

A response to the article titled:

*Spanish stereotypes: statistics tell us they have Mondays, too*

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I would say I agree with all of the statements the author of this text upholds if it was not for the fact that some other stereotypes are introduced in the text in an attempt to prove the thesis of stereotype existence. Let me put this issue in the correct words. I do not believe – and neither does Bertrand Russell – that idleness is a vice while work, and especially hard work, is a virtue. In fact, it is the philosophical premise behind the reasoning developed by the author and it is actually the way people see and think reality. But this way of interpreting the social reality has deep roots in cultural, social and historical dimensions transmitted from one generation to the other over the course of time and without being disputed.

Most of Bertrand Russell's generation was brought up with the saying: 'Satan finds some mischief for idle hands to do'. And as he once said, 'Being a highly virtuous child, I believed all that I was told'. As a consequence, he acquired a conscience which kept him working hard for a long time. However, he says later: 'But although my conscience has controlled my actions, my opinions have undergone a revolution'. But not all of us have or have had the opportunity to experience this change of mind. It illustrates how customs and traditions may develop a particular way of thinking.

One of the deep and highlights reasoning coming from this new perspective of Russell holds that a great deal of harm is being done in the modern world by belief in the virtuousness of work, while the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organized diminution of work. Let me quote his words: 'Modern technique has made it possible to diminish enormously the amount of labour required to secure the necessities of life for everyone. This was made obvious during the war' he argued. And it is in this sense that we have to understand his phrase, 'the morality of work is the morality of slaves, and the modern world has no need of slavery'.

He knew that a wise use of leisure is a product of civilization and education and that is the matter about – although a certain amount of this activity is necessary to our existence is not one of the ends of human life: 'If it were, we should have to consider every

navvy superior to Shakespeare' he used to say. But he knew also that the idea that the poor should have leisure has always been shocking to the rich. In the past, there was a small leisure class and a larger working class. The first one enjoyed advantages for which there was no basis in social justice and this necessarily made it oppressive, limited its sympathies, and caused it to invent theories by which to justify its privileges.

To conclude, I am sure there are many other reasons that could be exposed in order to clarify which and how many stereotypes are hidden behind what it seems to be an attempt to demystify the Spanish ones. For instance, taking into account the issue about the machismo among Spaniards, it is obvious that the reasoning developed in the text is meaningless, we could always find a country or a group of them which are better ranked – Norway and Iceland, for instance - or worse – Yemen, Chad and Pakistan, for example - in the 'machismo scale' so that we may deduce a biased conclusion about the position of the country in question. That is, it depends on the country I decide to introduce - or not, because it is not always exempt from political interests – in the comparison. Beside, statistics also depend on demographic factors as the number of men and women that live in each country involved in the comparison.

Inspired by

Russell, Bertrand (1932) "In Praise of Idleness", chapter 1, pp. 1-15. It is part of the book published in 1935 and titled *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 171 pp.