

Leviathan: James Burnham's Managerial Class in the 21st Century

リヴァイアサン： 21 世紀におけるジェイムズ・バーナムの経営者層

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Abstract

In *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World*, James Burnham chronicled the rise of a new class whose role was to coordinate the economic activity of the capitalists and proletariat. This class would, over time, take control of key economic, political, and cultural institutions worldwide. As Burnham predicted, the post-war period saw parliaments and congresses cede sovereignty to governmental and non-governmental bureaucracies, corporate interests, NGOs and think tanks, and the corresponding growth of a supranational legal and administrative framework to coordinate the operations of this diffuse network. The ambition of the new managerial class has grown since Burnham's time, from a desire to guide democracy in a direction favorable to corporate America, to that of enforcing a rules-based international order—in short, globalism. This paper examines the evolution of the managerial class and argues that Burnham's ideas remain vitally important in making sense of world.

Key words : James Burnham, Managerialism, Expertocracy, Liberalism, Rationalism

概 要

ジェームズ・バーナムは、『経営者革命：世界で起きていること』の中で、資本家とプロレタリアートの経済活動を調整する役割を担う新しい階級の台頭を記した。この階級は、やがて世界の経済、政治、文化の主要な制度を支配するようになる。バーナムの予測通り、戦後、国会や議会は、政府や非政府の官僚、企業、NGO、シンクタンクに主権を譲り、それに伴い、この拡散したネットワークが活動する超国家の法的・行政的枠組みが拡大した。バーナムの時代から、新しい経営者層の野望は、民主主義をアメリカ企業に有利な方向に導くという願望から、ルールに基づく国際秩序、つまりグローバリズムを施行することを使命とするようになったのである。本稿では、経営者層の変遷を検証し、バーナムの思想が現代を理解する上で極めて重要であることを主張する。

キーワード：ジェイムズ・バーナム、経営主義、専門家主義、リベラリズム、合理主義

1. Introduction

Compared to socioeconomic analyses such as capitalism and Marxism, managerialism has yet to enter popular understanding as a rationale for ‘what is happening in the world,’ but traces of Burnham can certainly be detected in commonly understood pejoratives such as *technocracy* and *the permanent bureaucracy*. With the occasional exception of judiciously selected quotes from George Orwell’s critiques, used polemically to forestall serious discussion of Burnham, the significant amount of literature on Burnham produced in the decades following the publication of the *Managerial Revolution* is rarely cited today. But there are signs that Burnham’s ideas have begun to emerge from a decades-long period of relative scholarly neglect (cf. Murphy, 2021; Greene, 2022). This paper is a modest attempt to argue for Burnham’s continued relevance. It starts by introducing Burnham’s managerialism; Section 3 applies Burnham’s concepts to the period of accelerated globalization from the 1980s onwards focusing on the West, and The United States in particular (space precludes a wider treatment); Section 4 examines how many contemporary critiques of modern economic and cultural trends can be understood as ‘managerialism by different names’, and closes by proposing some general characteristics of the new managerial class; The paper closes with speculation on the future of the managerial class.

2. Burnham’s Managerial Class

The theory of the managerial revolution predicts that capitalist society will be replaced by ‘managerial society’, that, in fact, the transition from capitalist society to managerial society is already well under way (Burnham, 1941, p.24).

In *The Managerial Revolution* (1941) Burnham argued that Marx’s view of historical determinism was only partly correct. The West was indeed undergoing a shift from capitalism but not, as Marx had predicted, towards Communism, but instead towards a new form of economy that Burnham called managerialism. A manager is someone who coordinates the behavior of others. Burnham cites as examples production managers, operating executives, superintendents, administrative engineers, supervisory technicians, commissioners, bureau heads, and others who manage “the actual process of production, no matter what the legal and financial form—individual, corporate, governmental—of the process” (Burnham, 1941, p.64). Managers, standardized procedures and requirements, hierarchy, and clear divisions of labor are an integral component of complex societies (Parsons, 1963; Weber, 2015). Managers interpose between workers, producers, and customers, all of whom become less accountable to each other and more responsible to managers. Ownership and control are separated, as are production and consumption. Plain bureaucracy becomes managerialism when managers come to form a distinct class, bound together by shared economic and social interests.

[The] functions of management become more distinctive, more complex, more specialized, and more crucial to the whole process of production, thus serving to set off those who perform these functions as a separate group or class in society; and at the same time those who formerly carried out what functions there were of management, the bourgeoisie, themselves withdraw from management¹⁾, so that the difference in function becomes also a difference in the individuals who carry out the function

(Burnham, 1941, p.66).

