

On Post-Fascism

The degradation of universal citizenship

Gáspár Miklós Tamás

June 1, 2000

I have an interest to declare. The government of my country, Hungary, is—along with the Bavarian provincial government (provincial in more senses than one)—the strongest foreign supporter of Jörg Haider’s Austria. The right-wing cabinet in Budapest, besides other misdeeds, is attempting to suppress parliamentary governance, penalizing local authorities of a different political hue than itself, and busily creating and imposing a novel state ideology, with the help of a number of *lumpen* intellectuals of the extreme right, including some overt neo-Nazis. It is in cahoots with an openly and viciously anti-Semitic fascistic party that is, alas, represented in parliament. People working for the prime minister’s office are engaging in more or less cautious Holocaust revisionism. The government-controlled state television gives vent to raw anti-Gypsy racism. The fans of the most popular soccer club in the country, whose chairman is a cabinet minister and a party leader, are chanting in unison about the train that is bound to leave any moment for Auschwitz.

On the ground floor of the Central European University in Budapest you can visit an exhibition concerning the years of turmoil a decade or so ago. There you can watch a video recorded illegally in 1988, and you can see the current Hungarian prime minister defending and protecting me with his own body from the truncheons of communist riot police. Ten years later, this same person appointed a communist police general as his home secretary, the second or third most important person in the cabinet. Political conflicts between former friends and allies are usually acrimonious. This is no exception. I am an active participant in an incipient anti-fascist movement in Hungary, a speaker at rallies and demonstrations. Our opponents—in personal terms—are too close for comfort. Thus, I cannot consider myself a neutral observer.

The phenomenon that I shall call *post-fascism* is not unique to Central Europe. Far from it. To be sure, Germany, Austria, and Hungary are important, for historical reasons obvious to all; familiar phrases repeated here have different echoes. I recently saw that the old brick factory in Budapest’s third district is being demolished; I am told that they will build a gated community of suburban villas in its place. The brick factory is where the Budapest Jews waited their turn to be transported to the concentration camps. You could as well build holiday cottages in Treblinka. Our vigilance in this part of the world is perhaps more needed than anywhere else, since innocence, in historical terms, cannot be presumed.¹ Still, post-fascism is a cluster of policies, practices, routines, and ideologies that can be observed everywhere in the contemporary world; that have little or nothing to do, except in Central Europe, with the legacy of

¹ A few interesting articles in English concerning recent developments: Harry Ritter, “From Hapsburg to Hitler to Haider,” *German Studies Review* 22 (May 1999): 269–284; Jan Müller, “From National Identity to National Interest: The Rise and Fall of Germany’s New Right,” *German Politics* 8 (December 1999): 1–20; Michael Minkenberg, “The Renewal of the Radical Right,” *Government and Opposition* 35 (Spring 2000): 170–188; Jacob Heilbrunn, “A Disdain for the Past: Jörg Haider’s Austria,” *World Policy Journal* 28 (Spring 2000): 71–78; Immanuel Wallerstein, “Albatross of Racism,” *London Review of Books*, May 18, 2000, pp. 11–14; Rainer Bauböck, “Austria: Jörg Haider’s Grasp for Power,” *Dissent* (Spring 2000): 23–26.

Nazism; that are not totalitarian; that are not at all revolutionary; and that are not based on violent mass movements and irrationalist, voluntaristic philosophies, nor are they toying, even in jest, with anti-capitalism.

Why call this cluster of phenomena *fascism*, however post-?

Post-fascism finds its niche easily in the new world of global capitalism without upsetting the dominant political forms of electoral democracy and representative government. It does what I consider to be central to all varieties of fascism, including the post-totalitarian version. *Sans* Führer, *sans* one-party rule, *sans* SA or SS, post-fascism *reverses the Enlightenment tendency to assimilate citizenship to the human condition*.

Before the Enlightenment, citizenship was a privilege, an elevated status limited by descent, class, race, creed, gender, political participation, morals, profession, patronage, and administrative fiat, not to speak of age and education. Active membership in the political community was a station to yearn for, *civis Romanus sum* the enunciation of a certain nobility. Policies extending citizenship may have been generous or stingy, but the rule was that the rank of citizen was conferred by the lawfully constituted authority, according to expediency. Christianity, like some Stoics, sought to transcend this kind of limited citizenship by considering it second-rate or inessential when compared to a virtual community of the saved. Freedom from sin was superior to the freedom of the city. During the long, medieval obsolescence of the civic, the claim for an active membership in the political community was superseded by the exigencies of just governance, and civic excellence was abbreviated to martial virtue.

