

THE COLLAPSE OF LIBERALISM

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The years 1989–1991 mark a decisive turning-point in contemporary history. On that almost everyone seems to agree. But turning from what to what? 1989 is the year of the end of the so-called Communisms in Eastern Europe, and 1991 marks it for the erstwhile USSR. The years 1990–91 are the immediate time boundaries as well of the so-called Persian Gulf war.

The two events, intimately linked, are nonetheless entirely distinct in character. The end of the Communisms marks the end of an era. The Persian Gulf war marks the beginning of an era. The one closes out; the other opens out. The one calls for reevaluation; the other for evaluation. The one is the story of hopes deceived; the other of fears still unfulfilled.

Yet, as Braudel reminds us, 'events are dust', even big events. Events make no sense unless we can insert them in the rhythms of the *conjonctures* and the trends of the *longue durée*. But that is less easy to do than it sounds, since we must then decide which *conjonctures* and which structures are most relevant.

Let us start with the end of the Communisms. I have called it the end of an era, but which era? Shall we analyse it as the end of the postwar epoch 1945–1989, or as the end of the Communist epoch 1917–1989, or as the end of the French Revolutionary epoch 1789–1989, or as the end of the ascension of the modern-world system, 1450–1989? It can be interpreted as all of these.

Let me put aside, however, the last possible interpretation for a while, and start by analysing it as the end of the epoch 1789–1989, via 1848 and 1968. Note well, not for the moment via 1917. How may we characterise this period: that of the industrial revolution? that of the bourgeois revolution (~) that of the democratisation of political life? that of modernity? All of these interpretations are commonplace, and all have some (even much) plausibility.

A variation on these themes, one that would perhaps be more precise, might be to call the era 1789–1989 the era of the triumph and domination of liberal ideology, in which case 1989, the year of the end of the so-called Communisms, would in fact really mark the downfall of liberalism as an

ideology. Outrageous and implausible, amidst the revival of the faith in the free market and the importance of human rights, you say? Not all that much. But, in order to appreciate the argument, we must begin at the beginning.

In 1789, in France, a political upheaval occurred to which we have given the name, the French Revolution. As a political event it passed through many phases, from the initial phase of uncertainty and confusion to the Jacobin phase, and then, via the interim of the Directory, to a Napoleonic phase. In a sense we can argue it was continued subsequently in 1830, in 1848, in 1870, and even in the Resistance during the Second World War. Through it all, it had as its slogan 'liberty, equality, fraternity' – a clarion call of the modern world that has proved to be superbly ambiguous.

The balance-sheet of the French Revolution in terms of France itself is very uneven. There were irreversible changes that were real changes, and there were many seeming changes that changed nothing. There were continuities from the *Ancien Régime* via the revolutionary process, as Tocqueville showed long ago, and there were decisive ruptures. This balance-sheet for France is not, however, our concern here. The bicentennial and its platitudes are over.

It is rather the impact of the French Revolution (interpreted widely) on the world-system as a whole that is the theme I wish to explore. The French Revolution transformed mentalities and established 'modernity' as the *Weltanschauung* of the modern world. What we mean by modernity is the sense that the new is good and that it is desirable, because we live in a world of Progress at every level of our existence. Specifically, in the political arena, modernity meant the acceptance of the 'normality' of change, as opposed to its 'abnormality', its transitory character. At last, an ethos consonant with the structures of the capitalist world-economy had become so widely diffused that even those who were uncomfortable with this ethos had to take it into account in public discourse.

The question became what to do about the 'normality' of change in the political arena, since those who have power are always reluctant to cede it. The differing views about how to handle the 'normality' of change are located in what we have come to call the 'ideologies' of the modern world. The first ideology on the scene was 'conservatism', the view that change would be retarded as long as possible, and its extent kept as minimal as possible. But note, no serious conservative ideologue has ever suggested total immobility, a position that it had been possible to assert in previous eras.

The response to 'conservatism' was 'liberalism', which saw the break with the *Ancien Régime* as a definitive political rupture and as the end of an era of 'illegitimate' privilege. The political programme incarnated by liberal ideology was the perfection of the modern world by means of the further 'reform' of its institutions.

