

On Foxes and Orioles: The Newer Worries of Europe

James V. Schall

In one of James Thurber's tales, "The Birds and the Foxes," the shrewd foxes (for the highest of ethical motives, of course) finally succeed in having torn down the cages that protected the Baltimore orioles. The fox leader gives a memorable speech about how those poor but juicy birds, though eaten, are now "liberated" from their unjust confinement. Thurber's moral parodies Lincoln: "Government of the orioles, by the foxes, and for the foxes, must perish from the earth." His reinterpretations of Lincoln—another being "You can fool too many people too much of the time"—are perhaps too severe. But they come closer to what politics deals with than we usually care to admit.

I begin thus because the general prognosis for the Western world is decidedly not cheery. I should like to think that the spate of unrestrained self-criticism Americans are now undergoing is a sign of strength. But not every virtuous undertaking, when pursued with disproportionate vigor, is itself a virtue. Self-criticism and self-doubt often go hand in hand.

I have long argued that the major cause of today's political crisis is the lack of an authentic superpower in Western Europe. At a moment when there is evident need for such an entity, when American power grows ever weaker, its absence appears a near disaster. As Alberto Cavallari pointed out in Torino's *La Stampa* earlier this year, not only do we not have *one* Europe, but we are very nearly creating *three* Europes—an Eastern Europe, a Northern Europe, and a Southern Europe. *Pravda* has suggested Europe's problems are all part of an American plot. The French have begun to complain that Europe is now run by the Germans. Helmut Schmidt has offered some consolation: "Europe in these days is not perhaps what those politicians of fifteen or twenty years ago had dreamed, but it isn't going badly." Still, with the lira ever descending in value, the pound likewise, the franc ditto, Schmidt's is not a widely shared opinion. A new British Prime Minister is a portent of new elections, Italy

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has suffered them, Giscard's whole political base is in jeopardy. No one can guess what will happen in Spain. There is one bright spot—Portugal—or so C.L. Sulzberger maintains.

Today bourgeois Europe is clearly frightened and paralyzed. The Christian parties seem to have exhausted their spirit. The Marxists of Western Europe no doubt see their historic opportunity, but they too are beginning to express fears. They all heard Mr. Brezhnev's discourse at the Moscow Party Congress in March, if only at second hand. And Peking Radio is saying that "Brezhnev is the Hitler of today."

True, in Warsaw I got the feeling that the Wermacht was still at the gates—although Polish history has now been rewritten to show that the Russians have always been "friends" of the Poles, especially the Polish Communist Party, although that Party had never once favored Poland. Another name of that same past, "Weimar," is now on the lips of economists trying to warn the unwilling unions about the dangers of inflation.

Since Europe in its present state is not confident of protecting itself, there is a general and widespread dismay at the ever-increasing signs of America's lack of will, of America's political and military ineptitudes. (Fidel Castro in Moscow, asked to comment on Henry Kissinger's warnings about Angola, put it sharply: "The Americans are impotent.") All of Europe wanted America out of Vietnam; they have realized belatedly that the same logic they applied might well be applied to them. The Lockheed scandals, which threatened even the Dutch throne, caused a somewhat hypocritical reaction on the Continent and also served to discredit American economic innovations—which the European Left has long attempted to do. Hope blooms eternal, of course, even in the French breast. As Alfred Grosser wrote in *Le Monde* earlier this year:

Now Italy and France live in pluralism because there is a good and beautiful western world to which all belong and a western Europe where liberties exist, where political struggle for more liberty is institutionalized because of the simple fact that the

enormous power of the Soviet Union is counterbalanced by the American power.

Without the United States, there would be neither communism à la Berlinguer nor socialism with a human face à la Georges Marchais. If the USSR were the sole great power present in Europe, pluralism and liberties would disappear. The problem of the dependence on the United States is, for the lands of Europe, including the communist parties, of another order and another nature.