Once citizenship was equated with human dignity, its extension to all classes, professions, both sexes, all races, creeds, and locations was only a matter of time. Universal franchise, the national service, and state education for all had to follow. Moreover, once all human beings were supposed to be able to accede to the high rank of a citizen, national solidarity within the newly egalitarian political community demanded the relief of the estate of Man, a dignified material existence for all, and the eradication of the remnants of personal servitude. The state, putatively representing everybody, was prevailed upon to grant not only a modicum of wealth for most people, but also a minimum of leisure, once the exclusive temporal fief of gentlemen only, in order to enable us all to play and enjoy the benefits of culture.

For the liberal, social-democratic, and other assorted progressive heirs of the Enlightenment, then, progress meant universal citizenship—that is, a virtual equality of political condition, a virtually equal say for all in the common affairs of any given community—together with a social condition and a model of rationality that could make it possible. For some, socialism seemed to be the straightforward continuation and enlargement of the Enlightenment project; for some, like Karl Marx, the completion of the project required a revolution (doing away with the appropriation of surplus value and an end to the social division of labor). But for all of them it appeared fairly

obvious that the merger of the human and the political condition was, simply, moral necessity.²

The savage nineteenth-century condemnations of bourgeois society—the common basis, for a time, of the culturally avant-garde and politically radical—stemmed from the conviction that the process, as it was, was fraudulent, and that individual liberty was not all it was cracked up to be, but not from the view, represented only by a few solitary figures, that the endeavor was worthless. It was not only Nietzsche and Dostoevsky who feared that increasing equality might transform everybody above and under the middle classes into bourgeois philistines. Progressive revolutionaries, too, wanted a New Man and a New Woman, bereft of the inner demons of repression and domination: a civic community that was at the same time *the* human community needed a new morality grounded in respect for the hitherto excluded.

This adventure ended in the debacle of 1914. Fascism offered the most determined response to the collapse of the Enlightenment, especially of democratic socialism and progressive social reform. Fascism, on the whole, was not conservative, even if it was counter-revolutionary: it did not re-establish hereditary aristocracy or the monarchy, despite some romantic-reactionary verbiage. But it was able to undo the key regulative (or liminal) notion of modern society, that of universal citizenship. By then, governments were thought to represent and protect everybody. National or state borders defined the difference between friend and foe; foreigners could be foes, fellow citizens could not. *Pace* Carl Schmitt, the legal theorist of fascism and the political theologian of the Third Reich, the sovereign could *not* simply decide by fiat who would be friend and who would be foe. But Schmitt was right on one fundamental point: the idea of universal citizenship contains an inherent contradiction in that the dominant institution of modern society, the nation-state, is both a universalistic and a parochial (since territorial) institution. Liberal nationalism, unlike ethnicism and fascism, is limited—if you wish, tempered—universalism. Fascism put an end to this shilly-shallying: the sovereign was judge of who does and does not belong to the civic community, and citizenship became a function of his (or its) trenchant decree.

This hostility to universal citizenship is, I submit, the main characteristic of fascism. And the rejection of even a tempered universalism is what we now see repeated under democratic circumstances (I do not even say under democratic disguise). Post-totalitarian fascism is thriving under the capacious carapace of global capitalism, and we should tell it like it is.

There is logic in the Nazi declaration that communists, Jews, homosexuals, and the mentally ill are non-citizens and, therefore, non-human. (The famous ideologist of the Iron Guard, the suave essayist E. M. Cioran, pointed out at the time that if some persons are non-human but aspire to humanity [i.e., Jews] the contradiction might be

² See G. M. Tamás, “Ethnarchy and Ethno-Anarchism,” *Social Research* 63 (Spring 1996): 147–190; Idem., “The Two-Hundred Years War,” *Boston Review*, Summer 1999, pp. 31–36.

sublated and resolved by their violent death, preferably, according to the celebrated and still-fashionable aesthete, by their own hand.)

These categories of people, as the Nazis saw them, represented types crucial to the Enlightenment project of inclusion. Communists meant the rebellious “lower type,” the masses brought in, leaderless and rudderless, by rootless universalism, and then rising up against the natural hierarchy; Jews, a community that survived the Christian middle ages without political power of its own, led by an essentially non-coercive authority, the people of the Book, by definition not a people of war; homosexuals, by their inability or unwillingness to procreate, bequeath, and continue, a living refutation of the alleged link between nature and history; the mentally ill, listening to voices unheard by the rest of us—in other words, people whose recognition needs a moral effort and is not immediately (“naturally”) given, who can fit in only by enacting an equality of the unequal.

The perilous differentiation between citizen and non-citizen is not, of course, a fascist invention. As Michael Mann points out in a pathbreaking study³, the classical expression “we the People” did not include black slaves and “red Indians” (Native Americans), and the ethnic, regional, class, and denominational definitions of “the people” have led to genocide both “out there” (in settler colonies) and within nation states (see the Armenian massacre perpetrated by modernizing Turkish nationalists) under democratic, semi-democratic, or authoritarian (but not “totalitarian”) governments. If sovereignty is vested in the people, the territorial or demographic definition of what and who the people are becomes decisive. Moreover, the withdrawal of legitimacy from state socialist (communist) and revolutionary nationalist (“Third World”) regimes with their mock-Enlightenment definitions of nationhood left only racial, ethnic, and confessional (or denominational) bases for a legitimate claim or title for “state-formation” (as in Yugoslavia, Czecho-Slovakia, the ex-Soviet Union, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Sudan, etc.)

