

**The Cold War**  
**and the Intellectual History of the Late Twentieth Century**

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**DRAFT: COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS ARE WELCOME;**

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*You know that it is less the facts that I am looking for than the traces of the movement of ideas and sentiments. It is that above all that I want to paint....the difficulties are immense. The one that most troubles my mind comes from the mixture of history properly so called with historical philosophy. I still do not see how to mix these two things and yet, they must be mixed, for one could say that the first is the canvas and the second the color, and that it is necessary to have both at the same time in order to do the picture.*

Tocqueville to Kagoulay, 1858

In retrospect the mid-1970s seem like the high point of what we might call the crisis of the West – or at least the high point of an acute consciousness of crisis in the West. The famous report to the Trilateral Commission claimed that European countries might be in the process of becoming ‘ungovernable’: the oil shock of 1973 had brought the *trente glorieuses* of unprecedented growth and social peace to a definitive end; the hitherto unknown phenomenon of stagflation – combining high unemployment and runaway inflation – seemed there to stay; domestic and international terrorism, from right and left, were on the rise; and, not least, the high levels of social mobilization and political contestation that had begun in the late 1960s continued unabated. Above all, though, there appeared to be a failure of nerve: Alexander Solzhenitsyn declared in his 1978 address to the graduating class at Harvard that ‘a decline in courage may be the most striking feature that an outside observer notices in the West today. The Western world has lost its civic courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, in each government, in each political party...’<sup>1</sup>

How then did the West get from what the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas had called the ‘legitimation crisis of capitalism’ and what Michel Foucault had already announced in the late sixties as ‘the death of man’ (which meant, among many other things, the end of liberal individualism) to the supposedly triumphalist liberalism of a Francis Fukuyama in the late 1980s, to the almost global renaissance of liberal philosophers such as Karl Popper, and to the apparent vindication of apologists for

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<sup>1</sup> *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Ronald Berman (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center), p. 5. He went on to say that ‘such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling and intellectual elites, causing an impression of a loss of courage by the entire society’. Witness, for instance, Giscard d’Estaing claiming that ‘the World is unhappy. It is unhappy because it does not know where it is going, and because it guessed should it know, it would be to discover that it is going towards a catastrophe’. Quoted in Walter Laqueur, *A Continent Asleep: Europe 1970-1978* (New York: Oxford UP, 1979), pp. 13-14.

capitalism, such as Friedrich von Hayek? Was this a case of a rapid ‘liberalization’ especially of European thought, and Western thought more generally – following perhaps the example set by the turn of dissidents in the East to liberalism, as some observers have claimed?<sup>2</sup> Or the victory of a neo-liberal conspiracy which had already begun on Mont Pèlerin in 1945, but whose chief conspirators – Hayek and Milton Friedman -- only conquered intellectual ‘hegemony’ in the 1970s, as critics on the Left have often alleged?<sup>3</sup> And, more interestingly from the perspective of a comprehensive history of the Cold War, what, if anything, was happening *between* East and West during those final years of the conflict? Is there such a thing as a *single* intellectual history -- or at least a single European intellectual history -- of the late twentieth century, when examined from the perspective of the end of the Cold War?

### *‘The Crisis of Democracy’*

‘The Crisis of Democracy’ was the matter-of-fact title of the influential ‘Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission’ published in 1975. The report claimed to respond to a widespread perception of ‘the disintegration of civil order, the breakdown of social discipline, the debility of leaders, and the alienation of citizens’.<sup>4</sup>

The social scientists who had authored it feared a ‘bleak future for democratic

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<sup>2</sup> See Mark Lilla’s seminal essay ‘The Other Velvet Revolution: Continental Liberalism and its Discontents’, in: *Daedalus*, Vol. 123, No. 2 (1994), pp. 129-57.

<sup>3</sup> Bernhard Walpen, *Die offenen Feinde und ihre Gesellschaft: Eine hegemonietheoretische Studie zur Mont Pèlerin Society* (Hamburg: VSA, 2004)

<sup>4</sup> Michel Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 2.

government’; more specifically, they were concerned about an ‘overloading’ of governments by demands emanating from society, and in particular what one of the principal investigators, Samuel Huntington, was to describe as a ‘democratic surge’ afflicting the United States. Too many people wanting too many things *from* government and ultimately also too much participation *in* government made governing increasingly difficult, or so the diagnosis went.

In addition, Michel Crozier, Huntington and Joji Watanuki stated in their introduction that ‘at the present time, a significant challenge comes from the intellectuals and related groups who assert their disgust with the corruption, materialism, and inefficiency of democracy and with the subservience of democratic government to “monopoly capitalism”.’<sup>5</sup> They contrasted the rise of the ‘adversary culture’ of ‘value-oriented intellectuals’ bent on ‘the unmasking and delegitimation of established institutions’ with the presence of ‘increasing numbers of technocratic and policy-oriented intellectuals’.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly enough, while they listed a whole range of challenges – including the already widely debated shift to ‘post-materialist values’ – the supposed weakening of Western democracies appeared as an entirely domestic phenomenon; at the high point of *détente* it seemed to have nothing to do with threats from the Soviet Union and its allies. Consequently, the responses to the ‘crisis of democracy’ were also fashioned in domestic terms.

One possible response was indeed by what the *rapporteurs* for the Trilateral Commission had called the ‘policy-oriented intellectual’. Its greatest late twentieth-century representative was arguably the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann – not

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

because he had vast influence on policy, but because he offered the most coherent and sophisticated theoretical justification for why policy should be shielded from wide-spread participation and essentially be left to technocrats. Luhmann's 'systems theory' – a kind of 'radical functionalist sociology' much influenced by Talcott Parsons, but also older German right-wing social theorists and philosophers – held that modern societies were divided into numerous systems running according to their own logic or 'rationality' (such as the economy, the arts and the government).<sup>7</sup> Systems served above all to reduce complexity; any interference from one system in another was *prima facie* counterproductive; and any expectation that governments could immediately realize 'values' from outside the system of state administration itself was a kind of category mistake. The upshot of Luhmann's theory was that the business of government should be left to bureaucrats – and that social movement-types listening to nothing but their conscience could inflict much damage on modern societies, if governments acceded to their misguided demands and illusionary hopes for participation in decision-making. Such a diagnosis often went along with contempt for members of the 'adversary culture'. Luhmann's teacher, the sociologist Helmut Schelsky, for instance, derided intellectuals as a 'new class of high priests' trying to gain power, while 'others are actually doing the work'.<sup>8</sup>

