

# EXCURSUS I

*Richard John Neuhaus on  
Democratic Communism*

The apparent conversion of some Communist parties to the virtues of liberal democracy is today the focus of heated debate in political circles around the world. The Italian Party, under its impressive Secretary-General Enrico Berlinguer, has taken the lead, and is now, in the opinion of many, within reach of power through an "historic compromise" with the ruling (so to speak) Christian Democrats. The French Communists, headed by Georges Marchais, have traditionally been less hospitable to revisionist intellectuals and more subservient to Moscow. But in its 22nd Congress earlier this year the French Party too committed itself to democratic governance and, in a much publicized step, repudiated the doctrine of "the dictatorship of the proletariat." The Spanish Party, under Santiago Carrillo, although still illegal, has similarly declared itself for democracy.

In varying degrees each has expressed criticism of some Soviet policies, and each asserts that socialism in its country will be homemade and not an imitation of the Russian experience. All three parties have publicly committed themselves to freedom of religion, freedom of dissent and expression, and to multiparty political systems. They pledge they will seek power by peaceful and democratic means and, if it is the democratically expressed will of the people, surrender power in the same way. The last point—"democratic alternation"—was most reluctantly agreed to by the French Party, but was insisted upon by the non-Communist Socialists as the price for the "union of the left."

Many democrats view these dramatic developments with a high sense of hope. The prospect of "socialist democracy" revives for some the pre-1968 dream of "socialism with a human face." A theoretical possibility again seems within reach of realization. For those of a dialogical bent this convergence of the best of two worlds holds the promise of ending the nightmare of confrontation. It has been argued that the example of a Communist party leaving power after being defeated in free elections would be a serious blow to the Russian-controlled parties of Eastern Europe. One French Socialist puts the whole question on a more prosaic level. Answering a critic who expressed suspicion of the sudden Communist conversion to democracy, he said: "But you don't understand. We have to work with the Communists. It is the only way we can gain power." Presumably that goal is a self-evident good to which all other considerations are subordinate.

Other European social democrats—notably those in West Germany, Sweden, and Great Britain—are less enthusiastic about the proposed alliance with the Communists. Secretary Kissinger has left no

doubt about U.S. opposition to the prospect of allies sharing power with Communists. Communists in the governments of Italy or France would be seen as a further setback to the morale of all partisans of liberal democracy, for it would undoubtedly be acclaimed as yet another evidence that socialism is the wave of the future. The economic risks for the Western world would also seem to be grave. The Italian Communists, for example, might declare themselves ever so amenable to a "mixed economy" and sympathetic to the interests of capital—and they are very reassuring on these scores—but that does not mean those who control the capital would give the Communists the opportunity to demonstrate their good faith. The memory of Allende in Chile is not encouraging in this connection. Perhaps uppermost in American policy thinking are the implications for NATO and other defense arrangements. The anxieties expressed a year ago about Portuguese Communist participation in NATO deliberations would seem minor compared with the dangers posed by an Italian government vulnerable to Communist policy.

At the heart of the debate is the prudential judgment as to whether the Communist parties can be trusted in their new commitment to democratic values. In favor of trust, we have their declarations, which, it must be acknowledged, are made at the cost of contradicting some of their own most cherished traditions. Essentially five arguments are advanced against taking them at their word. First, in no place where Communists have come to power is there today political or cultural freedom. Of course, what has never happened can happen; but only a fool dismisses the witness of history. Second, Communists have long argued that it is infantile to permit bourgeois honesty to get in the way of using whatever means are necessary to advance the revolution. Lenin was eloquent on the subject. It seems unfair to dismiss Lenin as irrelevant when the Communists insist they are faithful to his teachings. Third, and even more troubling, none of the parties in question has repudiated the "democratic centralism" by which party unanimity is enforced and dissidents expelled. The very facility with which the recent changes of party line were effected raises questions about their sincerity. People who favor freedom of expression and dissent in society might, or so it would seem, begin by opening up the discussion where they already have control, in their own parties.

Fourth, and most troubling, what kind of democrats are they who continue to affirm solidarity with a "socialist camp" that includes, indeed is largely dominated by, the totalitarian states of Russia and China? Fifth and finally, even if these arguments can be met and one trusts the good intentions of the West European Communists, would the parties, once in power, be able to maintain their new commitments in the face of severe economic or political crisis? Confronting the prospect of being turned out of power, is it likely the leaders could maintain

control over party membership or resist intervention from Moscow? There are no reassuring precedents for "democratic alternation" when it comes to Communists in power; there are many such precedents in the case of non-Communist Socialists and others of more long-standing democratic conviction.