Everywhere, then, from Lithuania to California, immigrant and even autochthonous minorities have become the enemy and are expected to put up with the diminution and suspension of their civic and human rights. The propensity of the European Union to weaken the nation-state and strengthen regionalism (which, by extension, might prop up the power of the center at Brussels and Strasbourg) manages to ethnicize rivalry and territorial inequality (see Northern vs. Southern Italy, Catalonia vs. Andalusia, English South East vs. Scotland, Fleming vs. Walloon Belgium, Brittany vs. Normandy). Class conflict, too, is being ethnicized and racialized, between the established and secure working class and lower middle class of the metropolis and the new immigrant of the periphery, also construed as a problem of security and crime.⁴ Hungarian and Serbian ethnicists pretend that the nation is wherever persons of Hungarian or Serbian origin

³ Michael Mann, “The Dark Side of Democracy: The Modern Tradition of Ethnic and Political Cleansing,” *New Left Review* 235 (May/June 1999):18–45.

⁴ See Mark Neocleous, “Against Security,” *Radical Philosophy* 100 (March/April 2000): 7–15; Idem., *Fascism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997). The evolution from “l’état social” to “l’état pénal” has been repeatedly highlighted by Pierre Bourdieu.

happen to live, regardless of their citizenship, with the corollary that citizens of their nation-state who are ethnically, racially, denominationally, or culturally “alien” do not really belong to the nation.

The growing de-politicization of the concept of a nation (the shift to a cultural definition) leads to the acceptance of discrimination as “natural.” This is the discourse the right intones quite openly in the parliaments and street rallies in eastern and Central Europe, in Asia, and, increasingly, in “the West.” It cannot be denied that attacks against egalitarian welfare systems and affirmative action techniques everywhere have a dark racial undertone, accompanied by racist police brutality and vigilantism in many places. The link, once regarded as necessary and logical, between citizenship, equality, and territory may disappear in what the theorist of the Third Way, the formerly *Marxissant* sociologist Anthony Giddens, calls a society of responsible risk-takers.

The most profound attempt to analyze the phenomenon of political exclusion is Georges Bataille’s “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,”⁵ which draws on the author’s distinction between homogeneity and heterogeneity. To simplify, homogeneous society is the society of work, exchange, usefulness, sexual repression, fairness, tranquility, procreation; what is heterogeneous:

includes everything resulting from *unproductive* expenditure (sacred things themselves form part of this whole). This consists of everything rejected by *homogeneous* society as waste or as superior transcendent values. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin, etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams and neuroses; the numerous later elements or social forms that *homogeneous* society is powerless to assimilate (mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individuals or at least those who refuse the rule—madmen, leaders, poets, etc.); ... *violence, excess, delirium, madness* characterize heterogeneous elements ... compared to everyday life, *heterogeneous* exis-

⁵ Georges Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” [November 1933], trans. Carl R. Lovitt, in *Visions of Excess*, ed. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 137–160. Concerning the problem of masses and violence, see Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 105, 115–116. Also: Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988). An interesting liberal critique of Bataille’s theory of fascism can be found in Susan Rubin Suleiman’s “Bataille on the Street,” in *Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 26–45. Bataille’s critique has to be understood within the context of the anti-Stalinist, revolutionary ultra-left. Two volumes of correspondence whirling around Bataille, Souvarine, Simone Weil, and the mysterious Laure (Colette Peignot) have recently been published: Laure: *Une rupture*, 1934, ed. Anne Roche and Jérôme Peignot (Paris: Editions des Cendres, 1999); and Georges Bataille, *L’Apprenti sorcier*, ed. Marina Galletti (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1999). As to another radical critique of fascism in the 1930s, see Karl Polányi, “The Essence of Fascism,” in *Christianity and Social Revolution*, ed. J. Lewis, K. Polányi, D. K. Kitchin (London: Gollancz, 1935).

tence can be represented as something *other*, as *incommensurate*, by charging these words with the *positive* value they have in *affective* experience.⁶

Sovereign power, according to Bataille (and to Carl Schmitt⁷), is quintessentially heterogeneous in its pre-modern sacral versions (kings ruling by Divine Right). This heterogeneity is hidden in capitalist democracy, where the sovereign is supposed to rule through an impersonal legal order that applies equally to all. Fascist dictatorship is in business to uncover or unmask it. This explains the link of fascist dictatorship to the impoverished, disorderly, *lumpen* mob. And this is exactly, I should add, what gets lost in post-fascism. The re-creation of sacral sovereignty by fascism is, however, a fake. It is homogeneity masquerading as heterogeneity. What is left in the homogeneous sphere in the middle is the pure bourgeois without the *citoyen*, Julien Sorel finally and definitely robbed of his Napoleon, Lucien Leuwen deprived of his Danton. Fascism, having put an end to the bourgeois realization of Enlightenment (i.e. to egalitarian capitalist democracy), transforms the social exclusion of the unproductive (from hermits and vatic poets to unemployable paupers and indomitable rebels) into their natural exclusion (i.e., extra-legal arrest, hunger, and death).