Luhmann eventually became the prime theoretical adversary of Jürgen Habermas, the most prominent heir to the German Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, who had taken his distance from the '68 rebels, but tried to hold on to, broadly speaking, Social Democratic hopes – including plans for further democratizing the state administration

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<sup>7</sup> Chris Thornhill, *Political Theory in Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> Helmut Schelsky, *Die Arbeit tun die anderen: Klassenkampf und Priesterherrschaft der Intellektuellen* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1975). Schelsky's analysis was much influenced by Weber and Sorel.

and the economy.<sup>9</sup> Habermas became arguably the most important philosopher for the environmental and feminist social movements that emerged in the 1970s alongside the revolutionary *groupuscules* and esoteric political splinter groups that the aftermath of '68 had produced. His primary concern was the protection of the integrity of what he called 'the lifeworld', that is, the realm of family and other interpersonal relations, as well as civil society, which ought to be shielded from the instrumental logic of the market and of public administration. The market and the state would always, so Habermas, have a tendency to 'colonize' the lifeworld; but social movements, pressure groups and, not least, intellectuals in the public sphere could resist such a colonization – and perhaps even achieve gradual de-colonization.

### *France's Antitotalitarian Moment*

A suspicion of bureaucracy and a demand for personal (as well as group) autonomy animated a whole range of intellectuals who had emerged from the upheavals of the late 1960s, but who did not want to subscribe either to orthodox Marxism (they viewed the established Communist parties in Western Europe as themselves prime examples of bureaucratic ossification) or invest in Maoist or other such exotic hopes. Older philosophers such as Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort in France, who had emerged from a Trotskyist background, advanced a critique of bureaucracy under state socialism, which could also inspire younger intellectuals looking for new forms of social

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<sup>9</sup> See the direct confrontation in Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1971).

organization with autonomy as a central value. One of the watchwords of the mid- to late 1970s was *autogestion* (roughly: self-management), which was theorized in France by members of what came to be called *la deuxième gauche*.<sup>10</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon and other intellectuals around the non-Communist, originally Christian trade union CFDT advanced a political agenda that was meant to invigorate the French Socialist Party, but also draw a clear line vis-à-vis the Communists.

The debates around *autogestion* eventually became enmeshed with the wide-ranging disputes about totalitarianism in mid-1970s France. By the early 1970s, the myths of Gaullism had been shattered – almost logically, it seemed, it was now time for what had always been Gaullism’s great adversary in the Fifth Republic – Communism – to come under attack. Politically and culturally, the two had divided up the Republic, so to speak, with the French Communist Party not just offering a ‘counter-culture’, but even a kind of potential ‘counter-state’.<sup>11</sup> The major myth of Gaullism had of course been the general himself, who left with a whimper in 1969, having lost what many considered a minor referendum – but then again there was a certain logic to the idea that a man who was supposed to embody *la France* could not possibly lose a popular vote.

Communism’s myths had been more of a moral and intellectual nature, rather than personal; and so it was only logical that left-wing intellectuals themselves had to dismantle them. All claimed to have been shaken out of their ideological slumber by what came to be known as the *choc Soljenitsyne*; arguably nowhere else did the publication of the *Archipelago Gulag* have such an impact as in the Hexagon – but not

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Rocard claimed in retrospect that the PSU had picked up the slogan *autogestion* from the CFDT in the chemical industries in 1965 or 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Grémion, *Modernisation et progressisme: Fin d’une époque 1968-1981* (Paris: Editions Esprit, 2005)

because what Solzhenitsyn described had been completely unknown. Rather, the attack on Communism was prompted at least partially by very concrete domestic concerns: In 1972 François Mitterrand had created the Union of the Left between Communists and Socialists, with a five-year 'Common Programme' for governing. In the run-up to the 1978 elections, there was a real sense that a Communist-Socialist government might actually come to power, which made it all the more important who would win the battle for political – and intellectual -- dominance within the Socialist-Communist coalition. It was thus no accident that a new intellectual anti-communism – though phrased in the language of 'antitotalitarianism' -- peaked at precisely this moment: the reaction of the Communist Party to Solzhenitsyn (PCF leader Georges Marchais claimed that the Russian dissident could of course publish in a socialist France – 'if he found a publisher') was widely interpreted as a sign of its authoritarianism; left-wing magazines like *Esprit* argued forcefully that the PCF had not really broken with its Stalinist past and that the Common Programme proposed a far too state-centric approach to building socialism; last, but indeed least, the so-called New Philosophers burst onto the scene.

Young and telegenic André Glucksmann and Bernard Henri-Lévy produced a string of bestsellers, much feted in popular magazines and on the small screen, in which they argued that socialism and Marxism and in fact all political thinking inspired by Hegel was fatally contaminated with authoritarianism. Especially the ex-Maoist Glucksmann appeared as strident in his condemnation of more or less all recent philosophy, as he had previously been in his endorsement of the Little Red Book. His polemic culminated in the notion that 'to think is to dominate', while Lévy exclaimed that the gulag was simply 'the Enlightenment minus tolerance'. Moreover, an opposition

to the state and all forms of power as well as a thorough-going historical pessimism pervaded the literary output of the New Philosophers – to the extent that older liberals like Raymond Aron consciously distanced themselves from *les nouveaux philosophes*, who they suspected of a black-and-white thinking, where black and white had simply changed places.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, more serious thinkers were moving in a similar direction. The historian François Furet, a brilliant organizer and institution-builder no less than an outstanding historian, relentlessly attacked Marxist interpretations of the French Revolution; he argued that totalitarianism had been present in the Revolution from the very start and that the Marxists were right to draw a direct line from 1789 to 1917 – except that the continuity in question was one of terrorism and even totalitarianism. He claimed that ‘the work of Solzhenitsyn raised the question of the gulag everywhere in the depths of the revolutionary design.... Today the gulag leads to a rethinking of the Terror by virtue of an identity in their projects’.<sup>13</sup>

So the revolutionary imagination seemed to have been depleted: the Russian Revolution was no longer the legitimate heir of the Jacobins; rather, parts of the French Revolution had now retroactively been discredited by Stalinism; and revolutions elsewhere in the world – China and Cuba in particular – had lost their glow. As Michel Foucault put it in 1977:

