Commission study is posed by "the intellectuals and related groups who assert their disgust with the corruption, materialism, and inefficiency of democracy and with the subservience of democratic government to 'monopoly capitalism'" (the latter phrase is in quotes since it is regarded as improper to use an accurate descriptive term to refer to the existing social and economic system; this avoidance of the taboo term is in conformity with the dictates of the state religion, which scorns and fears any such sacrilege). Intellectuals come in two varieties, according to the trilateral analysis. The "technocratic and policy-oriented intellectuals" are to be admired for their unquestioning obedience to power and their services in social management, while the "value-oriented intellectuals" must be despised and feared for the serious challenge they pose to democratic government, by "unmasking and delegitimization of established institutions."

The authors do not claim that what the value-oriented intellectuals write and say is false. Such categories as "truth" and "honesty" do not fall within the province of the apparatchiks. The point is that their work of "unmasking and delegitimation" is a threat to democracy when popular participation in politics is causing "a breakdown of traditional means of social control." They "challenge the existing structures of authority" and even the effectiveness of "those institutions which have played the major role in the indoctrination of the young." Along with "privatistic youth" who challenge the work ethic in its traditional form, they endanger democracy, whether or not their critique is well-founded. No student of modern history will fail to recognize this voice.

What must be done to counter the media and the intellectuals, who, by exposing some ugly facts, contribute to the dangerous "shift in the institutional balance between government and opposition"? How do we control the "more politically active citizenry" who convert democratic politics into "more an arena for the assertion of conflicting interests than a process for the building of common purposes"? How do we return to the good old days when "Truman, Acheson, Forrestal, Marshall, Harriman, and Lovett" could unite on a policy of global intervention and domestic militarism as our "common purpose," with no interference from the undisciplined rabble?

The crucial task is "to restore the prestige and authority of central government institutions, and to grapple with the immediate economic challenges." The demands on government must be reduced and we must "restore a more equitable relationship between government authority and popular control." The press must be reined. If the media do not enforce "standards of professionalism," then "the alternative could well be regulation by the government" -- a distinction without a difference, since the policy-oriented and technocratic intellectuals, the commissars themselves, are the ones who will fix these standards and determine how well they are respected. Higher education should be related "to economic and political goals," and if it is offered to the masses, "a program is then necessary to lower the job expectations of those who receive a college education." No challenge to capitalist institutions can be considered, but measures should be taken to improve working conditions and work organization so that workers will not resort to "irresponsible blackmailing tactics." In general, the prerogatives of the nobility must be restored and the peasants reduced to the apathy that becomes them.

This is the ideology of the liberal wing of the state capitalist ruling elite, and, it is reasonable to assume, its members who now staff the national executive in the United States....