Bataille's work comes out of the French objectivist sociological tradition, from Durkheim, Mauss, and Halbwachs through Kojève to Paul Veyne, wherein political repression and exclusion are not interpreted in moralistic and psychological, but in anthropological terms—as a matter of establishing identity. Bataille's revolutionary critique of the exclusion of the “heterogeneous”—the “useless,” people who are not “responsible risk-takers”—is based on an understanding of society, sexuality, and religion, a combination of Durkheim and Marx, if you wish, that might offer an alternative of our contemporary, on the whole Kantian, resistance to post-fascism. Our moralistic criticism, however justified, customarily precludes the comprehension of the lure of the phenomenon, and leads to a simplistic contempt for barbaric, benighted racists, rabble-rousers, and demagogues, and a rather undemocratic ignorance of peoples, fears, and desires.

An alternative line of argument, suggested by this tradition, begins by observing that the breakdown of egalitarian welfare states frequently means a shift in the focus of solidarity, fraternity, and pity. If there is no virtually equal citizenship, the realization of which should have been the aim of honest, liberal democrats and democratic socialists, the passion of generosity will remain dissatisfied. A feeling of fellowship toward kith

⁶ Bataille, “Psychological Structure,” 142. See the two intriguing drafts to the essay on fascism: “Cet aspect religieux manifeste ...” and “En affet la vie humaine ...” in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 161–164. Also: Antonio Negri's theory of constituent power and constituted power in his *Insurgencies*, trans. Maurizio Boscagli (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1999), pp. 1–128, 212–229.

⁷ On the parallel between Bataille and Carl Schmitt, see Martin Jay, “The Reassertion of Sovereignty in a Time of Crisis: Carl Schmitt and Georges Bataille,” in *Force Fields* (New York, Routledge, 1993), pp. 49–60; Bataille's essay on “Sovereignty,” *The Accursed Share* vols. 2 and 3, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1933).

and kin has always been one of the most potent motives for altruism. Altruism of this kind, when bereft of a civic, egalitarian focus, will find intuitive criteria offered by the dominant discourse to establish what and whom it will desire to serve. If civic politics cannot do it, racial feeling or feelings of cultural proximity certainly will. Identity is usually outlined by affection and received threats. He who will define those successfully wins. Nobody is better at describing this *identity panic* than Bataille.⁸

The half-mad pornographer and ultra-leftist extremist, as Bataille is still regarded *in petto*, cannot be well received by self-respecting social theorists, I believe, but curiously his theory is borne out by the acknowledged standard work on the Nazi regime, written by the greatest legal hawk of the German trade union movement, happily rediscovered today as the first-rate mind that he was.⁹ In contradistinction to fanciful theories of totalitarianism, the great Ernst Fraenkel, summing up his painstaking survey of Nazi legislation and jurisprudence, writes that:

[i]n present day Germany [he is writing in 1937–39], many people find the arbitrary rule of the Third Reich unbearable. These same people acknowledge, however, that the idea of “community,” as there understood, is something truly great. Those who take up this ambivalent attitude toward National-Socialism suffer from two principal misconceptions:

1. The present German ideology of *Gemeinschaft* (community) is nothing but a mask hiding the still existing capitalistic structure of society.

2. The ideological mask (the community) equally hides the Prerogative State [Fraenkel distinguishes the “normal,” so-called Normative State providing chiefly for civil law and the quasi-totalitarian Party state subordinated to the *Führerprinzip*] operating by arbitrary measures.

The replacement of the *Rechtsstaat* (Legal State) by the Dual State is but a symptom. The root of evil lies at the exact point where the uncritical opponents of National-Socialism discover grounds for admiration, namely in the community ideology and in the militant capitalism which this very notion of the *Gemeinschaft* is supposed to hide. It is indeed for the maintenance of capitalism in Germany that the authoritarian Dual State is necessary.¹⁰

The Autonomy of the Normative State (“homogeneous society”) was maintained in Nazi Germany in a limited area, mostly where the protection of private property was concerned (property of so-called Aryans, of course); the Prerogative State held sway in more narrowly political matters, the privileges of the Party, the military and the paramilitary, culture, ideology, and propaganda. The “dual state” was a consequence

⁸ See Jean Piel, “Bataille and the World,” in *On Bataille: Critical Essays*, ed. Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 95–106.