Like Marx, Burnham viewed capitalism as inherently vulnerable to subversion, given the threat it poses to the ruling class²⁾ in the form of periodic mass unemployment and civil unrest. He cites extensively the cases of Germany and Russia in the first half of the 20th century in support of his thesis. While a managerial class does not presuppose any particular kind of political structure³⁾, Burnham reasoned that nominally democratic forms of government⁴⁾ were most likely to emerge in conjunction with the rise of the managerial class, given the palliative effect democracy has on public sentiment⁵⁾ (Francis, 1992). However, a managerial elite, whether or not it operates from behind the scenes in a democracy, is to be feared for two reasons; First, it is democratically unaccountable and self-selecting, making it resistant to reform; Second, it is shielded by the powerful pretense that its operations are conducted in a neutral, or rational manner.

Burnham's theory drew on analyses by ex-communists such as Bruno Rizzi (1939), the Yugoslav dissident Milovan Đilas (cf. Lind, 2021), and Bele and Mean's study of American corporations (1930). In the decades following its publication, Burnham's arguments were taken up by a number of writers, C. Wright Mills' in *Power Elite* (1956), Milovan Djilas in *The New Class* (1957) Daniel Bell in *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973), Barbara and John Ehrenreich in *Between Labor and Capital* (1979), and John Kenneth Galbraith in *The New Industrial State* (1967). According to Galbraith, the power of the post-bourgeois elite stems from their function as coordinators of capital-intensive, science-based, high-tech industries, and the business and financial services they rely on. Most famously, Burnham's ideas were also addressed by Eric Blair (pen name George Orwell), who used Burnham's vision of managerial superstates in his 1948 novel, 1984.

...Burnham has probably been more right than wrong about the present and the immediate past. For quite 50 years past the general drift has almost certainly been towards oligarchy. The ever-increasing concentration of industrial and financial power; the diminishing importance of the individual capitalist or shareholder, and the growth of the new "managerial" class of scientists, technicians, and bureaucrats; the weakness of the proletariat against the centralized state; the increasing helplessness of small countries against big ones; the decay of representative institutions and the appearance of one-party regimes based on police terrorism, faked plebiscites, etc.: all these things seem to point in the same direction (Orwell, 1946).

3. Managerialism from the 1980s

Burnham notes that the easiest way to understand what the ruling class is in any society is to see who receives the most income. In the United States managers and lawyers top the list of average yearly incomes (Statista, 2022), and management, business and finance, and legal occupations together account for more than a third of net income (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Managerialism is the sea in which the 21st century citizen swims and can be observed at various levels of institutional scale. For example:

- An academic applying for a grant to research the migratory patterns of sparrows inserts 'climate change' into her proposal in order to improve its likelihood of acceptance;

- Human resources departments in different companies use similar criteria to dictate what type of people businesses can and cannot hire and fire, and who gets promoted;
- Large corporations loudly express their support for the latest social movements seemingly in unison;
- Outsourced, low-wage workers in the Philippines enforce speech codes on the online expression of Americans.

Opposing or offending the managerial consensus leaves the individual, corporation, or politician to attack, regardless of the formal legality of the offence (cf. Kyeyune, 2021, for an example from the corporate world); Politicians, for example, can be sidelined or ousted by scandals leaked to the media, judiciously selected whistleblower testimony, or parliamentary or congressional investigations. None of these managerial procedures necessarily require centralized collusion⁶⁾. Thus, who exactly wields power in a managerial state is difficult to ascertain. Key features of the rise of managerialism can nonetheless be identified. Three of these are the growth of the corporation, the decline in the sovereign power of the lower houses of parliaments or congresses, and the management of public discourse by the news media.