Imagine the comfort of Mr. Average European, however, when he woke up one morning to read the estimate of Belgian General Robert Close that Russian planning, strategy, and present capacity are such that the Russians can reach the Rhine in "48 hours." Imagine the even greater comfort of European politicians when Helmut Sonnenfeldt expressed his doctrine of Soviet incorporation of Eastern Europe. There was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn too, who in a talk on the BBC advised the descendants of Richard the Lionhearted and the Battle of Britain: "Britain's character is gone, its freshness has failed. Britain's position in the world today is of less significance than that of Rumania or even Uganda." And he proceeded to tell the rest of us: "I could never have imagined to what an extreme degree the West actually desired to blind itself to the world situation." *The Guardian* felt it imperative to write an article showing that the Man from Gulag does not understand the West. But many of us are beginning to wonder if he is not the only one who does.

Just south of Europe lies Africa, where they are beginning to speak of "Third World imperialism." The Russian-Cuban invasion of Angola has been marvelously successful. Cuba, with its twenty thousand or so troops scattered throughout continental Africa (and in the Middle East too), may have the most successful foreign policy in the world today. The only people who dared call the Angola invasion what it was—imperialism—were the Chinese and Daniel Moynihan. To my knowledge there was no instance of organized protest, left or right or center, against this power play in any European capital. By contrast, had it been the United States that managed to send, say, ten thousand Costa Ricans, or, dare I say it, *Puerto Ricans*, to Angola (or anywhere else), you can be sure the European streets would be alive with simulated anger. But in any case, all previous thinking about Africa is now obsolete. Black nationalism, Chinese railroads, South African power, development—all these now await Russian calculations about how far they can go. For anyone interested in the direction the world is going it is instructive to compare a map of Africa today with one in, say, 1935, one in 1914, one in 1885, one in 1750, and one in 1610. In the words of British political philosopher Max Beloff:

They [the Russians] also have considerable self-confidence: They really believe in themselves. They feel history is on their side. This is what democracies believed in the nineteenth century. Everyone thought then that the world would get more and more democratic. Nowadays it's almost completely reversed.



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We're the ones fighting a defensive battle because so few people really express their conviction that democracy is the better way ["Is Democracy Dying?" *U.S. News*, March 8].

What is of concern in Europe, beneath it all, is the increasing sign of American weakness, the kind of analyses American intellectuals seem to be making of the world. The Europeans are suddenly beginning to recognize that democracy is a waning force on this planet—there may be two dozen democracies on this globe, and in spite of her insistence to the contrary Mrs. Gandhi's India is not one of them. (I confess I am waiting with baited breath for some pious Indian gentleman to produce three or four children, adamantly refuse forced sterilization, and go on a hunger strike à la the other Gandhi in the name of human liberty and rights.)

After a trip to the States, Marion Gräfin Dornhoff made this conclusion about the American situation:

The visitor returns to Europe with the impression that Watergate not only destroyed the present administration's authority and has led America to a further crisis of masochism, skepticism and cynicism, but that it was an unrestricted tragedy for the whole western world in its foreign policy aspects—almost a *Waterloo* [*Die Welt*, February 6].

Alberto Ronchey wrote in *Corriere della Sera* that America is more unknown to Europe than China to Russia. Ronchey wondered if indeed there were not a cultural revolution going on in America that is every bit as pretentious as the one in China. "We should understand that after so many historical incidents, the Kennedy assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate, and the economic crisis, there may be coming a cyclone from the great puritan plains." Writing from Europe, the American analyst Flora Lewis has noted that unofficial statements by European diplomats express concern with "'eclipse,' 'withdrawal,' 'paralysis,' 'neoisolationism.'" Nothing has come from Washington to ease these European doubts...."

Into this political vacuum has wandered what is now called "Eurocommunism" by the Italians or "White communism" by the Germans. The standard thesis is that European Marxists—even the French Party is currently denying the "dictatorship of the proletariat"—have finally seen the light and have joined the democratic ranks, such as they are; they may now, led by the Italians (the Portuguese Stalinists having been isolated), legitimately enter European central governments. Everyone—from *Le Monde* to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.—warns the U.S. not to interfere in this process.