The Italian Communists are undoubtedly closest to converting their conversion into governmental power. Many observers believe the "historic compromise" in Italy is almost inevitable. In the rest of Western Europe there are signs of growing antipathy to the prospect of Communists close to power. It is argued by some that U.S. expressions of antipathy only feed the mood of anti-Americanism and play into the hands of the Communists. Others who criticize Secretary Kissinger's posture seem positively to long for a "grand experiment" of cooperation between communism and Western democracy. While the final decision must be made by the Europeans, it seems obvious that the absence of U.S. expressions of concern would seriously weaken the hand of those Europeans who have good reasons for distrusting Communist declarations of intent. As for the grand experiment, at this point it looks more like a reckless readiness to gamble with the lives and freedoms of peoples who in this century have been betrayed too often by totalitarians and the friends of totalitarians.

## EXCURSUS II

### *Wilson Carey McWilliams on The Moving Doctrine*

Very few of those Americans who denounced United States involvement in the Angolan civil war seem to find anything reprehensible in Syria's intervention in Lebanon. There is, if anything, even less interest in Palestinian participation, despite the fact that many of America's critics affect to regard the PLO as a lawful government. But then, military intervention by the PLO in the politics of host states is something of a tradition, if not a necessity, and like many indecencies in the contemporary world has been softened by familiarity.

Syrian intervention, however, is relatively unprecedented and quite extreme. Syria's "mediation" has included threats of invasion, and Syria has virtually dictated the terms of present and future Lebanese politics. Lebanese politicians refer their quarrels to Damascus, and a Syrian proconsul in Beirut would, at least, save them travel expenses. In fact, Syria has transformed Lebanon into a protectorate.

Possibly this is for the best, though I doubt it. But what makes Syrian intervention proper and American involvement impermissible?

The present implicit rule of morality seems to be a

version of the Monroe Doctrine. The essence of the Doctrine, as amended by Theodore Roosevelt's famous corollary, is a geographical "double standard." It is all right for states to interfere in the internal affairs of their neighbors, especially if those neighbors are weaker. "Outsiders," however, are debarred. India, for example, was not wrong in liberating Bangladesh; Hanoi was not aggressing by participating in the war in South Vietnam; Mozambique is correct in regarding racism in Rhodesia as a *causus belli*.

Such a rule would, at least, have a superficial clarity. But I doubt that "world opinion," and especially liberal-left opinion, would approve if *Israel* intervened in Lebanon or if the United States applied such a rule in Latin America (as it did, ten years ago, in the Dominican Republic). The rule of "neighborly intervention" requires an ethnic codicil: One can rightfully intervene only if one's neighbors are "one's own people."

As a rule of morality, that formula is likely to make the historically minded a bit queasy. It brings back memories of Seyss-Inquart and Henlein, the Anschluss and the Sudetenland. It is also a very slippery standard. After all, the Israelis are Semites too. Is religion a test of "one's own"? If so, whence India in Bangladesh? Are the Lebanese Christians without a "people," or would a Christian country be entitled to go to their defense? (That, after all, is how the French got there in the first place.) Who are "our people"? And who decides if some or all of those we decide are "our own" disagree with our decision?

I suspect that the reason that so many Western liberals and leftists find Syria's role acceptable is that it is perceived as anti-Western because it is fundamentally anti-Christian. But they would be outraged if an American, or another Western spokesman, proclaimed that as "Christian countries" we have a right to intervene. This is, after all, a secular age. But I hope it is not so secular as to declare that Christian peoples are fair game, especially in the Middle East. Christianity is also a Middle Eastern religion in origin, with its own claims to protection on indigenous grounds. I am not defending the politics or social policy pursued by Lebanese Christian leaders. I am only contending that to the extent that Christianity is equated with the West, it may become necessary for the West to follow a foreign policy that equates its own interests with those of Christianity. That was Western policy not so long ago, and if we are to agree that those were bad old times, we should have some guarantee that present times are better.

There is an even more fundamental question: Who are "our" neighbors? Humanitarianism, to say nothing of religion, makes that question problematic. In material terms the world is becoming a smaller place, as we all know, and physical proximity is no real indication of "closeness." In the fifties, piqued by U.N. criticism of their regime in the Congo, the Belgians mocked the "salt-water fallacy," the belief that imperialism was possible only when salt water