The Future of Europe

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For the first time since Yalta Europe is in the process of being fundamentally reorganized. The bipolar world of U.S.-USSR hegemony is rapidly passing. As Europeans, we can no longer evade the task of defining the distinct European reality. In the first part of this essay I described some of the new definitions being proposed by those who envision a united and socialist Europe. It is not enough, however, simply to expose the dangerous fallacies in the proposals set forth by others. Conservatives are called upon to clarify the assumptions on which they would build an alternative definition of the European reality.

This task requires that conservative forces in Europe, not yet united in one political party, find new forms of cooperation and communication if they are not to miss their opportunity to help shape the future of Europe. The conservative conviction is to be found in a wide range of organizations, from Britain’s Conservatives, to Christian Democrats, Liberals, Gaullists, and even Social Democrats. They all suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from their public caricature as forces of reaction. In fact, however, the conservative and the reactionary are not only different but diametrically opposite. The reactionary clings to the past, regardless of the value of that which he wants to preserve. He is as incapable of directing himself to the future as is the ultraprogressive incapable of taking seriously the past. A true conservative is shaped by the lively interplay between past and future.

While conservatives know the good that is to be preserved, they are also keenly aware of what must be replaced. Basic to their vision is the proposition that the present does not really exist; it is but a link of continuity between past and future. Like the Equator, it is a mental line. Such a view has a firm hold on the past, from which the future emerges—or, given the apparent rapidity of change, from which the future is launched. Wise policies are policies that recognize a community that exists between the dead, the living and the yet unborn. A sense of historic responsibility compels a conservative to care and courage in preserving, changing and enhancing an inheritance that is held in trust for future generations.

This approach to public policy is more widely held than is generally believed. Its adherents are to be found far beyond the circle of those who identify themselves as conservatives. It provides a meeting place for many, perhaps a majority, on both right and left. In the not too distant future this understanding of history and change may find its own and distinct political expression.

Although nonsectarian, conservative thought, whether articulated on the right or on the left, emerges from a moral and religious inspiration. This does not mean that conservatives favor greater political influence for the clergy. While conservative thought is deeply rooted in our Christian, Judaic and even Islamic inheritance, conservatives repudiate what we in Europe have known as clericalism. The irony is that today one frequently discovers the anti-conservative forces promoting a kind of inverted clericalism. Although churches generally, and widely, have stayed out of politics, we see a good many clergy marching into the political arena under the banners of “engagement in real life,” “relevance,” and frequently of various extremist causes. Clericalism has switched sides but has hardly bettered itself by doing so.

The genuine European conservative also rejects totalitarianism, whether of the left or of the right. In this respect our situation is different from that of many conservatives in other places, notably in Amer-
ica, who fail to recognize the political enemy in those extremists who exploit conservative rhetoric and sensibilities for essentially totalitarian ends. European conservatism never forgets that self-criticism is always in order, that too much applause from only one corner is always dangerous, even when the corner is ours.

In addition to the caricature that associates conservations with clericalism and totalitarianism, a role of youth has been dreadfully misrepresented. The mass media almost always identify youth with far-left causes—an identification that is patently false. It is in the very nature of television, for example, that it must, in order to hold the viewer’s attention, concentrate on what is unusual and out of the ordinary. Thus a small minority of youthful extremists tends to dominate the screens in millions of homes. Students who study, workers who work and clergymen who believe in God are deemed unsuitable material for television programming. Thus when people talk about “youth” in a political context, it is always advisable to remind oneself about the degree to which professional young people are able through the media to capitalize on the sheer accident of age as an argument for a particular political position.

While European conservatives support human freedom, they do not confuse freedom with unbridled economic activity. Since planning is a basic human trait and conservatives are sympathetic to the basics of the human condition, we do not hesitate to endorse economic planning. Of course economic planning can be planning for freedom as, for example, in the French system, or planning for the enforcement of bureaucratic controls. The latter type of planning conservatives reject, since it unduly limits human freedom of action.

The problem of freedom and planning raises the question of future relations with those states living under a Communist, or, as they say, socialist, system. Some contend that close cooperation with such countries is simply out of the question, but we doubt that very much. To be sure, structural relations with these countries must be based on conditions that go beyond economics.

There are three essentials for coexistence. First, these socialist countries must accept the people’s right to self-determination. This is essential to the building of Europe. Second, they must admit free circulation of persons and ideas, thus giving their citizens the opportunity to compare the workings of different political and economic systems. Finally, they must abandon the idea of the irreversibility of socialism. They must be prepared to accept that if it should happen that a majority of the population one day decides in favor of another doctrine, the State is not entitled to use force in order to prevent that choice from being effected. These are the three and only conditions for genuine cooperation that fully respects the internal structures of different systems.

The best proof of the solidity of the regimes established on the other side of the Yalta line would be their acceptance of these three points. If they refuse coexistence on this basis, they are in effect exposing their extreme weakness and admitting that after more than a quarter century of socialist rule a majority of the population has not accepted the blessings of the “new order.”