The last of the ideologies to make its appearance was 'socialism', which rejected the individualistic presumptions of liberal ideology, and insisted that social harmony would not come about automatically by unleashing individuals from all the constraints of custom. Rather, social harmony had to be socially constructed, and for some socialists it could only be constructed after a further historical development and a great social battle, a 'revolution'.

All three ideologies were in place by 1848 and have conducted noisy battles with each other ever since, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Political parties have been created everywhere, ostensibly reflecting these ideological positions. There has to be sure never been an uncontested definitive version of any of these ideologies, and there has also been very much confusion about the dividing lines between them. But in both learned and popular political discourse it has been generally accepted that these ideologies exist and represent three different 'tonalities', three different styles of politics with respect to the normality of change: the politics of caution and prudence; the politics of constant rational reform; and the politics of accelerated transformation. Sometimes we call this the politics of the right, the centre, and the left.

There are three things to note about the ideologies in the period following 1848. I say, following 1848, because the world revolution of 1848 – which combined the first appearance of a conscious workers' movement as a political actor with the 'springtime of the peoples' – set the political agenda for the next century and a half. On the one hand, the 'failed' **revolution(s)** of 1848 had established clearly that political change was not likely to be as rapid as the accelerators wanted, but neither would it be as slow as the cautious hoped. The most plausible prediction (not wish) was constant rational reform. Thus triumphed in the core zones of the **world-economy** the liberal centre.

But who was to effectuate these reforms? This is the first anomaly to notice. In the first blossoming of the ideologies, between 1789 and 1848, all three ideologies had situated themselves in positions that were firmly **anti-State** in the antinomy State-Society, whose centrality in political thought was equally a consequence of the French Revolution. Conservatives had denounced the French Revolution as an attempt to use the State to undermine and negate the institutions thought to be basic to Society – the family, the Community, the Church, the monarchy, the feudal orders. Liberals however had also denounced the State as the structure which prevented each individual – the actor considered to be basic to the constitution of Society – from pursuing his interests as **he/she** saw fit in what **Bentham** called the 'calculus of pleasure and pain'. And socialists had denounced the State as well on the grounds that it reflected the will of the privileged, rather than the general will of Society. For all three ideologies then, the 'withering away of the State' seemed an ideal devoutly to be wished.

Yet, and this is the anomaly we are noting, despite this unanimously negative view of the State in theory, in practice, especially after 1848, the exponents of all three ideologies moved in multiple ways to strengthen state structures. Conservatives came to see the State as a substitute mechanism to constrain what they considered to be the disintegration of morality, given that the traditional institutions could no longer do it, or could no longer do it unaided by the State police institutions. Liberals came to see the State as the only efficient, only rational mechanism by which the pace of reform could be kept steady, and oriented in the right direction. And socialists after 1848, came to feel that, without obtaining state power, they would never be able to overcome the obstacles to fundamental transformation of the Society.

The second great anomaly was that, although everyone said there were three distinct ideologies, in political practice, each ideological party tried to reduce the political scene to a duality, claiming that the other two ideologies were basically alike. For conservatives, both liberals and socialists were believers in Progress, who wished to utilise the State to manipulate the organic structures of Society. For socialists, conservatives and liberals represented mere variations on a politics of the defence of the status quo and of the privileges of the upper strata (old aristocracy and new bourgeoisie combined). And for liberals, both conservatives and socialists were authoritarian opponents of the liberal ideal, the flourishing of individuals in all their potentialities. This reduction of three ideologies to a duality (but in three different versions) was in part no doubt mere passing political rhetoric, but more fundamentally it reflected the constant reconstruction of political alliances. In any case, over the course of 150 years, this repeated reduction of the trinity to dualities created a great deal of political confusion, not least of all in the meaning of these labels.

But the greatest anomaly of all was that in the 120 years after 1848, that is, at least until 1968, under the guise of three ideologies in conflict with each other, we really had only one, the overwhelmingly dominant ideology of liberalism. To understand this, we have to look at what was the concrete issue under debate during the entire period, the fundamental social problem that required a solution.

The great 'reform' that was called for, if the capitalist world-system were to remain politically stable, was the integration of the working classes into the political system, thereby transforming a domination based merely on power and wealth into a domination of consent. This reform process had two main pillars. The first was the according of suffrage, but in such a way that, although everyone would vote, relatively little institutional change would occur as a result. The second was transferring a part of the global surplus-value to the working classes, but in such a way that the largest part remained in the hands of the dominant strata and the system of accumulation remained in place.

