

TIME TO SAY "TOLD YOU SO"

by Enoch Powell, M. P. *

"Weird" is the adjective which occurs to me to describe the experience of reading Asian Drama, an immense "Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations," in three volumes and 2,250 pages, by the veteran economist Gunnar Myrdal.

Almost everyone knows the sensation: "This has all happened to me before"; and it is weird. Here is a vast piece of re-learning by a very considerable man, who makes no secret of having been forced to overturn the assumptions which, along with nearly all contemporaries, he had cherished and propagated about "under-developed countries", "aid" and "planning development" in the countries of South Asia. As the Director of the fund which financed the study says in the foreword:

"Professor Myrdal had not only to move against accepted premises and assumptions; what was more difficult, he had to move against those premises which he had himself done so much to establish and to make seem self-evident." In the author's own words:

"I am deeply conscious of the fact that I have myself shared many of the ways of thought I criticise in this book."

* M. P. for Wolverhampton S. W.

What then is the recondite truth that so much learning and research, so much mental agony and honesty, have gone into discovering? It is that the under-development, or call it what you will, of the countries of Asia is deeply rooted and casually intertwined with their social and political institutions and with the whole outlook and mentality of their peoples.

To approach them with Western categories and propose to make them "grow" by development planning or economic aid is worse than futile; it is a mockery. Nothing less than a revolution, political, social, religious, philosophical, is the precondition of Western-style economic growth.

If such a revolution were to occur, it would render "aid" manifestly superfluous; unless and until it does, "aid" implies an arrogant presumption on the part of Western countries, an ambition to substitute one's own values for those of others, which is more than the older colonial imperialisms, being tinctured with knowledge and experience at first hand and therefore more modest and respectful, ever dreamt of.

The weird, the frightening thing almost, is that Gunnar Myrdal's revelation on the road to Damascus is something which has been perfectly familiar and indeed obvious to oneself from the start. That the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton South-West, whose name - I make no complaint - does not occur in the index, knew the answer before Professor Myrdal started to look for it and could have told it him in 10 minutes years ago if we had happened to meet - this is not a matter for arrogance or self-satisfaction, but for alarm.

It raises in monumental form one of the most worrying questions of our time. How can the nations, not merely the politicians, but the economists, the social scientists, the men of good will, the international organisations, in short almost everybody articulate, proclaim the most arrant and manifest piffle for years together, and yet nobody see, or say, or be allowed to be heard to say, that it is piffle?

In the early 1960s Harold Macmillan set up within his Government a new "Department of Technical Assistance." At the General Election of 1964 the opposing political parties bid against one another in promising more "aid to developing countries." The incoming Labour Government created a

"Ministry of Overseas Development," with a Minister of Cabinet rank in charge; and the Conservative opposition complained that the Government were not doing enough.

To protest against this fashionable cult did not even make people angry. In public and private, in speech and writing, while a member of the consultative committees of Sir Alec Douglas-Home and of Mr. Heath, I stated and argued that "aid to developing countries does more harm than good," to the recipient as well as the donor.

I was not even "sacked" for it. Evidently dissent was regarded as too whimsical to be noticed seriously. Yet here is a passage - from a speech in December 1964 - which could serve as the blurb for Professor Myrdal's book:

"Whence then, if from anywhere, are the means of improvement to come? There is only one answer: essentially from within. The investment and the initiative which made possible the development of the Western economies was not subscribed or donated from outside: it came from within.

The rise of Japan, in far less than a century from Admiral Perry's arrival, to challenge the Western countries in technology and production was not because she was spoon-fed with grants and uneconomic loans from Europe and America. It was due to the spirit and character of her people and their aptitude and appetite to learn.

The great, the only truly beneficent gift we have to offer is the example of that which made the West productive - capitalism and enterprise. But it is a gift which implies the power and the will to receive it; and that, although we can teach and demonstrate by precept and example, it is not in our power to confer."

The significant thing is that there is virtually no electoral pull in "aid". On the contrary, except among a small minority of the electorate, "aid" is positively and increasingly unpopular. In any case, the proposal to give away still more to other countries is hardly a classic method of bribing the

electorate. It follows that it is an oversimplification to suppose that political parties in our democracy are solely motivated by direct considerations of electoral popularity. We have to recognise that another, and strong, motivation is the desire to be intellectually fashionable, and the fear of being thought unenlightened.

Presumably the underlying assumption is that sooner or later the mass electorate will come round to the fashionable views, or that the deferential mentality of the British makes them demand that their party shall talk like their intellectual betters. Hence the enslavement of the parties, and not least the Conservative party, to the "opinion-formers," whose censure is feared as if it were a sentence of political death.

Unfortunately, the intellectually fashionable causes have a way of being perverse and, like all fashions, relatively short-lived. So the politicians are left carrying the intellectual baby after its true parents have run off, and maintaining their all-important consistency by asserting propositions which the rest of the world has begun to doubt or has already deserted.

I wonder how long it will take the Conservative party to get rid of "aid to developing countries."

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