For the first time, the left, faced with what has just happened in China, this

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Aron, ‘Pour le Progrès: Après la chute des idoles’, in: *Commentaire*, Vol. 1 (1978), pp. 233-243.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: France’s Antitotalitarian Moment* (New York: Berghahn, 2004), pp. 105-6.

entire body of thought of the European left, this revolutionary European thought which had its points of reference in the entire world and elaborated them in a determinate fashion, thus a thought that was oriented toward things that were situated outside itself, this thought has lost the historical reference-points that it previously found in other parts of the world. It has lost its concrete points of support.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike in Britain, market-oriented libertarianism was to make no inroads into the political imagination in France; but something that can meaningfully be described as liberalism did. Sartre died in 1980 and with him a certain model of the universal intellectual who can speak on anything, based purely on his moral stature. Aron, the sceptic, the sometimes pedantic-seeming academic and, above all, the anti-Sartre, enjoyed a late and gratifying moment of recognition when his *Mémoires* appeared in 1982. What at least two generations of French intellectuals had taken as a moral-political catechism – that it was better to be wrong with Sartre than right with Aron – seemed to have been revoked on the Left Bank.

Human rights came to the forefront – even if, soon after, it was already questioned whether by themselves human rights would actually be sufficient to constitute a positive political programme. Marcel Gauchet, editor of *Le Débat*, which had been launched in 1980 and established itself quickly as France's

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, “Die Folter, das ist die Vernunft“, in: *Literaturmagazin*, no. 8 (December 1977), pp. 60-68. To be sure, this can look like a bit of a glib generalization: not every theorist of revolution was either invested in Marxism or willing to latch onto what might have appeared as new forms of revolutionary action (such as the Iranian revolution); the idiosyncratic Cornelius Castoriadis would be a good example, although arguably his stress on ‘autonomy’ and ‘self-institution’ proved popular, because it could be fused with the political languages of the post-’68 social movements. See ‘L’exigence révolutionnaire (entretien avec Olivier Mongin, Paul Thibaud et Pierre Rosanvallon enregistré le 6 juillet 1976)’, in: *Esprit* (Feb. 1977), pp. 201-30.

premier intellectual magazine, questioned whether human rights were enough; he sought to continue a strong role for the state and what could broadly be called social democracy.<sup>15</sup> Others extended the attack on the Left from orthodox Communism to strands of thought that were often subsumed under the category ‘anti-humanism’: something summed up as ‘’68-thought’ was globally indicted for being insufficiently sensitive to the worth of the human individual. All ’68-philosophers, so the charge went, were really a-moral Nietzscheans who ultimately believed in nothing but power.<sup>16</sup>

Undoubtedly, then, the intellectual climate had changed, although largely for reasons that had more to do with domestic French political factors. Even when Socialists and Communists finally triumphed in 1981 (well after the intellectual ‘anti-totalitarian moment’), rather than realizing anything resembling the Common Programme, or advancing on the road to self-management, François Mitterrand presided over a radical turn-around: under intense pressure from financial markets, he had his premier minister abandon any ambitious welfarist plans in 1984. As it turned out, the age of diminished expectations that had begun in the early 1970s could not be transcended with an act of political will; and both the dream of ever-continuing modernization (shared, after all, by right and left) and the left-wing ideals of ‘progressivism’ had lost its hold. As Tony Judt has pointed out, anti-totalitarianism was not just revived anti-communism or a loss of faith in any vision of violent revolutionary action: it undermined a whole left-wing narrative about the twentieth century, as ‘the traditional “progressive” insistence on treating attacks on Communism as implicit threats to all socially-ameliorative goals – i.e.

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<sup>15</sup> Marcel Gauchet, ‘Les droits de l’homme ne sont pas une politique’, in: *Le Débat*, no. 3 (1980), pp.

<sup>16</sup> Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La pensée 68: Essai sur l’antihumanisme contemporain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988)

the claim that Communism, Socialism, Social Democracy, nationalization, central planning and progressive social engineering were part of a common political project – began to work against itself'.<sup>17</sup>

However, the really important result by the mid- to late 1980s had been the almost complete dismantling of the communist counter-culture – in a way that had no parallel in Italy, which had been equally divided politically-culturally, but between Christian Democrats and Communists, and where contestation – especially among workers themselves – and terrorism (of left and right) continued much longer than in France or Germany.<sup>18</sup> What remained of socialism in France seemed rather uninspired: the more exciting ideals of the *deuxième gauche* were never put into practice, not least because Mitterrand was obsessed with destroying the political chances of Michel Rocard to succeed him as president.

### *The Neoconservative Moment -- in the US and Elsewhere*

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, the 1970s saw the rise of an intellectual phenomenon whose precise character – let alone policy implications – still cause much dispute today: neoconservatism. Neoconservatism emerged from the world of the 'New York intellectuals' – children of poor Jewish immigrants who had gone to City College, joined the anti-Stalinist Left, only then to turn into fierce liberal Cold Warriors, with some joining the Congress for Cultural Freedom. In other words, the milieu from which

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<sup>17</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 561.

<sup>18</sup> For a theoretical reflection, see Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy; trans. Arianna Bove (New York: Verso, 2005).

neoconservatism proper was to emerge had already been through one major experience of political disillusionment. Irving Kristol, for instance, had been a member of the Young People's Socialist League, then went to the army, which, as he put it; 'cured me of socialism. I decided that the proletariat was not my cup of tea, that one couldn't really build socialism with them'.

Kristol, Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer eventually all become successful editors, journalists and university professors – while continuing their anticommunist intellectual combat. All were fiercely proud of America (and its universities) – the country and the institution which had allowed them 'to make it' (to cite a book title by a later neoconservative, Norman Podhoretz).<sup>19</sup> The key moment in the intellectual formation of neoconservatism came with the rise of student radicalism on the one hand, and the failure of the ambitious social programmes associated with Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' on the other. The students appeared to be attacking the very things which intellectuals like Bell and Kristol believed in most: the university -- and the idea of America itself. Partly in response they founded *The Public Interest*; the magazine, while devoting much space to the unintended consequences of policies and taking culture and morality seriously in a way that supposedly rationalist liberalism had not, eschewed any discussion of foreign policy: Vietnam was simply too controversial among a group that could still best be described as disillusioned Social Democrats.