The growth of the corporation. Corporations grow ever more powerful. Walmart employs more people than the population of Botswana, Microsoft has a greater market cap than Brazil's GDP, and FedEx operates five times as more planes than Air India. Big tech collects the personal data of billions of users and uses what it learns to shape consumption, in doing so revolutionizing the retail landscape. Despite the power of the corporation, however, its owners—capitalists—cannot wield this power as did the 'robber barons' of yore. This is for two reasons. First, the ownership of the modern corporation is distributed among shareholders, who lack the unity to exercise power beyond voting on certain measures (drawn up by managers) at an annual meeting; ownership and control are, to a significant degree, severed. Second, it is not the case that a majority shareholder, for example Jeff Bezos, who owns 11% of Amazon stock, can act unilaterally due to the apathy of majority shareholders, since he or she must by law delegate control of the company to an executive board. Facebook and Twitter, for example, bear little resemblance to their founders' original visions. Their operation is supervised by board members who pass through a revolving door between the government and the corporate world. The same applies to big tech in general, big oil, Comcast, General Electric, Goldman Sachs, the media, Monsanto, or big pharma (cf. Masnick, 2011). The power of the billionaires is therefore increasingly contingent not on their paper wealth, but on their standing with the ruling class⁷⁾. This is even true of the richest person in the world, Elon Musk, whose lack of standing with the managerial class leaves him vulnerable to managerial procedures such as an SEC investigation, congressional hearings, or legislative measures. Corporations are enormously powerful, but this power comes at the price of assimilation into the managerial class.

Decline in Sovereign Power. The post-war period has witnessed the declining power of parliaments and congresses to write, promote, and administer foreign and financial policy⁸⁾. The last time Congress declared war was in 1942. Since then, the US has been involved in 28 military campaigns (List of wars involving the United States, 2021), including invasions of sovereign nations. These campaigns are often developed and promoted by think tanks such as the Rand corporation, the Hudson Institute and the Institute for the Study of War (Stimpson, 2020; Lazare, 2021). The US Government and arms manufacturers contribute more than \$1 billion annually to the top 50 think tanks (Freeman, 2020), and their resident experts have grown used to having their advice followed. These institutes provide well-paid retirement positions for former military employees and weapons manufacturers. Collectively, this is the military-industrial complex that Dwight Eisenhower (1961) warned of. The federal reserve in the United States, and the Bank of England

are nominally independent. They, not the governments, control interest rates (Weldon, 2022). On paper at least, Congress has the power to tax and spend. Yet many members of Congress either do not, or cannot, read the bills they pass, since they run to thousands of pages. These bills are written for them by managers (Blumenthal, 2009; Innes, 2015). The laws themselves are often guidelines tasking an agency to create de facto laws.

The actual, day-by-day direction of the processes owned and operated by the government or controlled, without full ownership, by the government is in the hands of individuals strictly comparable to those whom we have called ‘managers’ in the case of private industry: the men of the innumerable bureaus and commissions and agencies, not often the publicly known figures, who may be decorative politicians, but the ones who actually do the directing work (Burnham, 1941, p.87).

Experts at the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and the International Monetary Fund offer grants and loans to poor countries, conditional on the ‘Westernization’ of their economies, which in practice entails opening them up to Western investment and ownership. The loans are often unpayable, leaving recipients at the economic mercy of their creditors (Kim, 2011). Managerialism knows no borders. Since the 1980s the world economy has been influenced to an unprecedented extent by monetary policy and labor arbitrage fueled globalization and financialization. During this period, dependency on geopolitical rivals and monetary intervention rose, coming to a head in the 2008 financial crisis (Napier, in Dittli, 2022) in which the global economy reached the brink of a deflationary debt liquidation. Politicians appear increasingly unable to anything about the situation—they are no longer in control.

Management of Public Discourse. A competent managerial class ideally wishes the news media not to notice it or, failing that, to at least be on its side⁹⁾ (a poisoned blessing, as will be argued in following sections). In recent years the American news media has developed close ties to the managerial state. In the past, ‘intelligence’ agencies used to have to conspire to infiltrate and manipulate the media (Hadley, 2019). In 1977 Carl Bernstein identified “more than 400 American journalists who in the past twenty-five years have secretly carried out assignments for the CIA.” (Bernstien, 1977). In 2008, the New York Times’ David Barstow was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his exposé on how the Pentagon disseminated Defense Department talking points by coordinating with news networks to place former officials as ‘analysts’ at news networks. National security reporter Ken Dilanian “routinely submitted his drafts about the CIA to agency officials before publication” (Greenwald, 2021). His employer at the time, The Los Angeles Times, stated that it was ‘disappointed’ and that he may have violated the paper’s rules. Shortly thereafter, Dilanian was hired by the Associated Press, and he now ‘covers’ the intelligence community for NBC News. Such underhand methods are increasingly unnecessary. Articles attributed solely to ‘government sources familiar with the matter’ are now commonplace. The news media now employs an army of former CIA operatives, FBI officials, NSA spies, Pentagon chiefs, and DOJ prosecutors to staff their newsrooms. NBC and CNN employ former CIA Director John Brennan, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, former Assistant FBI Director Frank Figliuzzi, former Homeland Security Advisor Fran Townsend, former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, former NSA and CIA Director Michael Hayden (Greenwald, 2021). CNN and MSNBC alone employed at least 15 former spies as ‘analysts’ in 2019 (Ross, 2019). The recent and ongoing publication of the Twitter Files (cf. Downey, 2022) shows how ingrained various branches of the US ‘intelligence’ community are in the control of public discourse, and the indifference towards the release of this information, which would until a few years ago constituted a national scandal, on the part of much of

the media speaks for itself.

