

Democracy in Europe
A History of an Ideology

Luciano Canfora

Translated by Simon Jones

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Democracy in Europe

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Prologue

I have had to battle against the greatest of commanders. In my time I have succeeded in getting emperors, a king, a tsar, a sultan, and a pope to agree. But no one on the face of the earth has given me more trouble than this Italian rogue – emaciated, pale, scruffily dressed, but stormily eloquent, fiery as an apostle, cunning as a thief, insolent as a comedian, and tireless as a lover: his name is Giuseppe Mazzini.

Klemens Metternich

“Of political wisdom Garibaldi was utterly devoid. He was neither a master of Italian letters like Mazzini nor a profound statesman like Cavour, but as a daring captain of irregular troops and as a leader capable of inspiring rough followers with the elements of a simple and passionate political faith he had a certain Homeric grandeur.” Thus writes the British liberal historian H. A. L. Fisher in the third volume of his *History of Europe* (1935).¹

Benedetto Croce, another liberal-minded historian, is less reductionist, and his writings frequently pay tribute at least to the role Garibaldi and Mazzini played as models for action by oppressed nations. “Even today those names have a resonance as far away as India, where those men have their followers,” he wrote in 1928, in *Storia d’Italia dal 1871 al 1915*.²

In 1860, during the military campaign that drove the Bourbons from the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Garibaldi took on the role of dictator. He certainly had in mind the Roman dictatorship, an office that placed supreme authority in the hands of one person for a period limited to a few months, though this could be renewed. He had a great deal of political and military experience under his belt, from South America to the Roman Republic of 1849, where he had also been put in a position of authority (even though Mazzini, who for his part had risen to be head of a “triumvirate,” appointed as his superior General Roselli, whom Garibaldi disobeyed whenever he felt inclined to do so). At one point Garibaldi had suggested to Mazzini that it would be preferable to wage a guerrilla war in the mountains rather than to conduct a stubborn – and militarily doomed – defense of Rome. He demanded that if the latter strategy were adopted, he should be granted the *dictatorship*. In other words, the idea of dictatorship recurs in his

thinking as a desirable and necessary form of power. Mazzini tried to soothe Garibaldi's resentment and eventually succeeded, but soon afterwards the Roman Republic was routed.

Before the republic had even been established, Garibaldi and his men were already within the borders of the Papal States. He was at Ravenna when Pellegrino Rossi was assassinated on the Capitoline Hill. Of that time, he writes in his *Memorie*: "In Ravenna, a spy appeared among the crowd in broad daylight. A rifle shot felled him, and the gunman calmly walked away: he did not flee, for no other spy would appear, and the accursed body would remain as an example to all." He expresses approval of the people of Ravenna, who are "people of action, if of few words." The killing of Pellegrino Rossi, too, earns his highest praise: "That day, the world's old metropolis showed itself to be worthy of its ancient glory, freeing itself of tyranny's most redoubtable servant and bathing the marble steps of the Capitoline Hill in his blood. A young Roman man had rediscovered the fire of Marcus Brutus!"³

In the ancient Roman constitution both triumvirate and dictatorship were extraordinary offices, endowed with unchecked power. Marx's suggestion, at about the same time, that the coming revolution should begin with a phase of "dictatorship" of the proletariat was thus, in a sense, in keeping with the ideas prevalent in democratic circles regarding the type of power that should be established during the transition from the old regime to the new.

In 1864, when Garibaldi made his unexpected visit to England, and spoke publicly of the great international problems of the day – from Greece to Poland, Schleswig-Holstein, and the Venice question – Lord Palmerston put strong pressure on the English organizers of the visit to ensure that it appeared strictly *private*. He said: "I urged that he should decline on the score of health all public dinners, at which he would say foolish things and other people mischievous ones."⁴ Disraeli turned down all invitations that risked a meeting with Garibaldi, declaring that he had no wish to make the acquaintance of that "pirate" – an allusion both to the general's distant time in Montevideo and to the way he had conquered the Kingdom of Naples. Nevertheless, Garibaldi's arrival in London was a triumph. Croce, too, recalls it admiringly in his *Storia d'Italia*. Half a million people waited all morning for Garibaldi to arrive. His carriage, surrounded by the crowds, took six hours to travel six miles. Workers' friendly societies, "temperance" associations, and others which had come together to form the "Working Men's Garibaldi Demonstration Committee" achieved an unhoped-for success: there was not a single instance of trouble. Queen Victoria, on the other

hand, declared herself “half-ashamed of being the head of a nation capable of such follies.”⁵ The general’s visit to Mazzini caused a stir and greatly worried Palmerston. Perhaps for this reason too, Garibaldi suddenly dropped everything and returned to Caprera.