The geographical zone in which such social 'integration' was required most urgently was that of the core states of the capitalist world-economy—Great Britain and France above all, but the United States, other states in Western Europe, and the White settler states as well. We know that this transformation was steadily implemented in the period 1848–1914, and that by the time of the First World War, the patterns of universal suffrage (albeit still only manhood suffrage in most places) and the welfare state were in place, even if not yet fully realised in all these states.

We could say simply that the liberal ideology had realised its objective and leave it at that, but that would be insufficient. We must notice as well what happened in the process to both conservatives and socialists. The leading conservative politicians turned themselves into 'enlightened conservatives', that is, virtual competitors with official liberals in the process of the integration of the working classes. Disraeli, Bismarck, and even Napoleon III stand as good examples of this new version of conservatism, what might be termed 'liberal conservatism'.

At the same time, the socialist movement in the industrialised countries, even its most militant exemplars such as the German Social-Democratic Party, became the leading parliamentary voices for the achievement of the liberal reforms. Through their parties and their trade-unions, they exerted 'popular' pressure for achieving what the liberals wanted, the taming of the working classes. Not only Bernstein but Kautsky, **Jaurès**, and Guesde as well, not to speak of the Fabians, became what we might call 'liberal socialists'.

By 1914, the political work of the industrialised countries was largely divided between 'liberal conservatives' and 'liberal socialists'. In the process, purely liberal parties began to disappear, but this was only because all significant parties were de facto liberal parties. Behind the mask of ideological conflict stood the reality of ideological consensus.

The First World War did not break this consensus. Rather, it confirmed it and extended it. The year 1917 was the symbol of this extension of the liberal consensus. The war had started by an assassination in a peripheral zone of the world-economy, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The moment had come for the core states to go beyond the narrower objective of integrating their own working classes and think about the integration of that larger segment of the world's working classes, those that lived in the peripheral and semiperipheral zones of the world-system. In the language of today, the issue had now become the taming of the South in ways parallel to the taming of the working classes internal to core zones.

There were two versions of how to resolve North–South issues. The one was put forward by that herald of the renewal of liberalism on a world scale, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson asked the United States to enter the First World War 'to make the world safe for democracy'. After the war, he called for the 'self-determination of nations'.

To which nations was Wilson referring? Obviously not to those of states in the core zone. The process of the construction of effective and legitimate state machineries in France and Great Britain, even Belgium and Italy, had long since been completed. Wilson was talking of course of the nations or 'peoples' of the three great empires in process of dissolution: Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottomans – all three comprising peripheral and semiperipheral zones of the world-economy. In short, he was talking of what we today call the South. After the Second World War, the principle of the self-determination of nations was to be extended to all the remaining colonial zones – in Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Caribbean.

The principle of the self-determination of nations was the structural analogy at the world level of the principle of universal suffrage at the national level. Just as each individual was to be considered politically equal and have one vote, so each nation was to be sovereign and thus politically equal and therefore have one vote (a principle today incarnated in the General Assembly of the United Nations).

Nor did Wilsonian liberalism stop there. The next step after suffrage at the national level had been the institution of the welfare state, that is, a redistribution of a part of the surplus-value via governmental income transfers. The next step at the world level after self-determination was to be 'national (economic) development', the programme put forth by Roosevelt, Truman, and their successors after the Second World War.

Needless to say, conservative forces reacted with their usual prudence and distaste to the clarion call of the Wilsonians for global reform. Needless to say as well, after the disruptions caused by the Second World War, conservatives began to see the merits in this liberal programme, and Wilsonian liberalism in practice became after 1945 a liberal-conservative thesis.

But 1917 had of course a second significance. It was the year of the Russian Revolution. Wilsonianism was hardly born when it was faced with a great ideological opponent, Leninism. Lenin and the Bolsheviks appeared on the political arena in protest primarily against the previous transformation of socialist ideology into what I have called liberal socialism (the same thing as Bernstein's revisionism, to which Lenin attached the Kautsky position as well). Leninism therefore was proposing a militant alternative, initially by its opposition to workers' participation in the First World War, and then by the seizure of state power in Russia by the Bolshevik Party.