⁹ Ernst Fraenkel, *The Dual State* [1941], trans. E. A. Shils, E. Lowenstein, and K. Knorr (New York: Octagon, 1969). See also: David Schoenbaum, *Hitler’s Social Revolution* (Garden City: Anchor Doubleday, 1967), pp. 113–151.

¹⁰ Fraenkel, *The Dual State*, p. 153.

of the Schmittian decision of the new sovereign as to what was law, and what was not. But there was no rule by decree in the sphere reserved to capitalism proper, the economy. It is not true, therefore, that the *whole* system of Nazi or fascist governance was *wholly* arbitrary. The macabre meeting of the Normative and the Prerogative is illustrated by the fact that the German Imperial Railways billed the SS for the horrible transports to Auschwitz at special holiday discount rates, customary for package tours. But they billed them!

People within the jurisdiction of the Normative State (Bataille's homogeneous society) enjoyed the usual protection of law, however harsh it tended to be. Special rules, however, applied to those in the purview of the Prerogative State (heterogeneous society)—both the Nazi Party leaders, officials, and militant activists, above the law, and the persecuted minorities, under or outside it. Before fascism, friend and citizen, foe and alien, were coincidental notions; no government thought systematically to declare war on the inhabitants of the land, who were members (even if unequal members) of the nation: civil war was equated with the absence of legally constituted, effective government. Civil war from the top, launched in peacetime, or at least under definitely non-revolutionary circumstances, turns sovereignty against the suzerain of the subject. The main weapon in this methodical civil war, where the state as such is one of the warring parties, is the continuous redefinition of citizenship by the Prerogative state.

And since, thanks to Enlightenment, citizenship (membership in the political community), nationality, and humanity had been synthetically merged, being expelled from citizenship meant, quite literally, exclusion from humanity. Hence civic death was necessarily followed by natural death, that is, violent death, or death *tout court*. Fascist or Nazi genocide was not preceded by legal condemnation (not even in the stunted and fraudulent shape of the so-called administrative verdicts of Cheka “tribunals”): it was the “naturalization” of a moral judgment that deemed some types of human condition inferior. And since there was no protection outside citizenship, lack of citizenship had become the cause of the cessation of the necessary precondition of the human condition—life.

Cutting the civic and human community in two: this is fascism.

This is why the expression, albeit bewildering, must be revived, because the fundamental conceptual technique of civic, hence human, scission has been revived, this time not by a deliberate counter-revolutionary movement, but by certain developments that were, probably, not willed by anyone and that are crying out for a name. The name is post-fascism.

The phenomenon itself came into being at a confluence of various political processes. Let me list them.

Decline of Critical Culture

After the 1989 collapse of the Soviet bloc, contemporary society underwent fundamental change. Bourgeois society, liberal democracy, democratic capitalism—name it what you will—has always been a controversial affair; unlike previous regimes, it developed an adversary culture, and was permanently confronted by strong competi-

tors on the right (the alliance of the throne and the altar) and the left (revolutionary socialism). Both have become obsolete, and this has created a serious crisis within the culture of late modernism.¹¹ The mere idea of radical change (utopia and critique) has been dropped from the rhetorical vocabulary, and the political horizon is now filled by what is there, by what is given, which is capitalism. In the prevalent social imagination, the whole human cosmos is a “homogeneous society”—a society of useful, wealth-producing, procreating, stable, irreligious, but at the same time *jouissant*, free individuals. Citizenship is increasingly defined, apolitically, in terms of interests that are not contrasted with the common good, but united within it through understanding, interpretation, communication, and voluntary accord based on shared presumptions.

In this picture, obligation and coercion, the *differentia specifica* of politics (and in permanent need of moral justification), are conspicuously absent. “Civil society”—a nebula of voluntary groupings where coercion and domination, by necessity, do not play any important role—is said to have cannibalized politics and the state. A dangerous result of this conception might be that the continued underpinning of law by coercion and domination, while criticized *in toto*, is not watched carefully enough—since, if it cannot be justified at all, no justification, thus no moral control, will be sought. The myth, according to which the core of late-modern capitalism is “civil society,” blurs the conceptual boundaries of citizenship, which is seen more and more as a matter of policy, not politics.

Before 1989, you could take it for granted that the political culture of liberal-democratic-constitutional capitalism was a critical culture, more often than not in conflict with the system that, sometimes with bad grace and reluctantly, sustained it. Apologetic culture was for ancient empires and anti-liberal dictatorships. Highbrow despair is now rampant. But without a sometimes only implicit utopia as a prop, despair does not seem to work. What is the point of theoretical anti-capitalism, if political anti-capitalism cannot be taken seriously?