Dynamic conservatism offers a healthier foundation for political action than is offered either by the Christian Democrats, limited in their appeal by their program, or by the paleo-Liberals, who are so preoccupied by the economic aspects of freedom that they tend to forget its essentially human side. And, of course, the conservative attitude has a fundamental argument with the presumably new socialism associated with the proposals set forth by Mr. Sicco Mansholt, President of the Commission of the European Community, proposals which I have discussed earlier.

Again, the issue of human freedom and self-determination is at the center of the argument. Without putting it so bluntly, the Mansholt thesis assumes that only an omniscient and benevolent bureaucracy will be wise enough to guide the nations toward happiness. The people are as yet immature, we are told, and, if left to their own judgment, will not be able to find the right way. The logic of such reasoning is difficult, for unless we assume a divine right of bureaucracy it is hard to understand why a man who as a private person is rather dull gains superior wisdom when he becomes a civil servant. The conservatives, on the other hand, view people as grown up. We do not deny the need for authority nor the fact that many people have neither intelligence nor interest to chart their own course. Nevertheless, conservatives want to give freedom a chance. They have learned something from history that shows that free people, for all their frequent mistakes and absurdities, have been responsible for some of humankind’s most remarkable achievements.

The conservative’s concept of human freedom assumes that the rights of the individual are paramount and those of the collectivity subordinate. The conservative views man as created in the image of God and hence endowed with “inalienable rights” which the collectivity cannot take from him. The Mansholt socialists clearly affirm the primacy of the collectivity. They celebrate a tribal law and suggest that people have only those rights conceded to them by the bureaucracy. This way lies not liberation but totalitarianism, especially in a time of heightened technological advancement. Clear political thought must be sensitive to the fact that in our time power has lost its natural limitations. Destructive power, both national and international, is no longer bound by nature. Any government not accountable to moral law has today the means to enslave its population.
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Mansholt socialism—if one may use that term—is prying at the lid of a Pandora’s box and may well, albeit unconsciously, prepare the way for the most extreme totalitarian control.

A basic difference between European conservative thought and that represented by Mansholt socialism is in the two views of how society ought to be structured. Mansholt, specifically in his plan for the future of agriculture, reveals the mentality of a bookkeeper unable to comprehend underlying social realities. Only those facets of society immediately relevant to economics seem to him worth preserving. Now in fact many of the complex elements of society are essential to maintaining the inner balance of the order, even though they are not reducible to neat mathematical calculation. This is particularly the case with our farmers, shopkeepers and artisans. From the narrow viewpoint of efficiency expertise, the methods used by these people, even their very existence, seem to be condemned. But the measure of efficiency is, in its narrow realism, grotesquely unrealistic.

Recently in Switzerland the legislature made a significant change in hunting laws. The traditional distinction between useful and harmful animals has been dropped in view of the recognition that even those considered harmful have a function within the natural community; the whole environment suffers when one species is eliminated. A similar principle applies to human society. There is no such thing as an obsolete or expendable social element.

According to Mansholt the number of farmers must, in a more rationally planned era, be drastically reduced. It is clear that agricultural income cannot sustain them at the same economic level as that enjoyed by industrial laborers. And so the Mansholt plan sets a certain size of land below which people should be forced to leave agriculture. The goal is to reduce the percentage of the farming population to about 5 or 6 per cent, in line with the proportion of the GNP supplied by agriculture. As logical as this proposal may seem, it fails to recognize that the farm population is needed primarily to keep a healthy balance within the whole society. Urban life entails tremendous tensions with its rhythm, noise and environmental pollution. A necessary corrective is to reestablish from time to time living contact with the land, and this can only happen when there are enough people outside megalopolis who, living with the rhythm of nature, compel the city dweller to slow down. If the countryside is emptied of population we lose this vital intermediary between the city and the land. In that event, going to the country will be for the city dweller very much like a visit to a museum in order to contemplate the artefacts of a dead civilization. One can observe city dwellers going through a national park and understand that this has little to do with mental or spiritual therapy.

Those who would drastically reduce the farm population are basically imitative of the American experience. To be sure, the American system has given its population history’s highest standard of living, and thus, according to the materialist concept, one would expect Americans to have the happiest of societies. Clearly this is far from the case. The imbalanced urbanization of the United States was most dramatically evident when, in recent years, rebels burned down not the houses of their enemies but their own homes and “neighborhoods.” Putting the torch to their own places in the universe, the revolutionists revealed the psychological depths of America’s urban problems.

No society in history has such relatively rural population as the United States. It is the society most divorced from nature. The problems of the American city are rooted in the death of the American countryside. It would be the height of foolishness for Europe to follow the course of urbanization in the United States, a course which has led to excruciating problems for which no solutions are in sight.

On the more explicitly political level, it is clear that an overhaul of our political structures is long overdue. Although our technical, scientific and economic life belongs to the twentieth century, our political institutions, whether in democratic or totalitarian systems, belong to the nineteenth century. This, of course, raises the question of our future constitutional order, both in the United Continent and its constitutive countries.