The main program for European Marxist parties is based on a grand renewal of national life. Indeed, the nationalist models of Eastern Europe (minus, naturally, the friendly Soviet troops) are not all that far from the ultimate ambition of European Marxists. They present themselves as democratic, efficient, nationalistic, innovative, European—in a Europe that distances itself from the American protective shield...though not too far.

The Western Marxists apparently want to cut their ties with the more blatant forms of Stalinism, though there is doubt about even this. Western Marxists must also worry about the death of Tito and Russian designs. And Enzo Bettiza has wondered impiously in public why the Western Marxist leaders, many of whom were in Moscow and knew at first hand of Stalin's crimes, never said a word about them later. This "Eurocommunism," in any case, is a new form of political front. "I only wish to say that the anti-communists of today are obliged to bring themselves up to date; and that if they wish to continue their very legitimate battle, they must at least take account that the shadow of Soviet Communism now has another name—it is Eurocommunism, which must be confronted by other means and methods," Vittorio Gorresio has written.

The essentials of this White communism, largely promoted by the Italians, are (1) an autonomous nationalist way to socialism; (2) a cooperative European policy within the Continent and even with America; (3) some autonomy from the Russians; and (4) respect for democratic processes, including peaceful retirement from office when voted out. The value of these proposals—the object of continuing discussion by European Marxists—is that they capitalize on the European connection with Italy and they somewhat separate the Marxists from direct Soviet hegemony. This tends to legitimize the Marxist claim to be entitled to rule.

Public opinion polls show that some Communist share in government office in Italy is favored by 52.7 per cent of the people. Franco Barbieri has suggested that Moscow, while forbidding such ideas in Eastern Europe and at home, permits them in the West because it sees that any advance to power by Communists is to its advantage, while its criticism will directly help these very Marxist parties in the West gain political autonomy and power.

The intellectual and political withdrawal taking place in America, at least in the eyes of the Europeans, has the paradoxical effect of Marxists taking shrewd advantage of a nonexistent European political counter-unity. The European bourgeois, Christian, and labor classes, which have tragically failed in their historical challenge, are now understandably worried about being on the "right" side. The handwriting of a new rigid social order, undoubtedly led by militant labor unions, seems already on the wall. Indeed, I have been struck by the number of recently reported instances of Europeans buying property in the States as a last resort, a place to which they can escape when the time comes. Applications for emigration to the United States and Canada are on the increase in Italy, and at such a rate that there is some worry that Italy could lose its vital entrepreneurial class.

The fundamental worry of Europeans of a non-Marxist bent, then, is America's philosophy about itself in its two hundredth year. Solzhenitsyn has remarked that World War II has already been fought and lost by the West. To anyone acquainted with the ideology of European university faculties this is a more than plausible argument. But Solzhenitsyn's words have fallen on deaf ears, as the shrewd men who expelled him anticipated. Jean-Francois Revel has wondered about this incapacity to listen to someone like Solzhenitsyn. Revel feels it is due to man's general inability to look outside of his own immediate social environment to imagine what another's lot might be.

The neo-Jeffersonian movement in the United States—the "reruralization" of society, as it is often called—is but a symptom of a spiritual confusion Europeans sense in the American cyclone. What else are they expected to conclude from affirmations such as this one by Professor James Edmonds: "I think that we can and should go back to the land over the next several hundred years. We'll just have to let science and art take their chances..." ("Science, Engineering, and Society," *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, October, 1975). Or this one by Stanford theologian Robert McAfee Brown delivered to a World Council of Churches session in Nairobi: "...I am a citizen of the *United States of America* in a world where both small and large nations are struggling to become free from the political, economic and military domination of the United States of America. Thus I symbolize the various oppressions that many of you, in the name of the Gospel, are struggling to overcome—racism, sexism, classism and imperialism." Or this from Theodore Wertime: "Karl Hess says break up modern corporations and bureaucratic institutions and reverse the

funnel of wealth and power. Scott Nearing... says rebuild the organic life of the America of 1910. My own inclination would be to reregionalize the United States and to launch a new industrial revolution that would bring about a technico-economic order based on small diversified energy-hoarding enterprises" ("The Aging of America," *Washington Post*, January 1, 1976). These seem to reveal a malaise, an uncertainty about the world that can only result in political stagnation.