We know that socialists everywhere in 1917, including in Russia, had expected the first socialist revolution to occur in Germany, and that for several years the Bolsheviks awaited the fulfilment of their own revolution by one in Germany. We know the German revolution never came and that the Bolsheviks had to decide what to do.

The decision they took was twofold. On the one hand, they decided to build 'socialism in one country'. They thus entered into a path in which the

primary demand of the Soviet state ~~vis-à-vis~~ the world-system became its political integration as a great power in the world-system and its economic development via rapid industrialisation. This was Stalin's programme but it was that of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Gorbachev as well. Thus the programme in practice was one of the Soviet state demanding its 'equal rights' on the world scene.

What then of world revolution? Lenin initially founded the Third International in theory to pursue in militant ways the tasks that the Second International had in effect renounced. The Third International soon turned however into a mere foreign policy adjunct of the USSR. The one thing it never did was stimulate real insurrections of the working classes. Instead, the focus of activity shifted, beginning with the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1921, to which Lenin invited not merely Communist parties but all sorts of nationalist and national liberation movements.

The programme that emerged from Baku, and that became in reality the programme of the world Communist movement, was the programme of anti-imperialism. But what was anti-imperialism? It was a translation into more **aggressive** and impatient language of the Wilsonian programme, of the self-determination of nations. And in the period after the Second World War, as one after the other of these national liberation movements came to power, what programme did they put forward? It was the programme of national (economic) development, usually relabelled socialist development. Leninism, the great opponent of liberal-socialism at the national **level**, was beginning to look suspiciously like liberal-socialism at the world level.

Thus, just as in the period 1848–1914, the liberal programme of the taming of the working classes in core zones via universal suffrage and the welfare state was implemented by a combination of socialist militancy and sophisticated conservative astuteness, so in the period 1917–1989, the liberal programme at a world scale, the taming of the South, was being implemented by a combination of socialist militancy and sophisticated conservative astuteness.

The second world revolution of 1968, just like the first world revolution of 1848, transformed the ideological strategies of the capitalist **world-economy**. Whereas the revolution of 1848, via its successes and its failures, ensured the triumph of liberalism as an ideology and the eventual transformation of its two rivals – conservatism and socialism – into mere adjuncts, the revolution of 1968, via its successes and its failures, undid the liberal consensus. The revolutionaries of 1968 launched a protest from the left against this consensus, and above all against the historic transformation of socialism, even Leninist socialism, into liberal-socialism. This took the form of a resurgence of various anarchist themes, but also, perhaps above all, of Maoism.

In the wake of the breaching of the worldwide liberal consensus by the so-called New Left, conservative ideology was also renewed for the first time since 1848 and became once again politically aggressive rather than defensive. Sometimes this was given the name of neo-conservatism but sometimes it was called neo-liberalism, which reflected the fact that its programme was primarily to remove constraints on the market and thereby to regress on welfare state reallocations, the first such significant regression in a century.

How can we account for the world revolution of 1968, and its consequences for ideological strategies? In terms of their structure of the world-system as a whole, we can say that the politics of liberalism – the taming of the world's working classes via **suffrage/sovereignty** and welfare statelnational development – had reached its limits. Further increases of political rights and economic reallocation would threaten the system of accumulation itself. But it had reached its limits before all sectors of the world's working classes had in fact been tamed by being included into a small but significant part of the benefits.

The majority of the population of the peripheral and semiperipheral zones were still excluded from the operations of the system. But so were a very significant minority of the populations of the core zones, the so-called 'Third World within'. And in addition, the world's women became conscious of their profound permanent exclusion, at all class levels, from true political rights, as well as, for the most part, from equal economic rewards.

What 1968 represented therefore was the beginning of the reversal of the cultural hegemony the world's dominant strata had, with great assiduity, been creating and strengthening since 1848. The period from 1968 to 1989 has seen the steady crumbling of what remained of the liberal consensus. On the right, conservatives increasingly sought to destroy the liberal centre. Compare the statement of Richard **Nixon** – 'we are all Keynesians now' – with the campaign of George Bush in 1988 against the '**L-word**', L for liberalism. Witness the virtual coup **d'état** in the British Conservative Party where Margaret Thatcher ended the tradition of enlightened conservatism that had gone back beyond Disraeli to Sir Robert Peel in the 1840's.

