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REBEL EUROPE: HOW AMERICA CAN LIVE WITH A CHANGING CONTINENT

by **James Oliver Goldsborough**

(Macmillan; vii+187 pp.; \$12.95)

BRITAIN AGAINST ITSELF THE POLITICAL CONTRADICTIONS OF COLLECTIVISM

by **Samuel Beer**

(W. W. Norton; xvi+231 pp.; \$18.95)

Larry Tool

America is the masterwork of European discontent. Europeans with bad memories and fresh hopes settled America, secured its independence, and made it a great power. Given this heritage, it is not surprising that we have often identified our national purpose with the improvement or even replacement of old Europe. Our major creeds have been challenges hurled eastward across the Atlantic. Democracy, free enterprise, and internationalism are the patent cures for feudalism, mercantilism, and power politics.

The Americanization of Europe was expected to proceed peacefully, by the sheer force of example. But it took the devastating world wars of this century to bring our dream perilously close to fulfillment. In 1945, Americans were both appalled and exultant. Lamenting European self-destruction, we still saw it as the essential precondition of a new American order. Dream and circumstance tempted us to style ourselves the receivers of a bankrupt civilization. Exhausted by their ordeal, many Europeans sanctioned our pose.

Today we are compelled to re-examine our more dubious postwar assumptions. Revision of NATO has been on the agenda since the mid-'60s, but now reassessment seems urgent. *Rebel Europe* is a timely contribution to that task.

Goldsborough's message is that the reports of Europe's demise have been greatly exaggerated. The form of American "receivership" remains, but its substance has vanished. Once we were the model for Western Europeans; today they are in a better position to tutor us. The Eastern bloc satellites are spinning away from Moscow, slowly approximating their ancient orbits. Amer-

ica must again learn to live with an autonomous Europe, one now growing indifferent to our enthusiasms, impatient with our phobias, and restive under our dominion.

In recent years, Goldsborough argues, we have suffered from the hubris of our generosity. By 1960 our efforts to aid European recovery had begun to undermine our own stability. Before we could address this problem we became mired in Vietnam, which devoured our political and economic reserves. America and Europe parted company in 1973: They responded to the energy shock; we didn't. Since then America has moved backwards. While Europeans fashion collective solutions to modern problems, we revert to the individualism of yesterday. The roles of 1945 are reversing: in America, narcissism and nostalgia; in Europe, pragmatism and consensus.

This is hardly the whole story, but the perspective is important. A veteran foreign correspondent, Goldsborough knows how odd American passions and policies can appear to those on the other side of the water. We need to know what is happening in Europe, but we need especially to know what Europeans think of us, and why. Spelling this out would seem a task worthy of Goldsborough's experience—fifteen years in twenty-nine countries. Unfortunately he attempts far more and achieves considerably less. His haste to tell the whole postwar story tempts him to elevate academic clichés above his own memories and impressions. His preface eloquently defends the journalist's first-hand account against the abstractions of foreign affairs specialists. Had he heeded his own advice, he would have given us more sto-

ries and fewer pat formulas.

The Atlantic Alliance *is* in trouble. Insofar as this stems from American deafness or presumption, *Rebel Europe* will help stimulate the self-criticism we need. America must learn the futility of hectoring its old friends. A renewed Atlantic partnership, however, requires more than Goldsborough's prescription of "less integration and more disintegration." As memories of common struggle and suffering fade, the Atlantic nations find it harder to reaffirm the shared beliefs that underlie their cooperation. Mutual understanding can halt the drift, but it will require far more searching and sympathetic analyses of the predicament and prospects of each alliance partner, ourselves included.

A model of such analysis is Samuel Beer's new essay, *Britain Against Itself*. Those who already know his treatise *Modern British Politics* (1965) will need no encouragement to attend its sequel. Those new to Beer's work will now discover an academic inquiry that is at once readable and informed, historical and timely, unsparing and hopeful.