Marx, who was living in London, considered the scenes of popular enthusiasm for the Italian visitor “a miserable display of imbecility.” He disliked the man. Three years earlier, on February 27, 1861, writing to Engels in a completely different context, he had made a passing and unflattering reference to Garibaldi. Spartacus, he wrote, had truly been a “great general (not a Garibaldi).”

Lenin was more generous. In *The Collapse of the Second International* (Geneva, 1915) he contrasts the great representatives of the bourgeoisie – Robespierre and Garibaldi – with other, pernicious members of that class – Millerand and Salandra – commenting: “One cannot be a Marxist without feeling the deepest respect for the great bourgeois revolutionaries who had an historic right to speak for their respective bourgeois ‘fatherlands’, and, in the struggle against feudalism, led tens of millions of people in the new nations towards a civilised life.”⁶

Lenin – who was much more in touch with practical realities than the aristocratic Marx – appreciated the revolutionary “leader” in Robespierre and Garibaldi. This “leader” figure was present, and an inescapable factor, in every phase of the European revolutionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Gramsci’s article *Capo*, written on Lenin’s death, is a determined attempt at establishing a theory of this complex subject – which had already suggested to Max Weber, in the same historical and political climate, the rich and ambiguous concept of the “charismatic leader.” It appears that Lenin criticized Italy’s socialists, at the time of the Fiume adventure, for having “allowed a D’Annunzio to slip through their fingers!” In his article published on Lenin’s death, Gramsci wrote that “whichever class is dominant, there is a need for leaders.” He also argued that “in the age of revolution” the only true leaders were “Marxist” ones. Clearly, however, he was mistaken: when he was writing, the almost mystical adoration of a *Führer* by one of the most cultured peoples in Europe, perhaps on the whole planet, had yet to materialize. Later Gramsci himself, writing his *Quaderni* in prison, drew an unconvincing distinction between “progressive” and “regressive” Caesarism.⁷

What the relationship between the leader and the masses consists of is a matter of controversy. A glance through *Conversations with Eckermann* reveals frequent mentions by Goethe of Napoleon, even long after the end of the latter’s political career, as a hero, a man of extraordinary qualities,

physically superior, and so forth. There is also lively discussion in an exchange of letters between Goethe and Walter Scott, who was the author of an unfavorable biography of Bonaparte. Perhaps this very suggestion of Goethe's is what lies at the root of the detailed opinion given by J. G. Droysen (1833) on Cleon, the infamous "leader" of the Athenian democracy who came to power after the death of Pericles. In the introduction to his German translation of Aristophanes' *The Knights*, Droysen writes: "No one would contemplate singing the praises of the bloody Robespierre or the savage Marius; yet in their works they embodied the feelings and gained the approval of thousands of men, from whom they differed only in that fatal greatness, or violence of character, that does not flinch from taking action." He goes so far as to assert that there are times when such men are needed: "it is a question of infringing rights, of bringing down ancient, venerable institutions; yet we praise the bold, firm hand that has opened the way to a new age, and we forget the transgression, which is inseparable from human action."⁸

This reflection by the great Droysen – who at that time (1834) was overturning the traditional moral verdict on Alexander the Great and the age that terrible, meteoric ruler inaugurated – takes us far back in time to the ancient debate over these hegemonic, creative "leader" figures. A case in point is Polybius's criticism of the way in which Theopompus, the historian who was a contemporary of Philip of Macedon, had spoken of Philip: as the "greatest man Europe had ever produced" and yet also a criminal, traitor, tyrant, and worse (Polybius, VIII, 9, 1). This sort of dispute was rekindled more than once in ancient times as a result of the frequent emergence of such figures. Pierre Bayle, in *Nouvelles lettres critiques sur l'histoire du Calvinisme* (letter IV) notes and comments on a passage of Seneca in which the philosopher reproaches the historian Livy, who had used the description "great man" for a person (we do not know who) on whom the moral verdict was anything but positive. Seneca challenges Livy's expression "vir ingenii magni magis quam boni" and puts him right thus: the *ingenium* "aut magnum aut bonum erit" (*De ira*, I, 20, 6), that is, the man can be great or good, but not both.