But the erosion was even greater on the left. It took the form most tellingly of the disintegration of the liberal-socialist regimes. In response to the patent inability of almost all of these regimes, in peripheral and semiperipheral zones, even the most 'progressive' and rhetorically militant among them, to achieve national development to any significant degree, one after the other of regimes with a glorious past of national liberation struggle lost their popular legitimacy. The culmination of this process was the so-called 'Collapse of the Communisms' – from the advent of **Gorbachevism** in the USSR and of 'special economic zones' in the People's Republic of China to the fall of the one-party Communist systems in all the countries of eastern Europe.

In 1968, those who were frustrated with the liberal consensus turned against the liberal-socialist ideology in the name of anarchism **and/or** Maoism. In 1989, those frustrated with the liberal consensus turned against the quintessential exponents of liberal-socialist ideology, the Soviet-style regimes, in the name of the free market. In neither case was the alternative proposed one to be taken seriously. The alternative of 1968 quickly proved meaningless, and the alternative of 1989 is in the process of doing the same. But, between 1968 and 1989, the liberal consensus and the hope it offered for gradual improvement in the lot of the world's working classes was fatally undermined. But if it is undermined, there can then be no taming of the working classes.

The true meaning of the collapse of the Communisms is the final collapse of liberalism as a hegemonic ideology. Without some belief in its promise, there can be no durable legitimacy to the capitalist world-system. The last serious believers in the promise of liberalism were the old-style Communist parties in the former Communist bloc. Without them to continue to perform this function, the world's dominant strata have lost any possibility to control the **world's** working classes other than by force. Consent is gone, and consent has gone because bribery had gone. But force alone, we have known since at least Machiavelli, is insufficient to permit political structures to survive very long.

II

Thus we come to the meaning of the Persian Gulf crisis, the beginning of the new era. In this era, the only effective weapon of the dominant forces is becoming force. The Persian Gulf war, unlike all other North-South confrontations in the twentieth century, was an exercise in pure *Realpolitik*. **Saddam** Hussein started it in this fashion, and the United States and the coalition it put together responded to it in the same way.

Realpolitik was never absent of course from previous conflicts. It informed the Congress of Baku in 1921 as well as the arrival of the Chinese Communist Party into Shanghai in 1949. It was part and parcel of the **Bandung** declaration of 1955, of the Vietnam war, and of the Cuban confrontation of 1962. It was always an integral part of the strategy of the antisystemic movements – witness Mao's maxim, 'political power comes out of the barrel of a gun' – but force was always an adjunct to the central organising motifs of antisystemic ideology. The South, the peripheral zones, the world's working classes had fought their battles under the banner of an ideology of transformation and hope, in which there was a clear ideological appeal to popular power.

We have been arguing that the forms this ideological struggle of the world's antisystemic movements took were less militant than they seemed or than they claimed. We have said that the world's antisystemic forces had

in fact been pursuing, in large part unwittingly, the liberal ideological objectives of homogenising integration into the system. But, in so doing, they at least offered hope, even exaggerated hope, and invited adherence to their cause on the basis of these hopes and promises. When the promises were finally seen to be unfulfilled, first there was fundamental uprising (1968) and then there was the anger of disillusionment (1989). The uprising and the disillusionment were directed more against the presumably anti-systemic liberal socialists than against the pure vintage liberals. But no matter, since liberalism had achieved its objectives via these **liberal-socialists** (and to be sure the liberal-conservatives as well), and had always been able to be effective alone.

Saddam Hussein drew the lesson of this collapse of the liberal ideological carapace. He concluded that 'national development' was a lure and an impossibility even for oil-rich states like Iraq. He decided that the only way to change the world's hierarchy of power was via the construction of large military powers in the South. He saw himself as the Bismarck of an eventual pan-Arab state. This was not the Bismarck of enlightened conservatism, but the Bismarck who was the leader of a state fighting an uphill battle in the interstate system. The invasion of Kuwait was to be the first step for **Saddam** Hussein in such a process, and would have as a side benefit the immediate solution to Iraq's debt crisis (elimination of a main creditor plus a windfall of looted capital).

