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The Revolt of the Ignorant

By AURELIO M. ESPINOSA

IN HIS epoch-making book, *La Rebelión de las Masas*, or *The Revolt of the Masses*, Ortega y Gasset made a vigorous protest against the increasing power of the masses. In the word masses he included most of those elements in the world that rightly or wrongly have considered themselves oppressed in the struggle for existence.

When Ortega y Gasset published his book, however, the results of *the revolt of the masses* had already wrought such havoc to a chaotic world that it had already become what we might properly call *the revolt of the ignorant*.

The revolt of the masses was complete in some parts of the world. In Russia the masses overpowered the protesting few and carried the day. Russia then volunteered to be the experimental station for humanity. Ten years ago, even five years ago, the enthusiasts for the Russian experiments in all parts of the world were thousands and thousands. Many of these thousands are no longer interested. The masses themselves have become dissatisfied with the experiments. The truth is no longer concealed. The masses produce mass production; but what of it? Economics has played a most important role in the history of the world, but it is a great error to consider all revolts in history as fundamentally economic. The error springs from the childish notion that if all men were economically equal they would be actually equal, and hence happy and contented.

Even if the miracle of economic equality could be brought about, happiness, satisfaction, and peace would not come. The primitive instincts of envy, greed, selfishness, ambition, instinct of exhibition, cruelty, etc., would still remain in the human heart. The masses, in this respect, are no different from any and all groups that writers and speakers do not include in the classification "masses," or that are considered the enemies of the masses. The masses fight

and will always fight among themselves, and with the same fury that they attack those whom they fancy to be their enemies.

The causes are very simple. The revolt of the masses always degenerates into the revolt of the ignorant, and not all of the elements of the masses are ignorant. The above mentioned primitive instincts are dominant among the ignorant, but the ignorant are also to be found among the non-masses. The revolt of the ignorant is one that will be more difficult to subdue than any other type of revolt. It is ever present among us. Many times it raises its ugly head and few notice its presence. This is largely due to the ever increasing cult for mediocrity, the equalization of ideas and their originators, the democracy plan of plus and minus, the equality that is the negation of all progress, the world where there are no superior individuals, with the result that all individuals tend to be inferior or mediocre.

Of course, the fought-for equalization would never be achieved in any case. We could all be well fed, well clothed, have little or no work to do, have the same type of houses and furniture, and still we would not all be good looking, of the same height, run the hundred meter race in the same time, dance equally well, or have the same aromatic breath. Men are not and never will be equal, even economically and physically. No human of sane mind can for a moment decry the struggle for social justice, the attempt to relieve the distressed and poor, both through personal help and through just laws and their just application.

But there is a vast difference between man before the law, the just law, and man as an actual equal of all other men before the laws of progress. It is sheer folly to give the same rights to all men in all things in the scientific determination of progress. Civilization can survive, can be improved by science on the one hand, and by religious progress on the other. The religious ideal was reached by the mystics of the sixteenth century. Surely such lofty spirits as St. John of the Cross and Saint Theresa of Jesus were spirit-

ually far above their age or any subsequent age. Human equality was not their concern. Their humility before God made them seekers of His graces and His comforts that they might prepare for the journey toward their eternal goal, union with Him.

In our material world, however, we have lost sight of all religious ideals. And what is still more tragic, we are depriving ourselves of all possibility of a return to religion by failing to listen to the words of science. The *verbum spiriti* has abandoned our homes and our schools, and the *verbum sapientiae* is being assailed by the *verbum ignorantiae*. In our blind race for material possession, for the great idol of plenty, and for the even greater idol of the equality of all men, we are continually giving ground in the fields already conquered by science.

It is commonplace in America, for example, to berate learning, especially higher learning, to equalize the researches and investigations of all scholars and would-be scholars. Do we not frequently witness the attacks of those who through mere ignorance belittle scientific and scholarly work? Do we not frequently see in print the vocabulary that betrays the equalizer of all men in the realm of science? We do. It is the revolt of the ignorant, to which we are continually giving ground. Such phrases as "the appeal to the public," "the public interest," "of interest only to specialists," etc., etc., are typical manifestations of the revolt of the ignorant. Materially speaking, science is the only key to human progress. The very institutions and material comforts that the revolting ignorant now enjoy are the fruits of science that they and their ancestors have often ridiculed and attacked.

Universities in the Middle Ages were the seats of all learning and were separated from the common people by a great gulf. Modern man with his equalization program, foolishly thinking that all men can be educated, and that all men can be great investigators as well as great political leaders, has admitted all to the universities and colleges.

And what is more, modern man "educates" them all. In this there is some good and some evil. But the evil often outweighs the good. The really ignorant revolt in later years, often at the very threshold of their career. The result is a lowering of all standards of research and investigation. The ignorant must be equal to those who are not ignorant.

There is perhaps no greater tragedy in the world than the obvious fact that after a revolt of the ignorant has wrought its havoc, and disappeared, the ignorance itself remains. Nowhere do we see this *ignorantia eterna* with more vigor than in localities where a powerful economic and materially aggressive culture "triumphs" over a more humane and Christian type of culture. The struggle is over and the "triumphant" ignorant remain ignorant. It may be that, after all, ignorance is an attitude of mind rather than the negation of intelligence, wisdom, and learning. It is apparently an inherited attitude.

Can the universities and colleges of the United States, in spite of the violent struggle now going on to democratize and "socialize" all human life and activities succeed in keeping science above and away from the rule of the mob? Can science be saved from the revolt of the ignorant? If it can ever be saved we must change our ways immediately. We must first of all have courage enough to maintain our ground and not yield, never yield to the revolt of the ignorant. It is a greater battle than all the economic battles that have ever been waged or ever will be waged. The economic struggle is a struggle to preserve the body; the struggle of science is a struggle for the progress of humanity. Incidentally, the struggle of science gives us all the material things of this world. We must carry on the struggle for social justice, but in a practical way, and above all we must see to it that in this struggle ignorance does not triumph. The revolt of the masses is very often an actual revolt of the ignorant. As such it need not have the support of those who are willing to fight for social justice.