Also, there is an unexpected consequence of this absence of a critical culture tied to an oppositional politics. As one of the greatest and most level-headed masters of twentieth-century political sociology, Seymour Martin Lipset, has noted, fascism is *the extremism of the center*. Fascism had very little to do with *passéiste* feudal, aristocratic, monarchist ideas, was on the whole anti-clerical, opposed communism and socialist revolution, and—like the liberals whose electorate it had inherited—hated big business, trade unions, and the social welfare state. Lipset had classically shown that extremisms of the left and right were by no means exclusive: some petty bourgeois attitudes suspecting big business and big government could be, and were, prolonged into an extremism that proved lethal. Right-wing and center extremisms were combined in Hungarian, Austrian, Croatian, Slovak para-fascism (I have borrowed this term from

¹¹ See G. M. Tamás, “Democracy’s Triumph, Philosophy’s Peril,” *Journal of Democracy* 11 (January 2000): 103–110. On alarming alternatives to politics as we know it, see Jacques Rancière, *La Mésestence* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), pp. 95–131.

Roger Griffin) of a pseudo-Christian, clericalist, royalist coloring, but extremism of the center does and did exist, proved by Lipset also through continuities in electoral geography.

Today there is nothing of any importance on the political horizon but the bourgeois center, therefore its extremism is the most likely to reappear. (Jörg Haider and his Freedom Party are the best example of this. Parts of his discourse are libertarian/neoliberal, his ideal is the propertied little man, he strongly favors a shareholding and home-owning petty bourgeois “democracy,” and he is quite free of romantic-reactionary nationalism as distinct from parochial selfishness and racism.) What is now considered “right-wing” in the United States would have been considered insurrectionary and suppressed by armed force in any traditional regime of the right as individualistic, decentralizing, and opposed to the monopoly of coercive power by the government, the foundation of each and every conservative creed. Conservatives are *le parti de l’ordre*, and loathe militias and plebian cults.

Decaying States

The end of colonial empires in the 1960s and the end of Stalinist (“state socialist,” “state capitalist,” “bureaucratic collectivist”) systems in the 1990s has triggered a process never encountered since the Mongolian invasions in the thirteenth century: a comprehensive and apparently irreversible collapse of established statehood as such. While the *bien-pensant* Western press daily bemoans perceived threats of dictatorship in far-away places, it usually ignores the reality behind the tough talk of powerless leaders, namely that nobody is prepared to obey them. The old, creaking, and unpopular nation-state—the only institution to date that had been able to grant civil rights, a modicum of social assistance, and some protection from the exactions of privateer gangs and rapacious, irresponsible business elites—ceased to exist or never even emerged in the majority of the poorest areas of the world. In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa and of the former Soviet Union not only the refugees, but the whole population could be considered stateless. The way back, after decades of demented industrialization (see the horrific story of the hydroelectric plants everywhere in the Third World and the former Eastern bloc), to a subsistence economy and “natural” barter exchanges in the midst of environmental devastation, where banditry seems to have become the only efficient method of social organization, leads exactly nowhere. People in Africa and ex-Soviet Eurasia are dying not by a surfeit of the state, but by the absence of it.

Traditionally, liberation struggles of any sort have been directed against entrenched privilege. Equality came at the expense of ruling groups: secularism reduced the power of the Princes of the Church, social legislation dented the profits of the “moneyed interest,” universal franchise abolished the traditional political class of landed aristocracy and the *noblesse de robe*, the triumph of commercial pop culture smashed the ideological prerogatives of the progressive intelligentsia, horizontal mobility and suburban sprawl ended the rule of party politics on the local level, contraception and consumerist hedonism dissolved patriarchal rule in the family—something lost, something gained. Every step toward greater freedom curtailed somebody’s privileges (quite apart from

the pain of change). It was conceivable to imagine the liberation of outlawed and downtrodden lower classes through economic, political, and moral crusades: there was, crudely speaking, somebody to take ill-gotten gains from. And those gains could be redistributed to more meritorious sections of the population, offering in exchange greater social concord, political tranquility, and safety to unpopular, privileged elites, thereby reducing class animosity. But let us not forget though that the social-democratic bargain has been struck as a result of centuries of conflict and painful renunciations by the traditional ruling strata. Such a liberation struggle, violent or peaceful, is not possible for the new wretched of the earth.

Nobody exploits them. There is no extra profit and surplus value to be appropriated. There is no social power to be monopolized. There is no culture to be dominated. The poor people of the new stateless societies—from the “homogeneous” viewpoint—are totally superfluous. They are not exploited, but neglected. There is no overtaxation, since there are no revenues. Privileges cannot be redistributed toward a greater equality since there are no privileges, except the temporary ones to be had, occasionally, at gunpoint.

Famished populations have no way out from their barely human condition but to leave. The so-called center, far from exploiting this periphery of the periphery, is merely trying to keep out the foreign and usually colored destitutes (the phenomenon is euphemistically called “demographic pressure”) and set up awesome barriers at the frontiers of rich countries, while our international financial bureaucracy counsels further deregulation, liberalization, less state and less government to nations that do not have any, and are perishing in consequence. “Humanitarian wars” are fought in order to prevent masses of refugees from flowing in and cluttering up the Western welfare systems that are in decomposition anyway.