4. Managerialism by Other Names; a Synthesis

Public awareness of the managerial class has arguably never been as high as it is today, but it is known by different names such as crony capitalism, the technocracy, the military industrial complex, globalism, the permanent bureaucracy, the deep state, officialdom, and the blob:

The Blob is hard to put anyone's finger on. It is a mixture of state institutions, state-funded institutions, and private trusts and charities. It is a groupthink bubble. It is a network, an ecosystem, in which everyone operates with a set of similar superficial assumptions about the legitimate domain of state action derived from similar assumptions about human nature (Herbalis, 2020).

Burnham's formulation itself receives little attention from the academic mainstream. His ideas have, however, in recent decades been revisited by right wing intellectuals and commentators. The most common (and least productive, in terms of scholarship) approach is to call the managerial class by another name and designate it the enemy—a habit Burnham judiciously avoided. Gabb (2001), for example identifies this enemy class as a clerisy:

These are the people who really govern the country. They are the ones who decide what statistics to gather and how and when to publish them. They decide what problems can be identified and what solutions can be discussed. They advise on policy and implement policy...They provide the boundaries and language of debate. They define the heretics and schismatics, and arrange for them to be persecuted. They are the modern equivalent of an established church.

McCarthy (2016) questions the relevance of Burnham's thesis. He cites the example of political candidates such as Pat Buchanan, Ralph Nader, Ron Paul, Donald Trump, and to a lesser degree, Bernie Sanders, asking why they were so rigorously resisted by the establishment. He concludes that they all committed the cardinal sin of opposing the elite consensus on war, trade, and immigration. He describes this elite as outspoken, college-educated 'verbalists.' "Members of the new class do not 'control' the media," McCarthy argues, "they *are* the media—just as they are our educational system, our public health and welfare system, and much else." The 1980s afforded these professionals access to professions aligned with 'postmaterial' concerns suiting their cultural sensibilities through the expansion of a variety of nongovernment organizations funded privately for nominally public purposes. These verbalists are antithetical to Burnham's 'industrial' managers, McCarthy argues. The term verbalists was originally coined by Irving Kristol, in a 1975 essay for the Wall Street Journal, to describe "college-educated people whose skills and vocations proliferate in a 'post-industrial society'." Burnham was not particularly enamored of Kristol's analysis, to which he responded in an article in National Review in 1978, shortly before a stroke ended his career:

I have felt that this 'new class' is, so far, rather thin gruel. Intellectuals, verbalists, media types, etc. are conspicuous actors these days, certainly; they make a lot of noise, get a lot of attention, and some of them make a lot of money. But, after all, they are a harum-scarum crowd, and deflate even more

quickly than they puff up. On TV they can out-talk any of the managers of ITT, GM, or IBM, or the administration-managers of the great government bureaus and agencies, but, honestly, you're not going to take that as a power test. Who hires and fires whom? (Burnham, 1978).

Given the importance ascribed to the use of language in contemporary society, popularly understood as an ideology of political correctness, Burnham's dismissal of the verbalists may, with the benefit of hindsight, appear premature. But it is important to remember that while the membership of a managerial class may change, the managerial class itself remains. McCarthy's argument does not negate Burnham's fundamental thesis. In line with this argument, Krein (2019) argues that the real class war is not between managers, capitalists, and workers (who have been effectively sidelined for decades now), but within the managerial class itself.

[The] story of a declining working class is now broadly understood...Much less understood, however, is the more recent reshaping and radicalization of the professional managerial class. While the top 5 or 10 percent may not deserve public sympathy, their underperformance relative to the top 0.1 percent will be more politically significant than the hollowing out of the working or lower-middle classes. Unlike the working class, the professional managerial class is still capable of, and required for, wielding political power...Marxian thinkers have been analyzing these dynamics for almost two centuries, but they have often misread the political effects of these developments, which play out primarily among the elite managerial class, rather than within the binary of capitalists and proletarians.