There is one place, however, in which American decline is seen as mere "myth." That is in the pages of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, which has not had a good thing to say about America in years. In February Professor James Petras provided a straightforward Leninist analysis, complete with surplus-value and finance capitalism, in which he warned that the American imperial system has never worked better—a conclusion made doubly delicious, from the French journal's viewpoint, by the fact that its author is an American. But such rehashing of *Imperialism* (itself already something of a rehash of Hobson) can hardly be taken seriously, even by the once-esteemed French review.

Much closer to the true problem in America and America's external presence are Norman Macrae's trenchant comments in *The Economist*. Macrae, consistently the best foreign commentator on America, believes it is precisely the intellectual and religious classes that are most behind the times and blind to the true importance of America in the world. Their political and social structures and theories are most often those that would enable all their dire self-fulfilling prophecies to come true:

When you have a GNP per head over \$7,000 a year, you naturally begin to regard growing much richer as a bit of a bore—although American Christians and humanists should be reminding zero-growth Americans that, by discontinuing their own industrial dynamism which has helped so much to drive world technology up through the bud, they could cruelly reduce the forward prospects of the 2 billion angry people on incomes under \$200 a year with whom we share this rather small planet. But the horror today is that America is not going slowly stagnationist out of selfishness. On campuses across the continent, a peculiarly innumerate anti-growth cult is being taught to a generation of idealistic kids as if it was high moral philosophy or even a religion [October 25, 1975].

Macrae, who has a lively sense of history, is appalled at the kind of collective ignorance that has been most often dominant in the intellectual life of American universities:

It was eerie during my trip across the campuses of the continent to hear so many supposedly left-wing young Americans who still thought they were expressing an entirely new and progressive philosophy as they mouthed the same prejudices as Trollope's 19th century Tory squires: attacking any further expansion of industry and commerce as impossibly vulgar, because unfair to their pheasants and wild ducks.

I believe there may be beginning some sensible reaction to such uncivilized and faddish moods of recent years, though I remain mostly Augustinian in my deeper moods. But there is no doubt that Macrae has sensed well the connection between humankind's future well-being and freedom as against the dismal kind of social philosophy we have had tossed at us in most recent years.

There are, then, *three* Europes today because there is not *one* Europe. That there are *two* Europes, East and West, is largely the fault of the Americans of World War II. That there are now beginning to be three Europes in which a kind of loose Euromarxism sees its future is largely the result of the Europeans themselves. Southern Europe's three peninsulas that jut out into the Mediterranean—the Spanish, the Italian, and the Greek—have become dangerously weak, problematic areas that portend a new reality. There is, perhaps, some hope that the Eurocommunist parties can maintain their freedom from the iron grip of the Russians, but only if the Russians are not left the world as their field of power, as now seems to be the case. In any event, Europe can no longer give a reason why Eurocommunism is an experiment that should not be tried—even though, once tried, its reversibility seems in doubt.

In a sober essay called "The American Experiment" Daniel Moynihan wrote:

Now obviously the most important fact about the American experiment almost a century later is that ours evidently are not the institutions 'toward which, as by a law of fate, the rest of civilized mankind are forced to move....' To the contrary, liberal democracy in the American model increasingly tends to the condition of monarchy in the 19th Century: a holdover form of government, one which persists in isolated or peculiar places here and there, and may even serve well enough for special circumstances, but which has simply no relevance to the future. It is where the world was, not where it is going [*The Public Interest*, Fall, 1975].

The political philosophy that nourished and sustained Western Europe and America, the one based on a God that was not Caesar, an individual that was not the state, a public good that did not include everything else, a personal dignity that transcended the social order—this has somehow lost its appeal to the minds of many men, most often because they are not allowed to hear its message. That it should not appeal to men who had no chance to listen to it should not worry us. That it is no longer appealing even to ourselves is the sign that we are choosing to be different kinds of men, men for whom these things are no longer problems, men who perhaps refuse to grasp what the alternatives really are.

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