The Second Coming of Daniel Bell

The Coming of Post Industrial Society by Daniel Bell is subtitled a "venture in social forecasting". Since the book has been greeted as a major turning point in sociological analysis by many, we might do well to recall for a moment one of Bell's earlier "ventures in social forecasting", The End of Ideology. Appearing at the end of the 1950s, The End of Ideology was an important document, but hardly because of the astuteness of its "forecasting". In fact, the book's central thesis, that radical ideologies had lost their appeal in the West, was rapidly disproved by events. In retrospect, The End of Ideology was significant because it communicated an understanding of 1950s America widely held by the American liberal intelligentsia. In this perspective an economically powerful America had solved, or could solve, the very social problems which had, in earlier times, prompted "ideological" or "utopian" thinking. Because of this in America the social basis of "ideological" thinking no longer existed. This was even more the case because all experiments at acting out "utopian ideologies" elsewhere-and particularly in the Soviet Union-had led to more social unpleasantness than they had originally set out to remedy. As "social forecasting", then, The End of Ideology was ideology, the wishful thinking of a generation of intellectuals, scarred by the battles of the '30s and '40s, who had become respected and important figures in the prosperous Cold War America.

Abstract
The Coming of Post Industrial Society by Daniel Bell is subtitled a "venture in social forecasting". Since the book has been greeted as a major turning point in sociological analysis by many, we might do well to recall for a moment one of Bell's earlier "ventures in social forecasting", The End of Ideology. Appearing at the end of the 1950s, The End of Ideology was an important document, but hardly because of the astuteness of its "forecasting". In fact, the book's central thesis, that radical ideologies had lost their appeal in the West, was rapidly disproved by events. In retrospect, The End of Ideology was significant because it communicated an understanding of 1950s America widely held by the American liberal intelligentsia. In this perspective an economically powerful America had solved, or could solve, the very social problems which had, in earlier times, prompted "ideological" or "utopian" thinking. Because of this in America the social basis of "ideological" thinking no longer existed. This was even more the case because all experiments at acting out "utopian ideologies" elsewhere-and particularly in the Soviet Union-had led to more social unpleasantness than they had originally set out to remedy. As "social forecasting", then, The End of Ideology was ideology, the wishful thinking of a generation of intellectuals, scarred by the battles of the '30s and '40s, who had become respected and important figures in the prosperous Cold War America.

Published Mar 17, 1974

George Ross

The coming of post industrial society by Daniel Bell is subtitled a "venture in social forecasting". Since the book has been greeted as a major turning point in sociological analysis by many, we might do well to recall for a moment one of Bell's earlier "ventures in social forecasting", The End of Ideology. Appearing at the end of the 1950s, The End of Ideology was an important document, but hardly because of the astuteness of its "forecasting". In fact, the book's central thesis, that radical ideologies had lost their appeal in the West, was rapidly disproved by events. In retrospect, The End of Ideology was significant because it communicated an understanding of 1950s America widely held by the American liberal intelligentsia. In this perspective an economically powerful America had solved, or could solve, the very social problems which had, in earlier times, prompted "ideological" or "utopian" thinking. Because of this in America the social basis of "ideological" thinking no longer existed. This was even more the case because all experiments at acting out "utopian ideologies" elsewhere-and particularly in the Soviet Union-had led to more social unpleasantness than they had originally set out to remedy. As "social forecasting", then, The End of Ideology was ideology, the wishful thinking of a generation of intellectuals, scarred by the battles of the '30s and '40s, who had become respected and important figures in the prosperous Cold War America.