Krein notes that socialist organizing is now more likely to occur in Silicon Valley and elite college campuses than in working-class exurbs. The policies advocated, such as student loan forgiveness and 'free college,' primarily benefit the top 30% of society, which includes the lower echelons of the managerial class. He notes:

When members of these professions write about embittered working-class Trump supporters in declining industries, they may as well be writing about themselves. [The] conspicuous embrace of 'elite values' by journalists and academics is often little more than an aspirational attempt to remain connected to an economically distant elite (Krein, 2019).

Briggs (2021a, 2021b) suggests that managerialism has evolved into expertocracy. In Burnham's time, members of the elite were selected by a mixture of hereditary characteristics and graduation from elite universities. Now, the education system produces a surplus of credentialed 'experts' looking for managerial work. This has expanded the remit of expertise to the regulation and micromanagement of more and more aspects of economic, social, and cultural life. Burnham's managers were relatively few, competent, and focused; the expert class is bloated and factionalized. With the spread of the ideology of expertocracy, the importance of democracy diminishes since the only 'rational' approach is to put the experts in charge. Opposition is dismissed as emotional, based on irrational fear (cf. Pigott, 2018).

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic provides a dramatic and clearcut example of the power of the ideology of the expertocracy channeled by the managerial state. On the recommendations of certain epidemiologists, social life was transformed by new regimes of social distancing, lockdowns, face masks, mandatory vaccination, and vaccine passports (Delanty, 2020). Corporate media, big tech, large

corporations, academia, the medical industry, banks and governments marched in lockstep to support these measures (Tucker, 2022). In 2020 Apple and Google launched an ‘exposure notification’ application for public health bodies seeking to track COVID cases. By September 2021 more than 40 countries, and with them billions of citizens, had plugged themselves in (Schott, 2021). The measures brought with them all sorts of consequences, none of which have anything directly to do with epidemiology. These include the potential future misuse of lockdown laws, declining mental health, increases in obesity, domestic violence, divorce, lack of access to dental and medical treatment, lack of access to education, job losses, economic decline (Lancet, 2016; Todhunter, 2020), and a general sense of curtailment hovering over “all that is best and most human in life—family get-togethers, religious worship, children playing, plans for the future, creative projects” (Sayers, 2020). The measures were presented as rational, and science-based, and those who opposed them, anti-science. Yet, at the time of writing, presuming accurate figures, COVID-19 has killed approximately 0.08% of the world’s population (John Hopkins, 2022). In a hypothetical town of 1000 people, this equates to the death of one person, most likely over 80 years old. If this hypothetical town was not blessed with access to modern media or experts, COVID-19 would in effect, as far as its citizens were concerned, *not have happened*. COVID-19 is of similar lethality to the 1957 Asian Flu and 1968 Hong Kong Flu epidemics, in response to which no such restrictive measures were introduced.

It is now possible to pose some general propositions concerning the contemporary managerial class: The managerial class has grown to an enormous size since Burnham’s time, and its character has changed as younger generations of college-educated professionals enter its ranks, a process facilitated by the expansion of higher education and a culture of credentialism of the type favored by managers. This has led to fractionalization within the managerial elite, most notably between those who control capital and those who earn wages. The size and makeup of the managerial elite no longer allows it to operate through (as the cliché goes) secret discussions in cigar-smoke filled rooms. This, its explicit and aggressive commitment to globalism, and its encroachment on more and more aspects of everyday life, has made the managerial class more visible than ever. However, public awareness tends to be expressed through a variety of standalone pejoratives rather than being subjected to a more detached, cohesive treatment such as Burnham’s.

5. Managerialism and the Future

[It] is most probable that managerial economy will have its own form of crisis. Managerial crises will, it would seem, be technical and political in character: they will result from breakdowns in bureaucratized administration when faced with, say, the complicated problems of sudden shifts to war or peace or abrupt technological changes; or from mass movements of dissatisfaction and revolt which, with the state and economy fused, would be automatically at once political and economic in character and effect (Burnham, 1941, p.107).

This section addresses why the situation described in the previous section is likely to persist. Of key importance is the relationship between liberalism and managerialism, the crisis of academia and journalism, the threat posed to the managerial elite by technology, and public perception of the failures of its policies.