On one occasion Bonaparte turned to Jean-Baptiste Suard, the austere publicist who refused to accept the official version of the killing of the duke of Enghien, and flung in his face the hollowness of Tacitus's moralizing against Nero: "Votre Tacite n'est qu'un déclamateur, un imposteur qui a calomnié Néron . . . oui, calomnié, car, enfin, Néron fut regretté du peuple." ["Your Tacitus is nothing but a tub-thumper, an impostor who has slandered Nero . . . yes, slandered, for after all Nero was greatly missed by the people."] ⁹

In a letter dated July 26, 1767, to the marquis of Mirabeau, father of the great orator who was a leading figure in the French Revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau states that despotism would inevitably come. The great problem of politics, the equivalent of squaring the circle, is “*to find a form of government that places the law above people.*” If this is not achieved – and he is convinced it is impossible – “we must go to the opposite extreme” and “establish arbitrary despotism, and the most arbitrary possible. I would wish that the despot could be God!” because “I see no bearable middle course between the most austere democracy and the most perfect Hobbesianism.” Having got this far, however, he then contemplates, with his habitual sense of pathos, a series of infamous names, and despairs: “But a Caligula, a Nero . . . My God! I roll about on the floor and groan at my fate of being human.”¹⁰

Trapped in this conundrum, Rousseau appears oblivious to the question that Aristotle examined so clearly: the *fundamental connection* between “belonging” to the people and the role of “leader,” as exemplified in ancient Greek history by the experience of the so-called “tyrannies.” Aristotle writes: “Pisistratus being a *demagogos* [that is, head of the popular faction] became a tyrant.”¹¹ The sentence could also be taken to mean “*because* he was a *demagogos* he became a tyrant,” given what Aristotle states in the *Politics*: “The tyrant is put in power by the mass of the people in opposition to the nobility, to protect them against the latter” (1310⁶, 12–14). The rise of Pericles, after all, eventually led to personal power, as Thucydides pointed out admiringly.

Two terms that crop up, infrequently but interestingly, in Greek political language of the Roman period are *demokratia* and a derivative of it, *demokrator*. If interpretation of their contexts is correct, these words clearly mean “rule *over* the people” (or over the entire community). In *Civil Wars*, Appian writes of the conflict between Caesar and Pompey that the two fought “vying for *demokratia* [*peri tes demokratias*].”¹² Dio Cassius, the historian who lived at the time of the Severi, seems to define Sulla, a dictator, using the term *demokrator* (judging from a later observer of the Byzantine period who describes his writings).¹³ In essence, the term corresponds to the concept of a *dictator*, not in a technical or constitutional sense but in the much deeper sense of “unopposed and accepted personal rule,” which might perhaps be preceded by the assumption of *dictatura* – as in Sulla’s case. The defining characteristic, though, is overwhelming personal power that is above the law. At this point, *demokratia* and “dictatorship” coincide.

All this palpably lays bare the extreme, and uncomfortable, closeness between different forms of government that accepted political “doctrine”

may class as distant from or even opposite to each other. And it seems beyond doubt that the political experiment, or “invention,” that did most to create this impression of closeness – to the confusion not just of the masses but of political theorists – was Caesarism-Bonapartism-Fascism. We will get nowhere if we overlook the elements of class that lie beneath the “vener” of “political systems.”

A Constitution Imbued with Hellenism: Greece, Europe, and the West

In *The Republic*, Book V, Plato says: “The Greeks will certainly not destroy the Greeks. They will not enslave them, lay waste their fields, or burn their houses. Instead, they will do all this to the Barbarians.” The orations of Isocrates, so full of pity for the ills of the Greeks, are ruthless towards the Barbarians and the Persians, and continually exhort the nation, and Philip, to exterminate them.

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

A philosopher can be allowed to broaden his vision and regard Europe as one great republic, whose inhabitants have attained almost the same level of civilisation and culture . . . The savage peoples of the earth are the common enemy of civilised society, and we can inquire with eager curiosity whether Europe is still threatened by a repetition of those calamities.

Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

The belief that democracy is a Greek invention is rather deeply rooted. One consequence of this crude notion was apparent when the draft preamble to the European constitution was published on May 28, 2003. Those who, after much alchemy, drew up that text – one of the most authoritative of them being the former French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing – had the idea of putting a Greco-classical stamp on the nascent constitution by placing before the preamble a quotation from the epitaph that Thucydides attributes to Pericles (430 BC). In the preamble to the European constitution, Pericles’ words appear in this form: “Our Constitution . . . is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole of the people.” This is a falsification of the words Thucydides attributes to Pericles – and it is important to try to understand why the authors resorted to such linguistic duplicity.

In the weighty oration that Thucydides attributes to him, Pericles says: “The word we use to describe our political system [it is clearly modernistic and erroneous to translate the word *politeia* as “constitution”] is *democracy* because, in its administration [the word used is in fact *oikein*], it relates not to

the few but to the *majority* [“power” therefore does not come into it, let alone “the whole of the people”]. Pericles goes on: “However, in private disputes we give equal weight to all, and in any case freedom reigns in our public life” (II, 37). We can reinterpret these words as much as we like, but the essential point is that Pericles is presenting “democracy” and “liberty” as antithetical.

Pericles was Athens’s greatest political leader of the second half of the fifth century BC. He did not achieve military successes: if anything, he amassed a series of defeats in foreign policy, such as the disastrous expedition to Egypt, in which Athens lost a huge fleet. However, he was so skillful in securing and consolidating consensus that for some 30 years (462–430), almost without interruption, he succeeded in guiding the city of Athens along the road to “democracy.” *Democracy* was the term opponents of government “by the people” used to describe such government, precisely with the aim of highlighting its violent character (*kratos* denotes exactly the violent exercise of power). For the opponents of the political system that was based around the people’s assembly, therefore, democracy was a system that destroyed freedom. This is why Pericles, in the solemn official speech attributed to him by Thucydides, modifies the meaning of the term and distances himself from it, well aware, moreover, that the word was disliked by the popular faction, which certainly used *people* (*demos*) to denote the system with which it identified. Thucydides’ Pericles takes a step back, saying: we use *democracy* to describe our political system simply because we are in the habit of referring to the principle of the “majority”; *nevertheless*, we uphold freedom.

Thucydides sees Pericles as a veritable *princeps* endowed with a sort of “primacy” or “princedom”: accepted and acknowledged personal power which in the end distorts the balance of powers, though without violating them. Just four centuries later, a similar kind of power was established by Augustus who, although he became “prince,” did not hesitate to claim that he had restored the Republic to Rome. For Pericles’ contemporaries, however, it was natural to think of another form of personal power with which they were more familiar: “tyranny.” Indeed, some comic poets – taking advantage of the freedom of speech granted to the theater – used the stage to lash the *princeps* Pericles, mockingly begging him not to assume the tyranny of Athens. It was Thucydides, Pericles’ contemporary and admirer, who coined the term “prince” (*protos aner*) with reference to him. Thus, in tracing his “portrait,” he writes that under his government “Athens, though in name a *democracy*, was in fact coming to be ruled by her *protos aner*” (II, 65). This description is highly measured; each word is consciously weighed. It is all the more telling because it is closely followed by the speech in which Pericles himself (as quoted by Thucydides) distances himself from the word

democracy and emphasizes how inadequate it is to convey the true – and highly original – nature of the Athenian political system.

Thucydides, then, does not assert that the government of Pericles resembled “tyranny,” as the hostile comics openly proclaimed. Instead he invents – and this is a sign of his stature as a political thinker – the unprecedented category of “princedom.” He also knows well the kind of power the “tyrants” – or rather the tyrant *par excellence*, Pisistratus (560–528 BC) – exercised in Athens during the previous century. When we speak of “tyranny” we confuse different situations. Moreover, we have difficulty in assessing them equitably because the sources that speak of them are for the most part extremely hostile to the individuals who, in various Greek cities, took on such a role. In principle, this role was essentially that of a mediator, and was played by men who – like Pisistratus – could rely on a base of popular support. “From a demagogue, Pisistratus became a tyrant,” writes Aristotle in the *Constitution of Athens* (22, 3). Thucydides is well aware that, in Greece, it was Sparta that brought down the “tyrants.” In the particular case of Athens, Pisistratus’s government was characterized not by savage terror and oppression (the “rhetorical-democratic” image of the tyrant) but by his unbroken presence in power in a constitutionally correct setting, albeit one changed insofar as the same men – Pisistratus and those close to him – were constantly present in the city’s leadership. Thucydides therefore describes the “tyrant” of Athens (Pisistratus) in terms very similar to those he uses for the *princeps* Pericles, and in any case he does not call Pericles a tyrant, but instead invents a new category. Thus the very writer who theorized about the *repetition* of historical events conceives that they are specific and not interchangeable.