Citizenship in a functional nation-state is the one safe meal ticket in the contemporary world. But such citizenship is now a privilege of the very few. The Enlightenment assimilation of citizenship to the necessary and “natural” political condition of all human beings has been reversed. Citizenship was once upon a time a privilege within nations. It is now a privilege to *most* persons in *some* nations. Citizenship is today the very exceptional privilege of the inhabitants of flourishing capitalist nation-states, while the majority of the world’s population cannot even begin to aspire to the civic condition, and has also lost the relative security of pre-state (tribe, kinship) protection.

The scission of citizenship and sub-political humanity is now complete, the work of Enlightenment irretrievably lost. Post-fascism does not need to put non-citizens into freight trains to take them into death; instead, it need only prevent the new non-citizens from boarding any trains that might take them into the happy world of overflowing rubbish bins that could feed them. Post-fascist movements everywhere, but especially in Europe, are anti-immigration movements, grounded in the “homogeneous” world-view of productive usefulness. They are not simply protecting racial and class privileges within the nation-state (although they are doing that, too) but protecting universal citizenship within the rich nation-state against the virtual-universal citizenship of all

human beings, regardless of geography, language, race, denomination, and habits. The current notion of “human rights” might defend people from the lawlessness of tyrants, but it is no defense against the lawlessness of no rule.

Varieties of Post-Fascism

It is frequently forgotten that contemporary global capitalism is a second edition. In the pre-1914 capitalism of no currency controls (the gold standard, etc.) and free trade, a world without visas and work permits, when companies were supplying military stuff to the armies of the enemy in wartime without as much as a squeak from governments or the press, the free circulation of capital and labor was more or less assured (it was, perhaps, a less equal, but a freer world). In comparison, the thing called “globalization” is a rather modest undertaking, a gradual and timorous destruction of *étatiste* and *dirigiste*, welfarist nation-states built on the egalitarian bargain of old-style social democracy whose constituency (construed as the backbone of modern nations), the rust-belt working class, is disintegrating. Globalization has liberated capital flows. Speculative capital goes wherever investments appear as “rational,” usually places where wages are low and where there are no militant trade unions or ecological movements. But unlike in the nineteenth century, labor is not granted the same freedoms. *Spiritus flat ubi vult*, capital flies wherever it wants, but the free circulation of labor is impeded by ever more rigid national regulations. The flow is all one-way; capital can improve its position, but labor—especially low-quality, low-intensity labor in the poor countries of the periphery—cannot. Deregulation for capital, stringent regulation for labor.

If the workforce is stuck at the periphery, it will have to put up with sweatshops. Attempts to fight for higher salaries and better working conditions are met *not* with violence, strikebreakers, or military coups, but by quiet capital flight and disapproval from international finance and its international or national bureaucracies, which will have the ability to decide who is deserving of aid or debt relief. To quote Albert O. Hirschman, *voice* (that is, protest) is impossible, nay, pointless. Only *exit*, exodus, remains, and it is the job of post-fascism to prevent that.

Under these conditions, it is only logical that the New New Left has re-appropriated the language of human rights instead of class struggle. If you glance at *Die Tageszeitung*, *Il Manifesto*, *Rouge*, or *Socialist Worker*, you will see that they are mostly talking about asylum-seekers, immigrants (legal or illegal, *les sans-papiers*,) squatters, the homeless, Gypsies, and the like. It is a tactic forced upon them by the disintegration of universal citizenship, by unimpeded global capital flows by the impact of new technologies on workers and consumers, and by the slow death of the global sub-proletariat. Also, they have to face the revival of class politics in a new guise by the proponents of “the third way” à la Tony Blair. The neo-neoliberal state has rescinded its obligations to “heterogeneous,” non-productive populations and groups. Neo-Victorian, pedagogic ideas of “workfare,” which declare unemployment implicitly sinful, the equation of welfare claimants with “enemies of the people,” the replacement of social assistance with tax credits whereby people beneath the category of taxpayers are not deemed worthy of aid,

income support made conditional on family and housing practices believed proper by “competent authorities,” the increasing racialization, ethnicization, and sexualization of the underclass, the replacement of social solidarity with ethnic or racial solidarity, the overt acknowledgment of second-class citizenship, the tacit recognition of the role of police as a racial defense force, the replacement of the idea of emancipation with the idea of privileges (like the membership in the European Union, the OECD, or the WTO) arbitrarily dispensed to the deserving poor, and the transformation of rational arguments against EU enlargement into racist/ethnicist rabble-rousing—all this is part of the post-fascist strategy of the scission of the civic-cum-human community, of a renewed granting or denial of citizenship along race, class, denominational, cultural, ethnic lines.