If this was an exercise in pure Realpolitik, then we must look at the calculations. How must **Saddam** Hussein have evaluated his risks and therefore his chances of success? I do not believe he miscalculated. Rather I believe he reasoned in the following manner: Iraq had a 50-50 chance of winning in the short run (if the US hesitated to respond), but if Iraq moved, the US would find itself in a no-win situation where the US had a 100% chance of losing in the middle run. For a player of Realpolitik, these are good odds.

Saddam Hussein lost his short-run 50-50 gamble. The US reacted with the use of its maximal military strength, and of course was unbeatable. Iraq, as a country, has emerged much weakened from the war, albeit less totally knocked out than the US seemed to think it would accomplish. But the political situation in the Middle East is fundamentally unchanged from that of 1989, except that the political responsibility of the US has increased considerably without any significant increase in its political ability to defuse the tensions. Whatever the short-run developments, the continued erosion of the US middle-run political role in the world-system will continue unabated, given the continuing erosion of the US competitive position in the world-market *vis-à-vis* Japan and the European Community.

The long-run question that is open is not what developments will occur in the North, which are fairly easy to predict. When the next long upturn of

the world-economy occurs, the likely poles of strength will be two: a Japan–US axis, to which China will be attached, and a pan-European axis, to which Russia will be attached. In the new expansion and new rivalry among core powers, each pole concentrating on developing its principal semiperipheral zone (in the one case China, in the other case Russia), the South will in general be further marginalised, with the exception of enclaves here and there.

The political consequence of this new economic expansion will be intense North–South conflict. But if the North has lost its weapon of ideological control of the situation, can the antisystemic forces, in the South and those elsewhere supporting the South, that is (in older language), the world's working classes, reinvent an ideological dimension to their struggle?

As the ideological themes of yesteryear, those incarnated in socialist and anti-imperialist doctrines, have used themselves up, we have seen three principal modes of struggle emerge. Each has created enormous immediate difficulties for the dominant strata of the world-system. None of the three seems to pose a fundamental ideological challenge. One is what I would call the neo-Bismarckian challenge, of which **Saddam Hussein's** thrust has been an example. The second is the fundamental rejection of the Enlightenment *Weltanschauung*, whose strength we have seen in the forces led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. The third is the path of individual attempts at socio-geographical mobility, whose major expression is the massive unauthorised ongoing migration from South to North.

Two things stand out about these three forms of struggle. First, each is likely to increase manyfold in the 50 years to come, and will consume our collective political attention. Secondly, the world's left intellectuals have reacted in extremely ambiguous fashion to each of these three forms of the struggle. Insofar as they seem to be directed against the dominant strata of the world-system and to cause the latter discomfort, left intellectuals have wanted to support them. Insofar as each is void of ideological content, and hence politically reactionary rather than progressive in middle-run political consequence, left intellectuals have taken their distance, even considerable distance, from these struggles.

The question is what choice left forces have. If 1989 represents the end of a cultural era that ran from 1789 to 1989, what will be, what can be, the new ideological themes of the present era? Let me suggest one possible line of analysis. The theme of the era just past, that of modernity, was the virtue of newness and, in the political arena, the normality of change. This theme led, as we have tried to argue, steadily and logically to the triumph of liberalism as an ideology, that is, to the triumph of the political strategy of conscious, rational reform in the expectation of the inevitable perfecting of the body politic. Since, within the framework of a capitalist world-economy, there were (unrecognised) **inbuilt** limits to the 'perfecting' of the

body politic, this ideology reached its limits (in 1968 and 1989), and has now lost its efficacy.

We are now into a new era, an era I would describe as the era of disintegration of the capitalist world-economy. All the talk about creating 'a new world order' is mere shouting in the wind, believed by almost no one, and in any case most improbable of realisation. But what ideologies can exist if we are faced with the prospect of disintegration (as opposed to the prospect of normal progressive change)? The hero of liberalism, the individual, has no significant role to play amidst a disintegrating structure, since no individual can survive very long in such a structure acting alone. Our choice as subjects can only be that of groups large enough to carve out corners of strength and refuge. It is therefore no accident that the theme of 'group identity' has come to the fore to a degree unknown before in the modern world-system.