Neoconservatism came into its own – and acquired a name – in the 1970s. Kristol, unlike Bell, decided to support Nixon; he also now used magazines such as *Commentary* and the op-ed page of the *Wall Street Journal* to propound strong doses of American nationalism and a pro-capitalist attitude that erstwhile allies like Bell – who

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<sup>19</sup> Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1967)

still described himself as a democratic socialist – found hard to accept. The term neoconservatism itself was first applied by the Left as a term of opprobrium – but eagerly appropriated by Kristol and others.

Eventually, neoconservatism also developed a distinctive view on foreign policy. In 1979 Georgetown professor Jeane Kirkpatrick, who had started her political career as a Democrat, famously drew a distinction between evil totalitarian regimes, such as the Soviet Union, and right-wing authoritarian ones. She argued that the Carter administration had been blinded by ‘modernization theory’: it interpreted revolutionary violence in countries like Iran and Nicaragua as the birth pangs of modernity, when in fact such countries were turning sharply against the US and possibly in a totalitarian direction, often directly or indirectly supported by the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Carter supposedly adopted a naively moralizing attitude to right-wing autocracies aligned with the US, admonishing them to heed human rights. But, argued Kirkpatrick, ‘only intellectual fashion and the tyranny of Right/Left thinking prevent intelligent men of good will from perceiving the *facts* that traditional authoritarian governments are less repressive than revolutionary autocracies, that they are more susceptible of liberalization, and that they are more compatible with U. S. interests’. This, it seemed, was the most serious charge against Carter: that he recklessly kept ignoring the American national interest.<sup>20</sup> Ronald Reagan appointed Kirkpatrick ambassador to the UN in 1981.

So neoconservatives unashamedly propounded the national interest. But, above all, they exuded optimism. Unlike any European conservatism, they did not have a negative view of human nature; unlike libertarianism, they did not completely reject government beyond some absolute minimum. As an editor of the *Public Interest* was to

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<sup>20</sup> Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, ‘Dictatorships and Double Standards’, in: *Commentary* (November 1979)

point out: where the libertarians subscribed to a kind of primacy of the economic and older American conservatives hankered after a primacy of culture (an aristocratic, Southern culture in particular), the necons thoroughly believed in the ‘primacy of the political’.<sup>21</sup> In other words, statesmen really could make a difference.<sup>22</sup> As Kristol put it, ‘neoconservatism is the first variant of American conservatism in the past century that is in the “American grain”. It is hopeful, not lugubrious; forward-looking, not nostalgic; and its general tone is cheerful, not grim or dyspeptic’. This meant endorsing modern life, broadly speaking, including technology and at least certain aspects of modern culture (but decidedly not any aspect of the counter culture).

To be sure, it wasn’t all optimism. Allan Bloom – who was not a neoconservative in the very narrow sense but managed to write a surprise bestseller which resonated with conservatives of all stripes – saw the US becoming the victim of dangerous relativism in the form of postmodernism and other insidious European imports. American intellectual life, it seemed increasingly, was split between a left wing in thrall to cutting edge-European thought (or what they took cutting-edge European thought to be) and a right that sought to instill pride in the young and boost US nationalism.<sup>23</sup> Bloom’s concluding paragraph to his *Closing of the American Mind* read:

This is the America moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged. Just as in politics the responsibility for the fate of

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<sup>21</sup> Adam Wolfson, ‘Conservatives and Neoconservatives’, in: Irwin Stelzer (ed.), *Neoconservatism* (London: Atlantic, 2004), pp. 215-31.

<sup>22</sup> Though Kristol kept insisting that ‘there is no set of neoconservative beliefs concerning foreign policy, only a set of attitudes derived from historical experience’.

<sup>23</sup> François Cusset, *French theory : Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux Etats-Unis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003)

freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime, so the fate of philosophy in the world has devolved upon our universities, and the two are related as they have never been before. The gravity of our given task is great, and it is very much in doubt how the future will judge our stewardship.<sup>24</sup>

Was neoconservatism an exclusively American phenomenon, as has often been claimed? In one sense, it was not: other countries witnessed the phenomenon of the disillusioned Social Democrat who strongly objected to the New Left and the ‘adversary culture’. In West Germany, for instance, there was Hermann Lübbe, a philosophy professor who had served in Social Democratic governments; Lübbe sought to defend ‘common-sense morality’ and traditional notions of culture against what he thought were the wildly utopian hopes of the ’68 generation. In France, some of the thinkers around *Commentaire* took a similar stance, like Lübbe and his allies defending *bürgerliche*, if not outright Victorian virtues, in the way Gertrude Himmelfarb would in the US. In a sense, it was only in Britain that the particular phenomenon of Social Democrat intellectuals turning right did not really exist – the emergence of Roy Jenkins’ SDP notwithstanding.

### *The End of the Social Democratic Consensus*

It was then, above all, old-style Social Democracy that was under threat in the late 1970s

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<sup>24</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 382.

and the 1980s; the most conservative politician at the time – in the sense of not wanting change – was ‘the right-wing Social Democrat’, according to Ralf Dahrendorf.<sup>25</sup> More precisely, threats came from two sides: on the one hand, there was the New Left and the social movements it had spawned, including the peace movement which was growing rapidly in opposition to the ‘Euro Missiles’. On the other hand, there was what observers alternatively construed as a revival of classical nineteenth-century liberalism or as an entirely novel form of ideology best summed up as libertarianism or ‘neoliberalism’ (to which I’ll turn in the next section). But quite apart from these two threats, there was postmodernism – not a political movement, to be sure, but certainly a political mood characterized by a distrust of ‘grand narratives’ of human progress and the rational collective self-transformations of societies.

The lasting legacies of the New Left were feminism and environmentalism – the former in particular could at least partially be integrated into parties which had understood themselves more or less without saying as ‘productivist’ and male-centred. Environmentalism, however, was often institutionalized separately (in green parties – which in fact initially understood themselves as ‘anti-party parties’, in Petra Kelly’s words), but was over time also at least partly adopted by all parties.<sup>26</sup>

Both feminism and environmentalism were intimately tied to the peace movement: opposition to nuclear war became closely aligned with efforts to end patriarchy and male violence, as well as what Edward Thompson referred to as the

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<sup>25</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, ‘Am Ende des sozialdemokratischen Konsensus? Zur Frage der Legitimität der politischen Macht in der Gegenwart’, in: *Lebenschancen: Anläufe zur sozialen und politischen Theorie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), pp. 147-66.

<sup>26</sup> As Rudolf Bahro put it, environmentalism was like a new ‘magnetic field’ – it thus changed the direction and position of existing parties (although Bahro drew exactly the opposite conclusion from his metaphor: he argued that ‘it is difficult to absorb this into the existing party political system, and so the ecology movement has in fact turned into an alternative type of party’). See Rudolf Bahro, *From Red to Green: Interviews with New Left Review*, trans. Gus Fagan and Richard Hurst (London: Verso, 1984), p. 130.

general ‘exterminism’ of the industrial system.<sup>27</sup> Ecological concerns (or even eco-centrism and what the Norwegian Arne Naes had theorized as ‘deep ecology’) could only be sharpened by the threat of what was often referred to as a ‘nuclear holocaust’. Petra Kelly, for instance, called the anti-nuclear movement ‘an absolute twin of the peace movement’, while Rudolf Bahro insisted that ‘militarism is a natural consequence of the dependence on raw materials of our over-worked production system’.<sup>28</sup> Thus ‘eco-pacifism’ mandated nothing less than what thinkers such as Bahro referred to as ‘industrial disarmament’ – even if it remained unclear what an industrially disarmed society might look like. But, then again, Bahro and others claimed that ‘it is in general wrong to believe that social change can only be achieved if people have first been given a scientific explanation of what precisely can be done’.<sup>29</sup>

Social movements, then, were thriving throughout the 1980s, but their visions were, for the most part, negative, if not outright apocalyptic. As Bahro announced in 1982:

...the plagues of ancient Egypt are upon us, the horsemen of the apocalypse can be heard, the seven deadly sins are visible all around us in the cities of today, where Babel is multiplied a thousand fold. In 1968 the promised Canaan of general emancipation appeared on the horizon, and this time at last for women as well. But almost all of those who believe in this have tacitly come to realise that first of all will come the years in the wilderness. All that is lacking now is the pillar of fire to show us the route

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<sup>27</sup> E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith (eds.), *Protest and Survive* (New York: Monthly Press, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Bahro, *From Red to Green*, p. 138.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

of our exodus.<sup>30</sup>

Very much in the spirit of the times, Jürgen Habermas announced – under title ‘The New Obscurity’ (or *Neue Unübersichtlichkeit*) -- the ‘exhaustion of utopian energies’ in 1985, claiming that the utopias centred on labour and human productivity had conclusively lost their appeal; while Dahrendorf had already declared a few years earlier the end of the ‘Social Democratic Century’.<sup>31</sup> What this meant more prosaically was the loss of any belief in large-scale collective self-transformations of society. A thinker like Habermas saw this ideal – which he identified with the Enlightenment and, broadly speaking, rational progress – as coming under attack from neoconservatives, who apparently believed in a kind of ‘foreshortened’ or ‘arrested’ Enlightenment: capitalism was here to stay for good, and traditional values and culture were to compensate for any damage capitalism might be inflicting on individuals and the ‘lifeworld’ – a kind of consolation through aesthetics. In any event, in the eyes of the neocons (as construed by Habermas) the traditional family and the nation-state were institutions that simply could not be further changed, let alone transcended altogether – they were, in a sense, where the Enlightenment met its institutional limits.

But the Enlightenment also appeared to come under attack from postmodern and post-structuralist thinkers who supposedly denigrated ‘reason’ and represented a dangerous celebration of ‘life’ and raw experience -- in contrast to ‘reason’. Habermas dubbed these thinkers ‘young conservatives’ (as opposed to neoconservatives), and

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<sup>30</sup> Rudolf Bahro, ‘Who can stop the Apocalypse? Or the Task, Substance and Strategy of the Social Movements’, in: *Praxis International*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (1982), pp. 255-67; here p. 255.

<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaates und die Erschöpfung utopischer Energien’, in: *Die Neue Unübersichtlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1985); Dahrendorf, *Lebenschancen*.

explained that

young conservatives appropriate the legacy of aesthetic modernism – an idea of the individual as liberated from all imperatives of utility, instrumentality, work and ‘other-directedness’. They revel in the spontaneous powers of the imagination, in the immediacy of the affects, and they subscribe to ideas and principles that can only be evoked, rather than discussed: the sovereignty of the individual, the will to power, the Dionysian power of the poetic, or even Heidegger’s Being.

Indeed, drawing primarily on Nietzsche and Heidegger, a number of French thinkers were prominently voicing doubts about what Jean-François Lyotard called ‘grand narratives’ – ideals of rational progress in particular. They also questioned any notion of the self-validating, free-standing subject that supposedly had underpinned metaphysics from Descartes onwards (or perhaps from as far back as Plato). And finally, they insisted that ‘identities’ were always constituted by excluding an ‘other’; and that a proper understanding of history required an appreciation of the past as succession of power struggles. In one sense, then, Habermas was indeed justified in seeing the emergence of postmodernism as yet another symptom of the West’s ‘loss of confidence’ in itself – history could in no way be seen as a narrative of progress (even incremental)<sup>32</sup>. A thoroughgoing relativism seemed all that was left... alongside fragmentation, pastiche, local variation, *bricolage*...and a ‘surfeit of memory’, self-musealization and nostalgia

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., .

as part of what in the eyes of many observers appeared as a kind of collective mood swing away from progressive hopes.<sup>33</sup>

What was little understood outside a narrow French context, however, was that post-structuralism was – obviously, in a sense – a reaction against structuralism, which could easily be understood as a form of determinism.

Ultimately, Habermas and the French theorists shared a great deal more than was apparent at the time: both clung to an ideal of individual human autonomy – except the terms with which that ideal was contrasted could not have been more different. Habermas, the self-declared ‘product of American re-education’ feared a return of vitalism or *Lebensphilosophie*; whereas the French were apprehensive precisely about an oppressive rationalism. Symptomatic was an admission by Michel Foucault who –outrageously, it seemed – had asserted that reason was torture. Pressed by a German interviewer, he conceded that the word *raison*, unlike the German *Vernunft*, had no ethical dimension, but was purely instrumental. Thus ‘for us in French, torture, that is reason. But I understand very well that in German torture cannot be reason.’<sup>34</sup> So much of the supposed epic philosophical battles between modernists (or defenders of the Enlightenment) and postmodernists (or critics of the Enlightenment) had been based on terrible generalizations (such as ‘the Enlightenment’), terrible simplifications and, not least, a few terrible mistranslations.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Charles S. Maier, ‘A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial’, in: *History and Memory*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1993), pp. 136-52.

<sup>34</sup>“Die Folter, das ist die Vernunft”, here 65. The intellectual trajectory of the later Foucault is competently charted in Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0* (New York: Other Press, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Habermas – arguably with the generosity of the philosophical victor – could much later admit that ‘there can be no doubt concerning the healthy influence that postmodernism has had for contemporary debates.

### *The Descent from Mont Pèlerin*

The real threat to Social Democracy was neither neoconservatism – which was not in principle hostile to the welfare state -- nor postmodernism; it was altogether more unexpected, and it was in many ways based on a renewal of ‘utopian energies’ – except that the utopia in question was that of the unrestricted market and the strong state. The rise of libertarianism, ‘neoliberalism’ or what sometimes was also called ‘The New Right’ had begun in the mid-seventies. It would arguably not have happened without Margaret Thatcher and a determined set of policy intellectuals around Ronald Reagan.

It certainly did not emerge from nowhere: Ludwig von Mises had argued as early as the 1920s that ‘only ideas can overcome ideas and it is only *ideas* of Capitalism and of Liberalism that can overcome Socialism’. Friedrich von Hayek had started his contribution to such an overcoming with direct attacks on Keynes in specialized journals in the 1930s, but then had branched out into popular political pamphleteering with his 1944 bestseller *Road to Serfdom* (which had been adapted for an American audience by *Reader’s Digest*). In 1947 he had founded the Mont Pèlerin Society – a self-described ‘nonorganisation of individuals’<sup>36</sup>, but de facto an elite advance troop in the war of ideas; Hayek claimed that ‘we must raise and train an army of fighters for freedom’. And the clarion call for libertarian ‘second-hand dealers in ideas’ had been heard both in the US

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The critique of a form of reason that attributes a teleological design to history as a whole is just as convincing as the critiques of the ridiculous pretension of eliminating all social alienation.’ See Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, trans. Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 146

<sup>36</sup> R. M. Hartwell, *A History of the Mont Pèlerin Society* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), xiii.

and in Britain: think-tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs in London were established and eventually gained influence on major politicians such as Sir Keith Joseph. Moreover, by the early 1970s Hayek himself was no longer seen as a kind of intellectual crank, as had been the case during the heyday of Keynesianism. He received the Nobel Prize (though it was suspected he was mostly chosen to ‘balance’ the socialist Gunnar Myrdal), and became a major influence in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America (a Guatemalan university named itself after him).

His master idea, to put it crudely, was that a centrally directed economy could not make use of the tacit and socially dispersed knowledge of individuals, while a market economy could. Economic planning, he claimed in *The Road to Serfdom*, would have totalitarian domination at least as an unintended consequence. In particular, he argued that Western societies were as much in danger because of their well-meaning friends as they were in danger because of the ignorance of their enemies: socialists would build a totalitarian society, because it was implied in any plan centrally to direct a society and thereby necessarily impose a conception of the good life. But while Hayek in 1944 was still rather gloomy about the future of the West, he later argued that socialism had probably peaked with the British Labour Government 1945-1951.

Hayek saw himself as rehabilitating a classical nineteenth-century conception of liberalism; he lauded the rule of law, and argued that the limits, rather than the source, of political rule were normatively decisive. A staunch methodological individualist, he inspired Margaret Thatcher’s famous saying that there was no such thing as society (‘There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first’), in an interview

with a journalist from *Woman's Own* in 1987.

But he also turned out to be an advocate of the strong state, especially a state that was able to resist the demands emanating from society – in other words, special interest groups. He even argued for a new constitutional settlement ensuring that only universal laws (that is, not serving special interests) would be enacted and individual liberty maximized. In particular, he had in mind the creation of an upper house with a small membership – ‘an assembly of men and women elected at a relatively mature age for fairly long periods, such as fifteen years, so that they would not be concerned about being re-elected’.<sup>37</sup> In short: Hayek’s thought proved popular, because it so clearly appeared to offer a solution to the ‘governability crisis’ of the 1970s. But, importantly, it also proved influential among dissidents east of the Iron Curtain: ‘liberalism’ came to be identified with Hayek much more than with John Rawls, for instance; in fact, Hayek turned into an almost iconic figure for intellectuals like Václav Klaus.

In the end, libertarianism turned out to be vastly more influential in the US than in Europe, even if some of the most important theorists in the US – von Mises, von Hayek – had of course been European. Simply put, it was a fit with a political culture that always had a place for the ideals of rugged individualism. But, interestingly, the American version of libertarianism was also at the same time more popular (or perhaps populist) *and* more philosophically grounded: Only in America was there a ten-part television series on ‘Free to Choose’ by Milton Friedman; only in America did libertarian novels like those of Ayn Rand become bestsellers; and only in America could there be a viable trade in Mises t-shirts. But it was also more systematically developed philosophically: Robert Nozick’s 1974 *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* was a libertarian answer to John

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<sup>37</sup> Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*...

Rawls' social democratic *Theory of Justice* that argued from first principles – and that found no equivalent in Europe. If anything, in Europe Hayekian liberalism was often still cloaked in the language of the Social Democratic consensus. In 1975, for instance, Keith Joseph claimed that ‘the objective for our lifetime, as I have come to see it, is embourgeoisement’; he then went on to explain that ‘our idea of the good life, the end product, and of embourgeoisement – in the sense of life-style, behaviour pattern and value-structure – has much in common with that traditionally held by Social Democrats, however we may differ about the kind of social economic structure best capable of bringing about and sustaining the state of affairs we desire’.<sup>38</sup> Even more so in continental Europe was there a sense that the achievements of the Social Democratic consensus had to be preserved – and Ralf Dahrendorf was far from being the only intellectual who felt that ‘the consensus is in a certain sense the most in terms of progress that history has ever seen’.<sup>39</sup> Much more so than in Thatcherite Britain or Reaganesque America, even nominally conservative politicians agreed that things should change only in such a way that everything could essentially stay the same. But even if achievements were to be preserved, that was now to happen without what Dahrendorf called the ‘syndrom of social democratic values’.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Reversing the Trend: A Critical Re-appraisal of Conservative economic and social policies – Seven Speeches by the Rt. Hon. Sir Keith Joseph Bt. MP* (Chichester: Barry Rose, 1975), p. 55 and p. 56.