Beer begins by asking "how it could happen that a country which had governed itself so well for so long should suddenly do so poorly." Among the familiar excuses are socialism, the unions, imperial nostalgia, uninspiring leaders. Beyond such finger-pointing the field is left to the economists. In *Rebel Europe*, for example, Goldsborough can list ten of their contradictory diagnoses, ranging from demand deficiency to simple laziness. Exasperated, he blames Britain's troubles on its "insularity," forgetting that when fish begin to die, one should not immediately suspect drowning.

Beer has more patience. He locates the main difficulty in the British political system, so long the boast and pride of the enlightened West. A paralysis of "the mechanisms of public choice" has allowed economic and social problems to fester and burn. Beer admits that his own stake in the explanation is considerable. His earlier book was a study in success, a probing appreciation of the British capacity to adapt ancient habits to novel circumstances. He now finds himself obliged to show how the very triumphs of Britain's "collectivist polity" have worked to prevent it from muddling through yet again. Beer's argument is complex and suggestive. Only a crude summary is possible here.

After 1945, Britain executed a surprisingly smooth transition to the managed economy and the modern welfare state. Labour led the way, but the ease of transition owed much to Conservative adaptations of the collectivist program. In contrast with the American experience, British pluralism seemed to *strengthen* the party government. Efficient representation of new consumer and producer groups did not threaten the overall capacity to implement national policy. Democratic stability seemed assured by a consensus between the new and ancient foes of defunct liberalism.

The fragile key to this achievement was the ability of parties to restrain and coordinate group demands. In the early '60s two forces emerged that relaxed group discipline and bred pluralist stagnation. First, collectivism helped erode the class basis of the parties. Satisfaction of labor's needs sapped working-class solidarity, thereby weakening Labour's capacity to govern. Similarly, the managed economy increased the political leverage of business groups at the expense of traditional Conservative loyalties. Beer wryly dissects the resulting stalemate under three heads: "the benefits scramble, the pay scramble, and the subsidies scramble."

Equally corrosive of counterweights to pluralism was a general crisis of authority, another ironic by-product of collectivist success. Like the United States, Britain was rocked by the populist revolt of the '60s. There the shock was much greater, however, due to the historic weakness of British radicalism. What occurred was a collapse of the system of deference that had made Britain governable through so many crises. It appeared that Shakespeare was right: "take but degree away...and hark what discord follows." The new populism eroded the independent authority of government, respect for leadership, and citizens' ability to identify with broad coalitions. Again the result was pluralist stagnation.

Beer neither lauds nor laments these changes. He simply asks whether the new values have the potential for restoring authority and trust. Britain's present discontents do draw upon a venerable radical tradition, but it has been almost exclusively a tradition of opposition. Since neither technocracy nor romanticism can *govern*, the crucial question is whether and from what source neoradicalism "can muster the

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constructive power to make the British polity again an effective mechanism of social choice." As always with Beer, there is an implicit comparison with America, where offshoots of that radical tradition have reigned virtually unopposed. The comparison would seem to offer both encouragement and caution. The act of comparison, however, is a reaffirmation of our common destiny. [WV]

THE STRUCTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE: THE LIMITS OF THE POSSIBLE

by Fernand Braudel

(Harper & Row; 623 pp.; \$30.00)

Brian Thomàs

It is possible to be skeptical at first about the great French historian Fernand Braudel. A sarcastic description of his absorption in details could make him sound like a throwback to the days when historians thought they could blithely dispense with theorizing and concentrate on just the facts. The reservations vanish, though, once it is plain just what the basic data are for Braudel.

Like the rest of the *Annales* school, of which he is the acknowledged dean, Braudel cares little for the grandiose events so beloved of conventional historians: the striking battles, the epigram-spouting diplomats, the towering leaders. Beneath this stratum lies the crucial category, the barely noticed "dust of history"—everyday life, the quite humble and endlessly repetitive customs that form linked chains and endure for millennia. More interested in how forks appeared than in the signing of a treaty, Braudel is attempting to see the quotidian whole—"from food to furniture, from techniques to towns"—and to define material life.

