
In the thirteen years of affluence since this book first appeared, the attack on modernity has once again become a dominant theme of our culture. The rebellion of the young—and not only of the young—against the emptiness of a materialist age, against the hypocrisy of bourgeois life and the estrangement from nature, against spiritual impoverishment amidst plenty, against the whole "liberal-capitalist system," has echoed many of the laments of the three critics here discussed. More, the present generation longs for a new communal existence, for a new faith, for wholeness. And once again, the deficiencies of liberal, bourgeois culture have been made shockingly clear in a decade of war, political divisiveness, industrial ugliness. Although in many ways identical with the traditional laments of the right, the outcry this time was linked to a vague leftist orientation; accordingly, the political expression of anti-modernity was not a mystical nationalism, but a utopian socialism, a yearning for a humane Marxism, a Marxism beyond all the realities of previously existing socialist regimes. In Germany, the protest has become quickly frozen into new, political orthodoxies. In America, the political expression of the protest has remained much more pragmatic; the full impact of the disenchantment with modernity has been felt in the cultural realm and in the so-called counter culture. But in all realms, the voices denigrating reason and elevating feeling were heard again, as they have been periodically in our civilization. And once again, implicit in the attack on modernity has been the repudiation, the hatred of the West. At times we seemed to witness analogues to that descent from idealism to nihilism that is suggested in the last chapter of this book.

Paradoxically, as the cultural grievance has once again appeared on the political scene, some historians of the past decade or so have championed a new determinism and once again sought the mainsprings of historical action in economic or eco-
nomically-determined motives. Yet at the same time, within and without the historical profession, there has been a growing presumption against the notion that material factors alone are capable of explaining the past. Specific studies, for example, have shown that cultural, spiritual, and psychic factors must be taken into account if we are to understand the triumphs of irrationality that marked fascism. To the further exploration of politics as psychodrama, of projective politics, of the irrational ingredients in all politics, I can hope that this book may prove useful.

It was written solely as an explication of the past—a past that haunts us still. If it has acquired a new meaning for the present, if it helps to focus attention on the persistent deficiencies of a certain kind of unreflective, uncritical modernity and also on the dangers of exuberant reform movements that in the name of idealism claim to be immune from accountability, that in their utopianism propose collective solutions for grievances and aspirations that do not allow for collective solutions, then the author can gratefully ponder such unanticipated timeliness of his work, even if he would prefer to live in a world in which the politics of cultural despair had nothing but an historic resonance.

F.S.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY