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ON THE IMPERFECTION OF REGIMES

I have come now to the last two chapters. First of all, I shall unravel the meaning of the difference between the two kinds of regime, then I shall try to situate this difference in history; in other words, the analysis will be static and then dynamic.

The antithesis between the constitutional-pluralistic regime and the monopolistic regime can be explained in four different ways: antithesis between *competition* and *monopoly*; between the *constitution* and the *revolution*; between the *pluralism of social groups* and *bureaucratic absolutism* and, finally, between the *state with parties* and the *party-state* (this last antithesis can be translated by secular-state and ideological state).

The destruction between competition and monopoly is part of the vocabulary of political economy. It seems to me that it can be used elsewhere, but only with some reservations.

In the political order, as in the economic one, the problem is how privileges which are necessarily scarce are to be shared out. Not everyone can become a deputy or a minister. The competition for political benefits can be compared to the competition for wealth.

However, the comparison is not absolutely valid. In the strict meaning of the term, there is no free competition in politics. An economist would say that political competition is always oligopolistic. A few individuals or groups compete for benefits, of which the most important is to have a share in power. The best conducted politics lead to oligopoly or duopoly, the rivalry of two parties. The more officially competition is organized, the less democratic it is, in one sense; the less, the ordinary citizen has a choice. In the case of a duopoly, he must opt for one of two parties.

The French system, which is organized, is, in a way, a perfect democracy, for it gives the greatest number of people the widest choice. There are so many possible choices that no collective decisions emerge.

Political competition, no matter how many groups or parties there may be, takes on a different meaning according to the organization of the parties themselves. Once again, within the parties, there is competition, a duopoly or oligopoly and the internal structure of the parties competes and often alters the structure of the regime which is defined by relations between the parties. At one extreme, the party is embodied in an all-powerful individual and at the other in competition for functions, which are as free as possible.

The two following concepts, *constitution* and *revolution*, are borrowed, not from political economy, but from juridical terminology.

The notion of constitutionality has several meanings. The organization of competition for the exercise of power and the subjugation of this competition to precise rules is constitutional. Another, probably more important, form of constitutionality is the subordination of governmental decisions to these rules. In order to promulgate a law, those in power in a constitutional system need the intervention of other bodies. In an authoritarian system, a decision taken by the governors automatically becomes law. It can happen that any whim of an individual can become law. A striking example of this was the suppression on 30 June 1934 by Hitler of a plot or of a pseudo-plot; Hitler had the conspirators or pseudo-conspirators put to death. After this had been done, a law was passed according to which these summary executions were made legal. A retrospective constitutionality was conferred on summary executions, thus combining the arbitrariness of the deed with the comedy of law (retroactive).

The constitutional state in its relations with individuals is neither judge nor partisan; anyone who is arrested and ill-treated has or should have the opportunity to appeal to impartial courts against officials who may have been guilty of an infringement of the law; or again, anyone whose interests have been damaged by an administrative decree can appeal to a juridical body, to ordinary or administrative courts. Bodies, independent of the government, empowered to deal with problems arising out of relations between

the state and individuals, constitute a third form of constitutionality.

Revolution, on the other hand, seems to me to be the negation, in its essence, of legality. To be sure, this is a question of definition. A French politician spoke of 'revolution according to the law'. There was, in fact, no revolution but one can imagine changes brought about legally which were so important that, in a wide sense, they could be called revolutionary. It seems to me preferable to retain the authentic meaning of the notion of revolution – a break with legality. In this sense, monopolistic party regimes are essentially revolutionary from the beginning, because they seize power by force. They remain revolutionary, some for a longer and some for a shorter time. Those who govern do not allow themselves to be hamstrung by constitutionality or by the laws. In the Soviet Union, the party in power has promulgated a constitution, or rather three constitutions, but it has never felt tied by constitutional rules. Monopolistic party regimes, especially communist ones, tend to be regimes of permanent revolution. They boast that they are in a state of permanent revolution until they have attained their goals.

The following antithesis, that of the pluralism of social groups and of bureaucratic absolutism, is a repetition of the analysis which I made elsewhere¹ of the social structure of Soviet-type countries and of western-type countries. All societies are heterogeneous, with unequal standards of living. On one side, groups have the right to organize themselves and to become aware of themselves, and to oppose each other openly; on the other, individuals and groups are ranged in a unique hierarchy which in the end is a bureaucratic one.

A bureaucrat, in its sociological use, is not someone in a government office. He is the representative of an anonymous order. He does not act as a person, but as an individual defined by his function, with a set place in the hierarchy. Each one has a specific role and all must obey the rules. The great American companies have bureaucrats who are exactly the same as those in the collectivized Soviet enterprises. Our age has rightly been called the administrative age. The administrative officers are as characteristic of an industrial society as are the factories themselves. Regimes of the Soviet type are not unique in this.

What does authorize us to speak of bureaucratic absolutism is

¹ *La lutte des classes.*

that the labour organizers, engineers and managers are all part of one administration, instead of being spread among autonomous companies, each with its own bureaucracy. All the organizers of collective labour, in a regime of the monopolistic type, are part of a state hierarchy. The same men are permanently employed in business enterprises and in the ministries. But this is not unknown in the West; in all the sectors of a nationalized economy the same man is found as head of a business enterprise and as an official. The characteristic feature of monopolistic party regimes remains nevertheless this combination, with state-control of the bureaucracy carried to its limits. When this point is reached we find a privileged class composed of men who owe everything to the state – their work and their income – and who stand to lose everything if they are dismissed or purged. There is only one way to reach important positions and it is through the state bureaucracy, with all the servility that this entails.

The fourth antithesis is that of the *state with parties* and the *party-state*. In one case, there is a plurality of competing parties, each with its conception of the common good, and, in the other, the single party and its conception of the good which is obligatory for everyone. I have used another expression, meaning more or less the same thing, that of the secular state and the ideological state, which is a transposition, in the age of political struggle, of the opposition between a state tied to a faith and a state with no creed.

The distinction is not a simple one. Every community must have common values, without which it could not exist as a state. In the secular states, the idea of the state tends to be diminished by the constitution itself. The main idea of the constitutional-pluralistic regime is the soundness of the constitution; everyone must agree to settle their disputes according to constitutional rules. The renunciation of violence becomes, so to speak, the ideology of the non-ideological state. By the same token, it must be said that the non-party state, the state of parties, in order to tolerate the pluralism of parties and of doctrines is not devoid of doctrine, because the renunciation of violence is itself a philosophy. It implies confidence in debate, in the possibility of gradual change. Every political system is defined by a particular method of settling social conflicts and of renewing the teams in power. The constitutional-pluralistic regime inclines to a peaceful settlement of conflicts and a regular renewal of the teams.

What conclusion can be drawn from this comparative analysis?

It cannot reasonably be said that one of the systems is good and the other bad, that one represents good and the other evil. Both are imperfect. But the imperfections are not of the same kind. Constitutional-pluralistic regimes are flawed in practice, the flaws in the monopolistic party regime are inherent.

Constitutional-pluralistic regimes are imperfect because they contain either too great a degree of oligarchy or of demagoguery and invariably suffer through the difficulty they have in being effective.

They are imperfect because they contain too much oligarchy, since behind the give-and-take of the parties lies hidden the omnipotence of a minority; they are imperfect because they contain too much demagoguery, since in the party struggle the groups lose sight of collective needs and the sentiment of the common good. They are imperfect because of limited efficiency since, inevitably, a regime, in which all the groups have the right to defend their interests, can seldom take radical steps.

The imperfection of the monopolistic party regime is something different and it is fundamental. If we imagine a homogeneous society, without conflicts of interest between the groups, in a planned economy with public ownership, the monopoly of the party is no longer indispensable. But if public opinion is forbidden to express itself freely, if uniformity of thought is maintained, the society is no longer homogeneous. From the moment when society is no longer homogeneous, the group which imposes its will by force can carry out a task, which is in itself admirable, but it can no longer claim that it has established democracy. In the end it comes down to the question of how to have a perfect society; it contradicts itself when it puts forward the one-party regime as the realization of democracy.

A second argument is based on the Soviet constitution and the elections. If elections in themselves have no significance, if the constitutional forms are devoid of meaning, why does the Soviet regime preserve rites such as elections or convocation of an assembly? Elections are the tribute paid to the virtue of these processes. If one does not believe that power emanates from the governed, what good are elections? The fact that in the Soviet Union elections are held and that there is a parliament proves that the intention or hope of one day restoring these democratic processes has not disappeared. Repression or manipulation is

justified by the circumstances; the society is not yet homogeneous enough. The day when it becomes so, things can be done differently. The result is that the single-party regime, because of the way it acts and the ideas which it professes, is only a transition, perhaps a prolonged and necessary one. It has no justification in itself.

Nor is it often justified by various pragmatic justifications.

Sometimes it is impossible to eliminate oligarchies, without resorting to violence. It may be that the choice lies between a barren conservatism and violence. The resort to force is not an evil in itself. The constitutional-pluralistic regimes of the west which declare themselves to be irreconcilably hostile to the use of violence proclaim by the same token that they are hostile to their ancestors. In England and in France, they put a king to death. The English often wonder whether they were right to do so; the French think less about it; in both cases, a revolution overthrew the traditional authority. In the United States the revolution – the war of liberation – lies also at the root of the constitutional pluralistic regime. Historically, western systems are not against the use of violence, in all circumstances. But violence must be stabilized in constitutional rules. Violence which perpetrates itself condemns itself by the same token.

The monopoly of one party after the revolutionary phase can be useful to the construction of the state. Its justification swings between the two formulae; the vanguard and the teacher. The monopolistic party is the vanguard of the masses, it leads them to the conquest of the future, it selects the best, and the best form an élite which gives a framework to and teaches the others. The monopolistic party is, so to speak, the teacher, who knows the historical truth and shares it with the as yet untaught masses, just as the schoolmaster passes on acquired truths to children.

The real question is to know in what precise cases these justifications can be held to be valid but, on this point, there is no general doctrine, either philosophical or sociological. It is difficult to reach agreement, when it is a question of deciding in what circumstances the use of violence is justified. The victims find it difficult to concede the necessity. Or again, contemporaries find it more difficult to admit its legitimacy than the heirs. But these are obvious statements. The important idea is that there is no general theory which enables one to determine when the use of violence is historically justified. We can follow Kant and state, once and for all,

that the use of force in itself is morally wrong, but on condition that we immediately add, as Kant did, that this morally wrong use of force was indispensable to create states and to raise mankind to reason.

How can the monopolistic party regime really be justified? By its ideal?

This justification can be borrowed from Spengler. Man, a beast of prey, is essentially violent and regimes which try to eliminate violence are thus decadent. The argument is subdivided into two statements: a metaphysical argument which states that violence is in itself, if not actually good, at least inherent in human nature; a historical argument, according to which constitutional egalitarian regimes are the harbingers of decadence.

Men do not live according to Spengler's pessimism, they do not think that they are beasts of prey nor do they wish to be. Spengler would probably reply that this denial only proves how hypocritical men are. This answer, which is not entirely without foundation, is still unconvincing. Men do not want only to be violent; the moral judgments which they make about good and evil decide to some extent how they behave. They cannot govern by means of such a philosophy. Spengler, had he been a politician, would have been forced to be a hypocrite, because mankind does not accept the goal which he set for it.

The doctrine of violence, in the age of thermonuclear bombs, would probably end in the self-destruction of mankind. This is a factual objection, but a strong one; men dedicated to war, with the technical means which are now available to them, would inevitably in the short or long run be condemned to death. Spengler's philosophy, which claims to be realistic, is invalidated by history itself.

Modern societies are rationalist and peaceful. Spengler's anthropological conception is ill-suited to the nature of industrial societies which are defined by public ownership, which demands equality of opportunity for all and at least a rudimentary education for all. The social and egalitarian trend which was, to Spengler and perhaps also to Nietzsche, a sign of decadence is today not so much the result of human decision as it is a social necessity.

The provisional conclusion is that the imperfection of the two systems differs in its nature. Many objections to this conclusion can be made and I shall now discuss them.

The two main objections are:

1. Can a multi-party state fit the purposes of a modern society? When we look at the dullness and the turpitude of the multi-party systems as they are daily reported, can we, in 1958, in France state that the systems, as they are, are essentially part of the societies in which we live?
2. Does not the monopolistic party regime, the one-party state, tend to create its own values, which differ profoundly from those of the multiparty state?

1. Is not the multi-party state in itself as imperfect, when compared to the ideal, as the one-party state?

I am thinking here of a study by Simone Weil on political parties. She advocated the banning of all parties in order to restore democracy to its pure state. Rousseau utterly condemned factions, party organization and parties of citizens within the Republic. True democracy could not, according to him, exist together with established rival groups. I have described the parties as one of the fundamental elements in constitutional-pluralistic regimes. I do not deny that they have faults. If I am ready to make a case for the parties, it is on condition that I do not have to belong to any of them – I am aware of their legitimacy in the abstract without being blind to their concrete faults. If one could imagine that men were different from what they are, then one could envisage a system of free elections and of debate without the citizens being subject to party machines which are always unpleasant and often deplorable. The parties secrete demagoguery; they force their members to think in certain terms, and to defend certain interests. Every politician knows that he cannot at the same time be a party man and a scholar, which is another way of saying that one cannot be a party man and always tell the truth. Those who are as intransigent as was Simone Weil, who thought that every lapse of truth was an absolute evil, will utterly condemn the confused mixture of truth and falsehood which are called party struggles. Yet one must understand why the plurality of parties is essential to modern societies.

First of all, the organization of competition is essential. I have spoken of competition and of monopoly. Using a comparison with economics, I suggested that modern economic societies entailed organized competition in most realms. The political game of the

constitutional-pluralistic regimes is the organization of competition, a competition and organization inevitable in our societies. Rivalry is inevitable because there are no more rulers by divine right or by tradition. Once there were no more hereditary rulers how could legitimate rulers emerge except through competition? If competition is not organized, it is given over to arbitrariness and violence.

In the second place the potential participation of all the citizens in politics is essential. Elections as they are now conducted are perhaps only a degenerate form of the universal participation of the citizens in the state, but they are a symbol which could become a reality.

Another essential factor in a multi-party system is the right to debate what should be done and what is the best constitution for the city. It seems to me, once again, fitting to our subject that all who want to should take part in the debate. I know the objection which Paul Valéry made; politics has long been the art of preventing men from having any say in their own concerns: it has become the art of asking them about matters of which they know nothing. This is a very brilliant simplification but, if men are not asked, they will always be ignorant. This kind of regime creates the hope that by dint of questioning them, they will one day become less ignorant.

The debate inside the parties touches on many interconnected themes. The allocation of collective resources, the way public ownership works, the structure of the political system, lastly all the interests of the community in relation to others are debated.

The debate on the allocation of collective resources or publicly owned enterprises can be settled reasonably and publicly between the citizens. The debate on foreign policy is unfortunately more difficult.

Systems of this kind would come nearer to their ideal if the way of choosing the rulers and the constitution was accepted by everyone. Conflicts about the system itself would be eliminated and reasonable debate between the groups would take place on the fair distribution of resources and on the best way to organize.

Public debate about the economic administration of the regime is not only reasonable but can help towards efficiency. Instead, in troubled times, in which the interests of one community are opposed to those of other communities, there is a risk, that

if every decision is debated openly, all action will be paralysed.

These facts, and many others, are the result of imperfections, inherent in human nature and in present-day social realities; they do not seem to me to invalidate the propositions which I want to support. In the societies of our time, I do not see how the organization of competition, the potential participation of everyone in elections and debate can be eliminated without violating the principles on which our culture is based.

2. Let us pass on now to the second objection to the specific values of monopolistic party regimes.

The specific values which are most frequently invoked are on the one hand genuine liberty, as against formal liberty and, on the other, the creation of a new man who will be born from social enlightenment.

The word 'liberty' is equivocal and has many meanings. Liberty in the vocabulary of Montesquieu means above all security, the guarantee that the citizens will be unmolested if they obey the law. Liberty means the citizen's right to have his own opinions about almost everything without the state dictating what he should think. To Rousseau liberty meant participation in public affairs, through the designation of those who govern in such a way that the individual feels that he is only obeying himself when he obeys the state.

These three notions of liberty are classic in political philosophy; I shall add two more.

A man who has from his early youth the feeling that he is the prisoner of his condition, without any hope of escaping from it and of bettering himself, can feel that he is not free. In our time, liberty implies some social mobility.

Thus, an employee must have the feeling that he is being treated fairly and is not being subjected to arbitrary authority and that he is receiving a reward commensurate with his efforts.

The feeling of being free which is different from the abstract notion clearly depends on various circumstances.

I imagine that a Russian who has been given a scholarship, secondary and then higher education, who has risen in the social scale, who today has a profession, which brings him advantages, feels that he is free, although perhaps he does not enjoy complete security nor the right to have his own opinions on Marxist

philosophy. Opportunities for social advancement can give rise to a feeling of freedom when other kinds of liberty are lacking.

The feeling of being free is also determined by the idea that men have about what is just and what is unjust. When a worker thinks that private ownership is an evil in itself, that the profits of the great enterprises come from the exploitation of the workers, security, the right to read *l'Humanité* every morning and to criticize the government, are of little use to him. He is probably aware that one essential freedom is missing. The feeling of being free is not in proportion to the objective guarantees of freedom, in the first three meanings of the word.

I have added these two last meanings in order to acknowledge that there is some truth in the criticisms which are often levelled at constitutional-pluralistic regimes. They are criticized for affording freedoms which affect more privileged classes, especially the intellectuals, rather than the ordinary man in the street, for not giving to the masses the two ultimate forms of concrete freedom, which are the feeling of having a good position and a fair wage for their work and an opportunity to rise in the social scale.

Security, freedom of thought, a share in sovereignty are not enough. But the fact that constitutional-pluralistic regimes do not assure *all* the freedoms does not mean that the monopolistic-party regimes give another meaning to freedom. Neither do the latter always give the workers the feeling of freedom in work and of a fair return. I do not think that any theoretician of the Communist Party has held that the security of the citizen, freedom of thought and a share in the sovereign power are valid forms of freedom. What they have said, and often rightly, is that other aspects of freedom are not always guaranteed by constitutional-pluralistic regimes.

The result of this argument is that there is not one meaning of freedom for monopolistic party regimes and another for constitutional-pluralistic ones. It is not true that these words have different meanings on either side of the iron curtain. It is true that all the freedoms have not until now been simultaneously assured to all the citizens. Each ideologist pleads his own cause, putting forward what his system gives to men and what the other system refuses. There is at once an intelligible and reasonable argument about the merits and demerits of the different regimes.

Is there a philosophical conception of freedom which would

justify the choice of a regime, in particular of a one-party regime? I do not think so. Philosophers explain often that the highest liberty is part of reason. Reasonably, the individual rises above the particularity and reaches a sort of universality. But this elevation of reason passes necessarily, as Kant and Auguste Comte have said, through the subjection to work and to the law, a subjection which is imposed equally by any regime.

I myself do not believe that any political system in industrial societies creates in reality a new man. Industrial societies, being affluent societies, cannot but arouse in every man the feelings of self-interest and, as the moralists of the past would have said, of egoism. After a short period, the limitation of the income of members of the Communist Party was abandoned. Lenin imposed at first the rule that a member of the Communist Party, the aristocrat of the regime, should not receive a higher salary than a worker. As in so-called bourgeois regimes, a scale of salaries was re-established because it was found that inequality of reward was technically necessary if an industrial economy was to work. Can one at least say that a monopolistic party regime creates a new man because of the faith which it spreads? I am not sure that these kinds of regime can in the long run spread the materialistic faith and do away with religious belief. Can this new man, who must be as selfish as are men in bourgeois societies, be regenerated through loyalty to the doctrine of the state? This allegiance, permanent and complete, is in the long run impossible. What makes the theory attractive and stirs up enthusiasm are the hopes which inspire the members. The moment that doctrine had become the justification for an established state, the discrepancy between the resulting aims and reality did not force the abandonment of the theory – it is possible to hold that the regime is the best of all the possible regimes – but it inevitably weakened and eroded faith. Man, as created by the communist regime, is not a single-minded being interwoven into a creed and a society, he is a dual man, who professes general principles with a varying degree of conviction and knows what he must say, the world being as it is. He is a human being, a man of industrial societies with, in addition, a doctrine in which he believes with a mixture of fanaticism and scepticism.

This is why I do not think that the contrast between the two kinds of regime is a contrast between two fundamentally different

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ideas. We do not have to believe that the modern world is torn between ideologies and is doomed to an inexpiable conflict. It is possible to discriminate between the *visible* imperfections of constitutional-pluralistic regimes and the *essential* imperfection of monopolistic party regimes. But it is possible that in some cases the latter kind of regime can be preferable to the former. In other words, it is possible not to put all regimes on the same plane from the point of view of values but that does not mean that science or philosophy can dictate what must be done at any particular moment. Politicians are right to say that there is no truth of action; this does not mean that the philosophers are wrong when they remind us that peaceful regimes, as such, are better than violent ones.