We begin from the premise that preserving man and his freedom is today the primary task of politics. Experience demonstrates that this is best done in small units, even though ours is a time in which other aspects of life clearly demand Continental integration. The contradiction is only apparent. A wide unity in essentials can readily accompany a generous decentralization in other fields. The larger unit should have authority only in those areas where the smaller cannot adequately function. In short, conservative thought moves from the smaller unit to the larger;
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We suffer today from a separation of the reflective and administrative functions of government. Our rulers are so possessed by administrative work, public relations and party politics that little time or energy is left for reflection. Thus, a genuine government—excepting solitary figures such as General de Gaulle—has become rare indeed. What is needed is a new separation of functions in which some people have no administrative tasks but are called upon to devote themselves to talking, reading and thinking about the policies and priorities of the social order. These policies and priorities would then be implemented by others to whom is entrusted the administrative function.

The present organs of government were devised at a time when civil servants wrote with a pen. In a time of computers the whole scheme of organization must be changed. As in communications, so in politics. If we put computers into a nineteenth-century structure the whole thing will quickly make no sense at all.

The present proliferation of bureaucracy results from obsolete forms of organization. It used to be that bureaucrats must multiply because their productivity was low. We can now devise organizational forms that will escape the inexorable circle of Parkinson's Law. If we maintain our present system very little will really change—except that much needed resources will be used in an increasingly unproductive manner.

Major reform will not be possible, however, until we get rid of the party feudalism that is inherent in the projections of what I have called Maunsholt socialism. Democracy as such is by no means tied to party thinking and party behavior. While parties have a role to play, they are not the masters. At best they expound ideas, take initiatives and thus animate the life of the community. They should not, however, become administrative organs or owners of economic enterprises. Citizens should not have to go through a party in order to communicate with the authorities. Thus the direct election of parliamentarians, as is the case in Anglo-Saxon countries, is far superior to our European system of proportionate representation, which has time and again proven itself to be the beginning of the end of the parliamentary system. In our day socially relevant organizations such as the trade unions or farmers associations have in fact a public function, though unfortunately our constitutions fail to take this into account. It would be logical to create a second chamber or a senate in which such social organizations are represented and take part in the legislative process. It may be objected that this would be a return to the corporate system and, of course, it is. Nonetheless, and whether it is admitted or not, we are in fact moving in this direction today. Pressure groups do influence the legislator, either directly or through mass organizing. It would be more constructive were what is already going on to go on within constitutional forms rather than, as is now the case, outside the legal channels.

Beyond all this, true conservatism raises fundamental questions of public philosophy. States built on materialism alone have little durability and only a fragile authority that rests exclusively upon strength. The proliferation and uses of power cannot be fully controlled by institutional means, but they can be fettered by the acceptance of moral standards. The purely materialistic concepts of the State and the larger community are doomed to failure. We must at least strive for a religious and thus a spiritual social foundation. This morality has nothing in common with the ritualistic moralizing of those who prescribe standards for others which they themselves are hardly prepared to respect. The spiritual rebirth of public life cannot be achieved by legislation but exclusively by the personal example of
those who believe that without a spiritual renewal humanity has no future.

Dynamic conservative forces in Europe will imitate neither the United States nor the Soviet Union. They affirm that each society must express itself through political forms pertinent to its own peculiar genius. They affirm this not only with respect to Europe but in the case of each people and culture. With regard to South America, for example, the accepted wisdom says that the area’s difficulties stem from social tensions, more particularly from the gap between the rich and poor. Closer examination reveals, however, that these social tensions are not the root but only the symptom of the South American crisis. In reality, South America suffers from its inability so far to find a political form appropriate to its genius. In trying to imitate the Anglo-Saxons it has failed to recognize that what worked out through centuries on the misty banks of the Thames will never flourish along the Amazon or on the slopes of the Andes. Equally dismal are the attempts of other countries to imitate the Soviet example. As for South America, it will not resolve its problems until it has discovered political institutions appropriate to its very own Indian, Spanish and Portuguese origins.

Similarly, in Japan, foreigners who had only superficial knowledge of Japanese realities imposed the MacArthur constitution upon a vanquished people. Unless Japan breaks out of these alien political forms, it will sooner or later undergo a violent convulsion that might well destroy much that has been developed at a heavy price.

And so in Europe we must go our own way in the spirit of our specific culture, of our spirituality, of our historical heritage. Our wisdom must not be wisdom borrowed from our mighty Eastern neighbor nor from our friends across the Atlantic. We seek a European political form, what General de Gaulle called a “European Europe.” Most particularly we remember that our greatness is rooted in our diversity. The European way of life flows from the wealth of our cultural sources. The guiding principle for the future of Europe must be that old axiom, given new voice by the late Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, who first expressed the pan-European vision:

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\text{In necessariis unitas} \\
\text{in dubiis libertas} \\
\text{in omnibus caritas.}
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