<sup>39</sup> Dahrendorf, *Lebenschancen*, p. 150

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Politics of Antipolitics under Post-Totalitarianism*

The question whether intellectuals still mattered politically continued to be widely debated in the West during the last decades of the twentieth century. It could hardly be doubted, though, that they mattered in Central and Eastern Europe. Their dissident strategy from the mid-1970s onwards was based on what appeared to be an idea both of breathtaking simplicity and sheer genius: they wanted to take their regimes at their word, especially after socialist governments had signed the Helsinki Accords of 1975.<sup>41</sup> For instance, Charter 77, a motley group of reform Communists, Trotskyists, Catholic conservatives and assorted philosophical anti-modernists, sought to subscribe to a strict legal positivism and merely ‘help’ the Czechoslovak state to implement the Accords. As Václav Benda, a leading Czech dissident, put it, ‘this tactic of taking the authorities at their word is, in itself, a shrewd ploy’.<sup>42</sup> Rights talk reminded everyone about very their absence; but this was less in order to engage the regimes, as to ‘talk past them’.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, the establishment of political organizations outside the various communist and socialist parties and their offshoots was strictly forbidden. So, almost by definition, any groups or associations being formed had to present themselves as ‘a-political’ or perhaps even ‘anti-political’. This also made conceptual sense, as the regimes were uniformly described by the dissidents as ‘totalitarian’ – that is, trying to monopolize the political. The statement ‘it is supremely ironic that just at the moment when the concept of “totalitarianism” was losing its plausibility in the West, it was

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<sup>41</sup> It’s worth remembering that dissidents did not call themselves dissidents, for the most part.

<sup>42</sup> Václav Benda, ‘The Parallel “*Polis*”’, in: *Civic Freedom in Central Europe: Voices from Czechoslovakia*, ed. H. Gordon Skilling and Paul Wilson (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 35-41; here p. 35

<sup>43</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, p. 567.

helping to fuel democratic activism in the East' needs to be qualified, though – as we saw earlier, antitotalitarianism became central for French left-wing intellectuals in the mid-1970s and was also to make a comeback with older liberal antitotalitarian thinkers such as Jean-François Revel in France and Karl Dietrich Bracher in Germany who strenuously opposed the peace movement because of its alleged blindness to the threats emanating from a totalitarian Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup>

In fact, the dissidents shared more concerns with intellectuals in the West than is usually acknowledged. One was the idea that a 'lifeworld' of undamaged interpersonal relations could be recovered or protected even under totalitarianism. This intuition was particularly important in the thought of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. Patočka had emerged from the phenomenological school and had studied with both Husserl and Heidegger; however, rather than going along with Heidegger's general suspicion of humanism, Patočka attempted to 'humanize' Heidegger and use his ideas in the service of a vision of individual dignity. Patočka appeared to present phenomenology as holding the promise of personal transformation, even of a kind philosophical salvation in the face of terrible political circumstances. Central was the notion of 'care for the soul', which Patočka viewed as a distinctive European idea going back to Plato, and which meant both a resistance to a kind of self-forgetting in everyday business and a refusal of violent attempts to transcend everydayness, such as in war.<sup>45</sup> He also formulated the ideal of a 'community of the shaken' in the face of totalitarianism; and insisted on the specifically moral – again, as opposed to political – character of dissidence, claiming that morality 'is

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<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey C. Isaac, 'Critics of totalitarianism', in: Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), pp. 181-201; here p. 196. See Jean-François Revel, *La tentation totalitaire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976) and Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Das Zeitalter der Ideologien* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982).

<sup>45</sup> Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Peter Lom (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002)

not here to make society work, but so that man can be man'. As one of the first spokesmen for Charter 77, he was arrested by the Czech secret police and died after a number of severe interrogations. Infamously, the authorities would try to disrupt his funeral with a motocross-race right next to the cemetery and a helicopter hovering above.

But the dissidents' voices could no longer be drowned out or silenced. Václav Havel, who described himself as 'a philosophically inclined literary man', carried forward Patočka's legacy, also drawing on Heidegger to formulate a comprehensive critique of modernity and human beings' dependence on technology in particular – a critique that was supposed to be applicable to the West as much as the East.<sup>46</sup> Like Solzhenitsyn at Harvard, Havel opposed 'rationalist humanism', 'the proclaimed and practiced autonomy of man from any higher force above him', or simply: 'anthropocentricity'.<sup>47</sup> In the end, Havel saw state socialism as just a more extreme or uglier expression of modernity's essence; in the same vein, Solzhenitsyn claimed that 'this is the essence of the crisis: the split in the world is less terrifying than the similarity of the disease afflicting its main societies'.<sup>48</sup>

Here was also another sense of 'antipolitics' – in the form of opposition to power politics in East and West – and especially power politics with nuclear weapons. As György Konrád put it:

Antipolitics strives to put politics in its place and make sure it stays there, never overstepping its proper office of defending and refining the rules of

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<sup>46</sup> Aviezer Tucker, *Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

the game of civil society. Antipolitics is the ethos of civil society, and civil society is the antithesis of military society. There are more or less militarized societies – societies under the sway of nation-states whose officials consider total war one of the possible moves in the game. Thus military society is the reality, civil society is a utopia.<sup>49</sup>

More important than any more or less wholesale condemnation of modernity, however, was Havel's famous argument in 'The Power of the Powerless' that even under the conditions of what he now described as 'post-totalitarianism' individuals could start 'living in truth' if they stopped going through the ideological motions that the regime prescribed.<sup>50</sup> Havel's greengrocer who puts out a sign saying 'Workers of the world, unite!' without any real conviction became one of the most powerful symbols for the hollowness of the regimes – and the cynical complicity of their subjects -- in Central and Eastern Europe. By the same token, however, Havel had shown that despite the apparent 'auto-totally' of the system, the regimes were in fact extremely fragile.