If the subjects are groups, these groups are in practice multiple in number and overlapping in very intricate ways. We are all members (even very active members) of numerous groups. But it is not enough to identify the theme of the group as subject. In the 1789–1989 era, both conservatives and socialists sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to establish the social primacy of groups, in the one case of certain traditional groupings, in the other case of the collectivity (the people) as a singular group. We must in addition put forward an ideology (that is, a political programme) based on the primacy of groups as actors.

There seems to be only two ideologies one can conceivably construct, although at this point neither has been fully constructed in fact. One can put forth the virtue and legitimacy of the 'survival of the fittest' groups. We hear this theme announced in the new aggressivity of proponents of neo-racist themes, which are often clothed in meritocratic garb rather than in the garb of racial purity. The new claims are no longer necessarily based on old narrow groupings (such as nations or even skin-colour groups), but rather on the right of the strong (however *ad hoc* their grouping) to hold on to their loot and protect it within their fortress localities.

The problem with the neo-Bismarckian and the anti-Enlightenment thrusts in the South is that they are inclined eventually to come to terms with their compeers in the North, thereby becoming merely one more fortress locality of the strong. We see this clearly in the politics of the Middle East of the last 15 years. Faced with the threats represented by Khomeini, **Saddam** Hussein was supported and strengthened by all sectors of the world's dominant strata. When **Saddam** Hussein moved to grab too large a share of the loot, these forces turned against him, and Khomeini's successors were happy to rejoin the dominant pack. This easy switching of alliances says something about the politics of the dominant strata (and the hypocrisy of their cant about concern with human rights), but it says something as well about Khomeini and his group and about the **Baathist** party under **Saddam** Hussein as well.

There is an alternative ideology to the 'survival of the fittest' groups that can be constructed around the primacy of groups in an era of disintegration. It is one that recognises the equal rights of all groups to a share in a reconstructed world-system while simultaneously recognising the **non-exclusivity** of groups. The network of groups is intricately cross-hatched. Some Blacks, but not all Blacks, are women; some Moslems, but not all Moslems, are Black; some intellectuals are Moslem; and so on ad **infinitum**. Creating real space for groups in the social system necessarily implies creating space within groups. All groups represent partial identities. Defensive frontiers between groups tend to have the consequence of creating hierarchies within groups. And yet, of course, without some defensive frontiers, groups can have no existence.

This then is our challenge, the creation of a new left ideology in a time of disintegration of the historical system within which we live. It is no easy task nor one that can be accomplished overnight. It **took** many, many decades to construct the ideologies of the post-1789 era. The stakes are high. For when systems disintegrate, something eventually replaces them. What we now know of systemic bifurcations is that the transformation can go in radically divergent directions because small input at that point can have great consequences (unlike in eras of relative stability such as that which the modern world-system enjoyed from circa **1500** to recently, when big inputs had limited consequence). We may emerge from the transition from historical capitalism to something else, say circa 2050, with a new system (or multiple systems) that is (are) highly inegalitarian and hierarchical, or into one that is largely democratic and egalitarian. It depends on whether or not those who prefer the latter outcome are capable of putting together a meaningful strategy of political change.

In the capitalist world-economy, the system works to exclude the majority (from benefits) by including in the work-system in a layered hierarchy all the world's potential work force. This system of exclusion via inclusion was infinitely strengthened by the diffusion in the nineteenth century of a dominant liberal ideology which justified this exclusion via inclusion, and managed to harness even the world's antisystemic forces to this task. That era, happily, is over. Now we must see if we can create a very different world-system that will include all in its benefits via the exclusions involved in the construction of self-conscious groups that nonetheless recognise their interlacing.

The definitive formulation of a clear antisystemic strategy for an era of disintegration will take at least two decades to develop. All one can do now is put forward some elements that might enter into such a strategy without being sure how all the pieces fit together, and without asserting that such a list is complete.

One element must surely be a definitive disjuncture with the past strategy of achieving social transformation via the acquisition of state

power. It is not that assuming governmental authority is never useful, but that it is almost never transformatory. The assumption of state power should be regarded as a necessary defensive tactic under specific circumstances in order to keep out ultra-right repressive forces. But state power should be recognised as a *pis aller*, which always risks a relegitimation of the existing world order. This break with liberal ideology will undoubtedly be the hardest step to take for antisystemic forces, despite the collapse of liberal ideology I have been analysing.