In the decades following the publication of the Managerial Revolution, Burnham became convinced that Western social liberalism and managerialism had united—a view he expounded upon in his 1964 book, *Suicide of the West*. Enthusiasm for social liberalism¹⁰⁾ post-war was an understandable reaction to ideologies that had resulted in such carnage during the first half of the 20th century¹¹⁾. Social liberalism, or

progressivism, provides the managerial state with an inventory of social movements for it to publicly align itself with. Social liberals themselves are more likely to subscribe to a rationalist, expert-led managerial ideology¹²⁾ than conservatives holding to more inflexible frameworks of ethical and moral guidance. Like the manager, the social liberal seeks to reform society, seeing no reason to favor ideas, institutions, or modes of conduct merely because they have been long-established. Their ancient lineage is, if anything, grounds for suspicion.

However, while one can imagine the managerial class of Burnham's day using social liberalism for its own ends, the managerial class of today actually believes its own rhetoric, for the simple reason that it is increasingly populated by social liberals. This has the effect of removing an important protection from the managerial class, namely the pretense of apoliticism or objectivity, making it a concrete target for failed policies. Burnham himself believed that social liberalism would inevitably run into the brick wall of human nature, which is at heart decidedly illiberal. Beyond a certain point, people do not actually wish to be 'liberated' from the limiting ties of place, tradition, religion, and family, in pursuit of the radical autonomy of the modern consumer (Lyons, 2021). Purportedly irrational institutions that stand in the way of liberal 'progress'—family, ritual, sex roles, hierarchy and religion—have evolved in all societies as imperfect means of accommodating and ameliorating dangerous human inclinations. When the measures liberalism adopts fail to account for human nature, unpleasant consequences will likely follow:

We may be successful in achieving our sought-for reform; but there will be other, unintended and perhaps undesired changes arriving along with it; and there will also and inevitably be something lost—at the minimum, what the reform has replaced; so that on net the loss may more than counterbalance the gain on the scale of Progress (Burnham, 1964, p. 57).

The new managerial class is increasingly constrained by the institutional forces it set in motion. In Burnham's day universities were elite institutions, and the managers who came from them were of above average intelligence and ability. With the higher-education-for-all movement (Swaim, 2017), the universities are creating more experts, of sub-standard quality, than the managerial class can absorb (Krein, 2017). Costs are rising, student loan debt is reaching dangerous levels, and enrollment is beginning to decline as young people opt out (or simply cannot afford it). But while declining attendance at university will lead to a diminution of trust in the ideology of the expert, the experts themselves have little choice but to continue business as usual. The professions of both academics and journalists are non-fungible. In order to gain tenure, academics must publish and pass through peer review. Developing a reputation for the wrong sorts of ideas—such as a belief in human universals—is potentially a career killer. For journalists, playing safe is the way to progress from local to regional to national news organization. This sets up a terrible reality in which the people responsible for shaping the public mind¹³⁾ become supporters of the status quo. Both institutions are key to the propaganda efforts of the managerial elite to portray itself as apolitical, and this is best done subtly than overtly. As trust in journalism and academia declines, so does the public relations armor of the managerial class.

Technology poses a further challenge to the managerial class. It has degraded the monopoly over the control of information formerly enjoyed by the media. The managerial class is therefore currently attempting to defuse the threat posed by the democratizing potential of the Internet¹⁴⁾. The centralization of Big Tech has provided them the means to clamp down on information (in the name of harm reduction) by herding the majority of Internet users into controlled environments. Unless one makes an effort to

curate the Internet as one would a personal library, 'exploration' of anything remotely controversial on the Internet is in reality little more than a guided tour of mainstream news media opinion, courtesy of Google. Artificial Intelligence is quickly neutered to bring it in line with elite class orthodoxy (see fig. 1)



Figure 1. Sample of neutered AI. Output from *chat.openai.com*

Nonetheless, the Internet still offers access to information that would previously have been mediated. Anybody can watch a political press conference, or a livestream of a criminal prosecution, then watch how the media portrays these events, and draw their own conclusions as to the trustworthiness of the media.

The result of these trends is that the track record of managerialism itself has been opened to greater scrutiny. Under managerialism, in the second half of the 20th century international trade and labor arbitrage transformed the global economic landscape. Millions in the third world escaped extreme poverty, but in the West industry and manufacturing stagnated and wealth inequality grew. A financial divide has arisen between the elite and the ruled, the former enjoying unprecedented prosperity in the post-war era, and the latter facing economic stagnation and lower social mobility (Krein, 2017). The federal bureaucracy is run people with impressive academic degrees and extensive specialized experience. These people:

...in 2008, brought the nation to the brink of economic disaster and, over the last half-century, put the government nearly \$20 trillion in debt; [they] were allotted billions for the eradication of poverty

but failed to do much of anything beyond the creation of a few expensive and inextinguishable government agencies; [they] claimed to know how to lower the cost of medical care but managed to raise it dramatically (Swaim, 2017).