The present volume has a complicated genesis. It is a thoroughly rewritten version of a book translated in 1973 as *Capitalism and Material Life: 1400-1800*. The earlier work has grown into a trilogy called *Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century* that includes *The Wheels of Commerce* (which "compares the market economy and the higher activity of capitalism") as well as the *Perspective of World* ("a chronological study of the forms and successive preponderant tendencies of the international economy"). Neither of these works has appeared in English;

presumably translations are under way.

As in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel's method is pointillistic. He tosses up a succession of observations and glimpses he has garnered from bills of lading, stray journals—practically anything he has noticed in the course of his exhaustive reading of primary sources—and then he generalizes, fully admitting the lack of hard warrant for some of his claims. This provides a fruitful way of scrutinizing capitalism's prehistory, its foundations, its teeming content.

Economists tend to view their turf as a tidy, well fenced-in field. Braudel knows better. Taking demography and geography as his point of departure, he dwells on bread, other foods, drink, then houses, clothes, and fashion; and along the way he garlands the statistics with arresting minutiae, such as what the consumption of white bread tells us about the real wealth of a region. He also pokes along through the advance of technology, transport, and money, concluding with a discussion of towns and cities.

Nor does he confine himself to Europe. Cases gathered from China and South America are woven in, serving as contrasts to the waxing commercial power of Europe. His phrase for this method is "retrospective traveling," and the temptation for a reviewer is to fall in step beside him, listing the nuggets he presents so readably: for instance, the evidence for the lack of privacy and comfort even among the wealthy until quite recently, or surmises about the adoption of table manners gleaned from renditions at different times of the Last Supper.

Braudel emphasizes the grinding poverty of everyday existence and how all classes were meshed in an interdependence so inflexible and unforgiving that a small change in, say, the frequency of crop rotation could wreck a kingdom. Moreover, as the market economy expanded, so did the ability of an alteration of daily habits to reverberate: Thus, the transformation of sugar from a luxury into a necessity added a push to imperial expansion. All this took place in an atmosphere of monetary chaos, until more reliable coinage "created a unity of the world," albeit "a unity of injustice."

The dust of history is full of quirky, novelistic interest, but I myself found Braudel's comments on the workings of

higher capitalism more compelling. The chapter on "Money" is the best in the book; just sample his discussion of exactly what happened when monetary systems broke down and were eclipsed by barter. Braudel is particularly informative on the instruments of credit that sprang into use when the inconvenience of metallic coinage was hindering the velocity of money circulation; there is also a shrewd application of a *bon mot* by Joseph Schumpeter to the effect that metallic coinage is in the end no less a means of credit than paper specie or promissory notes—each is really a tissue of promises and deferred reality. Having pioneered the tools for painstakingly reconstructing statistics from old records, Braudel then deftly employs them in accounting for the economies of early capitalism. The workings of the market exert an allure that outdoes daily life, at least for me, which is why I'm looking forward to the subsequent volumes. From the author's description, these will explore the issues raised in the "Money" chapter more fully.

One of Braudel's persisting themes is how, after people had been bound for centuries by unyielding regularities that went largely unnoticed, the emergence of capitalism gave some an unheard of degree of choice. "Capitalism alone had comparative freedom of movement," says Braudel. That liberty was limited to a tiny elite, of course, and even they did not have much leeway. The "possible" alluded to in the subtitle of this book was very limited indeed. Braudel is therefore pessimistic about the possibilities for a more egalitarian system, either then or now.

The world was hamstrung between state and citizen; towns fattened upon the surrounding countryside; lords dominated their serfs; each tugged and was tugged in a skein whose strands Braudel does much to unwind. He notes that this "is to return to the language used by Marx and to walk some of the way with him, even if one rejects his precise words or the rigorous process by which he saw every society moving from one stage to the next."

My only quibble with this great book is that the otherwise excellent illustrations are not well integrated with the text. We see plenty of photos of old coins, for example, yet the captions are too terse to illuminate the words that surround them. This is a surprising flaw in a work whose supreme strength lies