The re-duplication of the underclass—a global underclass abroad and the “heterogeneous,” wild ne’er-do-wells at home, with the interests of one set of underclass (“domestic”) presented as inimical to the other (“foreign”)—gives post-fascism its missing populist dimension. There is no harsher enemy of the immigrant—“guest worker” or asylum-seeker—than the obsolescent *lumpenproletariat*, publicly represented by the hard-core, right-wing extremist soccer hooligan. “Lager louts” may not know that *lager* does not only mean a kind of cheap continental beer, but also a concentration camp. But the unconscious pun is, if not symbolic, metaphorical.

We are, then, faced with a new kind of extremism of the center. This new extremism, which I call post-fascism, does not threaten, unlike its predecessor, liberal and democratic rule within the core constituency of “homogeneous society.” Within the community cut in two, freedom, security, prosperity are on the whole undisturbed, at least within the productive and procreative majority that in some rich countries encompasses nearly all white citizens. “Heterogeneous,” usually racially alien, minorities are not persecuted, only neglected and marginalized, forced to live a life wholly foreign to the way of life of the majority (which, of course, can sometimes be qualitatively better than the flat workaholism, consumerism, and health obsessions of the majority). Drugs, once supposed to widen and raise consciousness, are now uneasily pacifying the enforced idleness of those society is unwilling to help and to recognize as fellow humans. The “Dionysiac” subculture of the sub-proletariat further exaggerates the bifurcation of society. Political participation of the have-nots is out of the question, without any need for the restriction of franchise. Apart from the incipient and feeble (“new new”) left-wing radicalism, as isolated as anarcho-syndicalism was in the second half of the nineteenth century, nobody seeks to represent them. The conceptual tools once offered by democratic and libertarian socialism are missing; and libertarians are nowadays militant bourgeois extremists of the center, ultra-capitalist cyberpunks hostile to any idea of solidarity beyond the *fluxus* of the global marketplace.

Post-fascism does not need stormtroopers and dictators. It is perfectly compatible with an anti-Enlightenment liberal democracy that rehabilitates citizenship as a grant from the sovereign instead of a universal human right. I confess I am giving it a rude name here to attract attention to its glaring injustice. Post-fascism is historically

continuous with its horrific predecessor only in patches. Certainly, Central and East European anti-Semitism has not changed much, but it is hardly central. Since post-fascism is only rarely a movement, rather simply a state of affairs, managed as often as not by so-called center-left governments, it is hard to identify intuitively. Post-fascists do not speak usually of total obedience and racial purity, but of the information superhighway.

Everybody knows the instinctive fury people experience when faced with a closed door. Now tens of millions of hungry human beings are rattling the doorknob. The rich countries are thinking up more sophisticated padlocks, while their anger at the invaders outside is growing, too. Some of the anger leads to the revival of the Nazi and fascist *Gedankengut* ("treasure-trove of ideas"), and this will trigger righteous revulsion. But post-fascism is not confined to the former Axis powers and their willing ex-clients, however revolting and horrifying this specific sub-variant may be. East European Gypsies (Roma and Sintj, to give their politically correct names) are persecuted both by the constabulary and by the populace, and are trying to flee to the "free West." The Western reaction is to introduce visa restrictions against the countries in question in order to prevent massive refugee influx, and solemn summons to East European countries to respect human rights. Domestic racism is supplanted by global liberalism, both grounded on a political power that is rapidly becoming racialized.

Multiculturalist responses are desperate avowals of impotence: an acceptance of the ethnicization of the civic sphere, but with a humanistic and benevolent twist. These avowals are concessions of defeat, attempts to humanize the inhuman. The field had been chosen by post-fascism, and liberals are trying to fight it on its own favorite terrain, ethnicity. This is an enormously disadvantageous position. Without new ways of addressing the problem of global capitalism, the battle will surely be lost.

But the new Dual State is alive and well. A Normative State for the core populations of the capitalist center, and a Prerogative State of arbitrary decrees concerning non-citizens for the rest. Unlike in classical, totalitarian fascism, the Prerogative State is only dimly visible for the subjects of the Normative State: the essential human and civic community with those kept out and kept down is morally invisible. The radical critique pretending that liberty within the Normative State is an illusion is erroneous, though understandable. The denial of citizenship based not on exploitation, oppression, and straightforward discrimination among the denizens of "homogeneous society," but on mere exclusion and distance, is difficult to grasp, because the mental habits of liberation struggle for a more just redistribution of goods and power are not applicable. The problem is not that the Normative State is becoming more authoritarian. The problem is that it belongs only to a few.

The Ted K Archive

Gáspár Miklós Tamás
On Post-Fascism
The degradation of universal citizenship
June 1, 2000

Retrieved on 2020-04-06 from, bostonreview.net

www.thetedkarchive.com