In one sense Havel was to take anti-politics to an extreme which would alienate more traditional liberal democrats: in his view, restoration of parliamentary democracy was to be merely a first step that had to be followed by an existential revolution and the 'restoration of the order of being'. Rather than copying existing models in the West, the goal was a 'post-democracy', characterized, above all, by the absence of political parties. Yet it would be wrong to think that all 'anti-politics' was anti-institutional per se. One of

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<sup>49</sup> György Konrád, *Antipolitics: An Essay*, trans. Richard E. Allen (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, Javonovich, 1984), p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> Václav Havel, 'The Power of the powerless', in: *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1985), pp. 23-96.

the most influential ideas among the dissidents was to create what Václav Benda had termed ‘the parallel polis’, or what Adam Michnik had theorized as a ‘New Evolutionism’. Institutions with very concrete purposes parallel to the state would be created within a fledgling civil society: workers’ defense committees, most prominently with the *Komitet Obrony Robotników* (KOR) in Poland, underground trade unions, ‘flying universities’, organizations supporting the poor (such as Hungary’s *Szegényeket Támogató Alap* – a provocation, of course, in a socialist country where poverty was supposed to have been eliminated), but also genuine countercultural groups and social movements dealing, for instance, with the horrendous environmental consequences of state socialism.

Demands for ‘truth-telling’ and ‘truth-living’ against a background of high European philosophy were thus complemented by much more concrete action and limited, practical goals pursued by an ever proliferating number of civic groups and associations.<sup>51</sup> As Michnik had put it, the point was to ‘give directives to the people on how to behave, not to the powers on how to reform themselves’.<sup>52</sup> Benda in turn summarized the strategy by saying that ‘we join forces in creating, slowly but surely, parallel structures that are capable, to a limited degree at least, of supplementing the generally beneficial and necessary functions that are missing in the existing structures, and where possible, to use those structures, to humanize them.’<sup>53</sup>

Opposition could also take playful forms, and was, at any rate, animated by a whole range of different political ideas: some outright nationalist, some religious, some

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<sup>51</sup> This seems to me more accurate than to say that the generation of ‘truth-teller’s had been superseded altogether. Cf. Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Noel O’Sullivan, *European Political Thought since 1945* (Palgrave, 2004). pp. 167-8.

<sup>53</sup> Benda, ‘The Parallel “Polis”’, p. 36.

purely focused on a kind of human rights universalism. Opposition movements often reflected long-standing splits and cleavages in different countries' intellectual scenes and political cultures more broadly: Hungary, for instance, saw the emergence of an opposition divided between 'democrat-urbanists' and 'populist-nationalists'.<sup>54</sup> In such circumstances, it was all the more important that intellectual figures could be found whose ideas were capable of integrating or at least appealing to different groups. In the Hungarian case, István Bibó – or rather, the memory of István Bibó -- performed such a role: Bibó had identified distinctive Central European traditions, which at the same time could be construed as liberal and as democratic. Put differently: at least for a moment, nationalism and liberalism could clearly come together in the demand for popular sovereignty and territorial independence.

### *A Late Liberal Triumph?*

In retrospect it seems that the 1980s were, above all, a decade of renewed confidence and optimism leading right up to Francis Fukuyama's 1989 thesis about the end of history: it was not just morning in America, as Ronald Reagan's ad for re-election in 1984 had asserted; it was a new dawn for the West as a whole. Yet it is easily forgotten that self-doubt still kept shadowing much of the decade: in 1988 anxieties about the world role of the United States and the decline of the West could still make Paul Kennedy's *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* into a major bestseller. Moreover, the consumerism and

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<sup>54</sup> Ignác Romsics, *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (Budapest: Corvina, 1999), p. 415.

hedonism (and, yes, cynicism) of the eighties could just as easily give occasion for diagnoses of decadence – after all, under Ronald Reagan the US had become the world’s largest debtor. And the fears of nuclear or environmental collapse which had really sustained the passionate politics of the peace movement only slowly subsided in the West, after Gorbachev committed to winding down the Cold War.

Also, Fukuyama’s ‘End of History’ was in fact by no means the naïve liberal triumphalism it has so often been made out to be in retrospect – and as it has been subject to endless ridicule. Fukuyama, after all, did not predict the end of all conflict and violence; rather, he asserted that there was, in the long run, no attractive alternative way of life or way of organizing human collectives that could rival liberal democracy.<sup>55</sup> He predicted that the world was going to go the way of post-Hitler – that is, ‘post-ideological’ and therefore ‘post-historical’ – Western Europe, and that there would in all likelihood be a “Common-Marketization” of international relations’.<sup>56</sup>

Fukuyama was not afraid of asserting what both the postmoderns and the methodological individualism of Hayek and other libertarians had allegedly discredited: a ‘grand narrative’. His could at first sight seem like a mere restatement of modernization theory – and its attendant sentiments, summed up beautifully in 1959 by Edward Shils in saying that “modern” means being western without the onus of following the West.’<sup>57</sup> But not for nothing had Fukuyama been a student of Alan Bloom, who had in turn been influenced by the French Hegelian (and Russian émigré) Alexandre Kojève. Just as on that drizzly June morning in 1978 the ghosts of Dostoevsky and Pobedonostsev appeared

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<sup>55</sup> Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, in: *The National Interest*, no. 16 (summer 1989), pp. 3-18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003), p. 2.

to be standing behind Solzhenitsyn at Harvard, the erstwhile Alexander Kojevnikoff was looming behind the State Department official's theses on the philosophy of history. Not least, Fukuyama's account was suffused with the very cultural pessimism that had animated Bloom: were liberal democracies to be populated by Nietzschean 'last men', that is, docile, self-satisfied, mediocre, utterly un-heroic bourgeois philistines -- and thus falling far short of what human beings could be? As Fukuyama put it: 'the end of history will be a very sad time....In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history'.<sup>58</sup>

1989 was an *annus mirabilis*. But it was also the year of Tiananmen. It was also the year of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie. And it was the year of altogether different peaceful transition against the odds: that of the Iranian regime, after the death of its charismatic leader Ayatollah Khomeini. Were there perhaps challenges to liberal democracy left, or could one confidently assert with Fukuyama that 'our task is not to answer exhaustively the challenges to liberalism promoted by every crackpot messiah around the world, but only those that are embodied in important social or political forces and movements, and which are therefore part of world history'?<sup>59</sup> The questions were already there at the end of what Bracher, the German liberal antitotalitarian, had called 'the age of ideologies' -- and at the hopeful dawn of the 'new world order'. They are still very much with us.

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<sup>58</sup> But one could also ask whether liberal democracy in fact secure, if the only political framework in which democracy had appeared in the modern world -- namely the nation-state -- seemed to be decisively weakened, if not dissolved altogether by globalization? See Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *La Fin de la Démocratie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993)

<sup>59</sup> Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', p. 9.