Doubts about the elite's capability are fueled by disenchantment with everyday life. In the United States the working class has suffered family instability, weakened civic engagement, rising mortality due to premature deaths, and declining life expectancy (Graham, 2017). White-collar professionals in the information economy, hold what anthropologist David Graeber (2018) refers to as bullshit jobs, make-work positions which exist for little social or even narrowly commercial purpose. Traditional Liberal ideals of fairness, basic human rights, and equality before the law have in recent years metamorphized into a plethora of concerns centered around social justice. The importance of these issues often pales into insignificance compared to the actual problems the working classes face in their daily lives, yet they are nonetheless constantly bombarded with them by politicians, corporations, the media, and their employers. The domestic liberation of women has become a celebration of women, the career woman, and even the single mother (Sawhill, 2015). Cultural shifts such as these bring with them unintended consequences. In the most 'liberated' of societies, America, for example, more than 40% of marriages end in divorce (Canterbury Law Group, 2020), 25% of children are raised in single parent households (Zuckerman, 2020), 72% of black children are born to unwed mothers (Faust & Manning, 2020), and more than 20% of American women are on anti-depressant medication (Welch, 2016). Krein (2017) equates the ideological conflicts between left and right in the new managerial state to Slavoj Žižek's observations on the belief in Santa Claus in late childhood: Children pretend to believe because they think it makes their parents happy; the parents pretend to believe because they think it makes their children happy. But neither believes in Santa Claus, in the same way that fewer and fewer people seriously believe that the Democratic Party's principal agenda is to empower the poor, or that the Republican Party will bring the country back to its founding principles or reduce the federal debt.

The atomization of social life, economic stagnation, and frustration with speech codes enforced by a cabal of government, the media, and big-tech are fueling popular resistance to the ideal of a transnational economy headed by their better-credentialed superiors. In a managerial state, political or economic policies that further managerial interests have always been promoted as democratic or free market-based, and those that do not as antidemocratic or protectionist. But the vitriol of the ruling class is increasingly personal in nature. Cultural opponents are slandered as far right and racist, and the economic woes faced by Western societies, many of them self-inflicted, blamed on freedom-hating authoritarians in countries thousands of kilometers away. A significant minority is beginning to doubt the virtue of understanding the world in comic book terms as a fight between good and evil, instead wondering whether the elite class itself might not be the problem.

6. In closing

Every complex society that has ever existed has organized itself into a minority ruling class and a majority of the ruled¹⁵). According to Burnham's thesis the modern world would be ruled by a managerial class. In his earlier writings he avoided the temptation to cast moral judgments on instances of ruling classes; instead he addressed how, and how effectively, they exercised power. The most effective ruling classes, he maintained, allowed for a certain amount of mobility into and out of the ruling class; the least effective

were self-contained and inflexible, both in their constitutions and ideologies (Burnham, 1943). The managerial class cannot be voted away, but it is not immune to revolution. The easiest way for the current managerial class to forestall such an eventuality would be to loosen its grip on the micromanagement of politics, and in particular culture, while at the same time pruning its bloated membership. Should it fail to do so, economic turmoil or war may do the job for them in more dramatic fashion. This could lead to the replacement of one managerial class with another, drastically reduced in size. For the moment, it seems likely that the managerial class will become increasingly tyrannical towards those it blames for the failure of its policies, as these policies inevitably run into the economic constraints of human and societal nature. The world is not ready—and likely never will be—for its ambitious social liberal project¹⁶). In nominal democracies the working classes still vote, and the rise of populist leaders such as Donald Trump who, “whether he’s right or wrong on the point at issue, *literally doesn’t care what a phalanx of experts says about it*” (Swaim, 2017. Emphasis added) have, quite understandably, rattled the establishment, but it does not so far appear to have prompted much self-reflection. Should the lower echelons of the managerial class reach a similar level of disenchantment as the working classes, and should they turn their wrath on their former masters instead of those they have been taught to despise, the membership and character of the managerial class may perhaps undergo as non-violent a change as it could hope for. What happens after that is of course anyone’s guess.