What goes with such a rupture with past practice would be a total unwillingness to manage the difficulties of the system. It is not the function of antisystemic forces to solve the political dilemmas that the increasingly strong contradictions of the system impose upon the dominant strata. The self-help of popular forces should be seen as quite distinct from negotiating reforms in the structure. This has been precisely the trap into which all antisystemic forces, even the most militant ones, were led during the liberal ideological era.

Instead, what antisystemic forces should be concentrating upon is the expansion of real social groups at community levels of every kind and variety, and their grouping (and constant regrouping) at higher levels in a non-unified form. The fundamental error of antisystemic forces in the previous era was the belief that the more unified the structure the more efficacious. To be sure, given a strategy of the priority of conquering state power, this policy was logical and seemingly fruitful. It is also what transformed socialist ideology into liberal-socialist ideology. Democratic centralism is the exact opposite of what is needed. The basis of solidarity of the multiple real groups at higher levels (state, region, world) has to be subtler, more flexible, and more organic. The family of antisystemic forces must move at many speeds in constant reformulation of the tactical priorities.

Such a coherent non-unified family of forces can only be plausible if each constituent group is itself a complex, internally democratic, structure. And this in turn is only possible if, at the collective level, we recognise that there are no strategic priorities in the struggle. One set of rights for one group is no more important than another set for another group. The debate about priorities is debilitating and deviating and leads back to the garden path of unified groups ultimately merged into a single unified movement. The battle for transformation can only be fought on all fronts at once.

A multi-front strategy by a multiplicity of groups, each complex and internally democratic, will have one tactical weapon at its disposal which may be overwhelming for the defenders of the status quo. It is the weapon of taking the old liberal ideology literally and demanding its universal fulfilment. For example, is not the appropriate tactic faced with the situation of mass unauthorised migration from South to North to demand the principle of the unlimited free market – open frontiers for all who wish

to come? Faced with such a demand, liberal ideologues can only shed their cant about human rights and acknowledge that they do not really mean freedom of emigration since they do not mean freedom of immigration.

Similarly, one can push on every front for the increased democratisation of decision-making, as well as the elimination of all the pockets of informal and unacknowledged privilege. What I am talking about here is the tactic of overloading the system by taking its pretensions and its claims more seriously than the dominant forces wish them to be taken. This is exactly the opposite of the tactic of managing the difficulties of the system.

Will all of this be enough? It is hard to know, and probably not, by itself. But it will force the dominant forces into more and more of a political corner and therefore into more desperate countertactics. The outcome would still be uncertain, unless the antisystemic forces can develop their utopistics – the reflection and the debate on the real dilemmas of the democratic, egalitarian order they wish to build. In the last period, utopistics was frowned upon as political diversion from the priority tasks first of gaining state power and then of national development. The net result has been a movement based on romantic illusion and hence subject to angry disillusionment. Utopistics are not utopian reveries, but the sober anticipation of difficulties and the open imagining of alternative institutional structures. Utopistics have been thought to be divisive. But if the antisystemic forces are to be non-unified and complex, then alternative visions of possible futures are part of the process.

The year 1989 represented the agonising end of an era. The so-called defeat of antisystemic forces was in fact a great liberation. It removed the liberal-socialist justification of the capitalist world-economy and thus represented the collapse of the dominant liberal ideology.

The new era into which we have entered is nonetheless even more treacherous. We are sailing on uncharted seas. We know more about the errors of the past than about the dangers of the near future. It will take an immense collective effort to develop a lucid strategy of transformation. Meanwhile, the disintegration of the system goes on apace, and the defenders of hierarchy and privilege are wasting no time to find solutions and outcomes that will change everything in order that nothing change. (Remember that di Lampedusa said this as a judgment of Garibaldian revolution.)

There is reason neither for optimism nor for pessimism. All remains possible, but all remains uncertain. We must unthink our old strategies. We must unthink our old analyses. They were all too marked with the dominant ideology of the capitalist world-economy. We must do this no doubt as organic intellectuals, but as organic intellectuals of a non-unified worldwide family of multiple groups, each complex in its own structure.