Notes

- 1) [The] big capitalists did not stop their withdrawal at the level of finance. We find that they have more and more withdrawn, not merely from production proper, but from active and direct participation of any sort in the economic process. They spend their time, not in industry or even in finance, but on yachts and beaches, in casinos and traveling among their many estates; or, others of them, in charitable, educational, or even artistic activities (Burnham, 1941, p.81).
- 2) [The] group of persons which has (as a matter of fact, not necessarily of law or words or theory), as against the rest of the population, a special degree of control over access to the instruments of production and preferential treatment in the distribution of the products of those instruments (Burnham, 1941, p.126).
- 3) The position, role, and function of the managers are in no way dependent upon the maintenance of capitalist property and economic relations (even if many of the managers themselves think so); they depend upon the technical nature of the process of modern production. Consequently the preservation of the capitalist relations is not an absolutely decisive question for the managers (Burnham, 1941, p.74).
- 4) The key characteristic of “democracy” as we use the word...is the granting of the right of political expression to minorities. More fully: democracy is a political system where policy is decided, directly or indirectly, by a majority, and where minorities, differing in their opinion from the majority, have the right of political expression and the opportunity, thereby, of becoming a majority (Burnham, 1941, p.132).
- 5) [A] certain measure of democracy is an excellent way to enable opponents and the masses to let off steam without endangering the foundations of the social fabric (Burnham, 1941, p.137).
- 6) No more than in the case of the capitalists, have the ‘managers’ or their representatives ever got together to decide, deliberately and explicitly, that they were going to make a bid for world power. Nor will the bulk of those who have done, and will do, the fighting in the struggle be recruited from the ranks of the managers themselves; most of the fighters will be workers and youths who will doubtless, many of them, believe that they are fighting for ends of their own. Nor have the managers themselves been constructing and propagating their own ideologies; this has been, and is being, done for the most part by intellectuals, writers, philosophers. Most of these intellectuals are not in the least aware that the net social effects of the ideologies which they elaborate contributes to the pomp and privilege of the managers and to the building of a new structure of class rule in society. As in the past, the intellectuals believe that they are speaking in the name of truth and for the interests of all humanity (Burnham, 1941, pp.59, 60).
- 7) Their preferential treatment in distribution will be allotted to them in terms of status in the political-economic

structure, not in terms of the capitalist type of property (Burnham, 1941, p.100).

- 8) [The] history of the political development of capitalism is the history of the shift in the locus of sovereignty to parliament...and more particularly to the lower house of parliament. In almost all capitalist nations, the authority to make laws was vested in a parliament, and the laws were in fact made by the parliament. Moreover, the political shift to parliament as central authority coincided historically, on the whole, with the general development of capitalist society (Burnham, 1941, pp.18, 19).
- 9) To curb the masses in such a way as to lead them to accept managerial rule and to eliminate any threat of a classless society...large sections of the masses must be enlisted, under suitable slogans, on the side of the managers and of the managerial future (Burnham, 1941, p.171).
- 10) The use of social liberalism or liberalism here should be differentiated from the sense in which it was understood in the pre-war era, namely the belief that the state's activities in the interest of the capitalist economic process.
- 11) [Not] just any ideology is capable of appealing to the sentiments of the masses. It is more than a problem of skillful propaganda technique. A successful ideology has got to seem to the masses, in however confused a way, actually to express some of their own interests (Burnham, 1941, p.151).
- 12) All organized societies are cemented together, not merely by force and the threat of force, and by established patterns of institutional behavior, but also by accepted ways of feeling and thinking and talking and looking at the world, by ideologies (Burnham, 1941, p.149).
- 13) [No] major ideology is content to profess openly that it speaks only for the group whose interests it in fact expresses. Each group insists that its ideologies are universal in validity and express the interests of humanity as a whole; and each group tries to win universal acceptance for its ideologies (Burnham, 1941, p.20).
- 14) Totalitarianism presupposes the development of modern technology, especially of rapid communication and transportation. Without these latter, no government, no matter what its intentions, would have had at its disposal the physical means for coordinating so intimately so many of the aspects of life. Without rapid transportation and communication it was comparatively easy for men to keep many of their activities, or even their entire lives, out of reach of the government. This is no longer possible, or possibly only to a much smaller degree, when governments today make deliberate use of the possibilities of modern technology (Burnham, 1941, p.124).
- 15) The general field of the science of politics is the struggle for social power among organized groups of men (Burnham, 1941, p.47).
- 16) Men are prepared to be heroes for very foolish and unworthy ideals; but they must at least believe in those ideals (Burnham, 1941, p.29)

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