Such is his description that Thomas Hobbes – a great thinker and one of the founders of political thought, who began his career with a translation of Thucydides (1628) that profoundly influenced his intellectual development – concludes that Thucydides had placed both Pisistratus and Pericles among the “monarchs,” and that therefore Thucydides himself was to be considered one of the greatest theorists and champions of monarchy. Hobbes’s vision is clouded by his *own* vision of political and institutional forms. His assessment is inaccurate, but highly significant because it demolishes the banal Thucydides of mediocre interpreters, who built him up as a eulogist for democracy *because he was the author of Pericles’ epitaph*.

Already these brief introductory reflections, to which I will return at greater length, throw light on the most important phenomenon of the constant, tortured, and often wandering efforts of modern writers to find their bearings in the labyrinth of ancient politics, especially of Greece. This effort is made even more arduous by the *verbal identity* of various funda-

mental concepts, starting with “democracy.” This identity masks differences, making these difficult to understand. As has just been pointed out, they require a Thucydides.

Thus can we start to understand the gaffe committed by those who crafted the preamble to the European constitution. They had learned at school, perhaps at a fairly junior level, that “Greece invented democracy”: a nonsensical formula and so schematic that, looked at in depth, it proves false. They also knew that ancient authors, whether Athenian or writing about Athens, mention, discuss, and pass judgment upon the mechanism of democratic politics. At first, probably, they will have searched through the writings of political thinkers (Plato and Aristotle), and must have been astonished to find that in their works, which have survived in such voluminous quantities, democracy is the constant target of polemics, and in the case of Plato’s *Republic* is the subject of a furious diatribe. They looked elsewhere. Perhaps they searched among the orators? We don’t know – but if they did they would have come away in alarm. In Isocrates they would have found the description of Sparta as “perfect democracy,” and they would have asked themselves: but how? Wasn’t it the oligarchic city *par excellence*? (Another cliché.) In the end, they turned to Thucydides (better not to call on Demosthenes, who suggested that political opponents should not only be “beaten with sticks” but branded “traitors” and “enemy agents”). But what to choose from the difficult, dialectical Thucydides? Finally, thanks again to their schooling, they decided on Pericles’ epitaph: all it takes is an *index verborum*, a lexicon, and the entry for *demokratia* promptly leads to the passage. However, once read, it cannot have given much satisfaction. Even current translations, though neat and sometimes reconciliatory, cannot hide the detached, uncertain tone in which Pericles speaks. Hence the most brilliant and, in its way, classical solution: to make Thucydides say what he does not say.

It is to be hoped that this journey through the work of Greek writers has been instructive. It must have given a glimpse of a highly significant, though not edifying, fact: there is nothing by any *Athenian* writer that sings the praises of democracy. And this is no coincidence.

Every reader of Homer knows that the contraposition of Europe and Asia does not occur in the *Iliad* – and neither does that of Greeks and Barbarians, as Thucydides pointed out (I, 3). The Trojans are no less Greek than the Achaeans. This is thus a retrospective interpretation, which cannot predate the Persian wars. The *Geography* by Hecataeus of Miletus, who lived at the time of the Ionian revolt, consists of two volumes, one devoted to Europe

and the other to Asia, but “Europe” was more or less synonymous with Greece (excluding the Peloponnese) and the Greek colonies.

The Persian wars acted as a catalyst in creating the distinction between Greeks and Barbarians. What might be the essential difference between them? The Greeks lived in cities and the Barbarians did not: the former were “free,” the latter subjugated under a leader. From the first sentence of Herodotus’s *History*, the Barbarians and the Greeks make up the two poles of history: “Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds – some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians – may not be without their glory.”

The contraposition of Europe and Asia is depicted by Aeschylus in the *Persians* (472 BC) by the image of two sisters – the Dorian and the Persian – who are enemies. This vision was to be projected onto the Trojan war, retrospectively making the Trojans appear to be “Barbarians.” For a long time the notion of *Europe* corresponded to the way the Greeks defined themselves. In the Greece of the city-states the following equations were deeply rooted: Greece = Europe = freedom/democracy; Persia = Asia = slavery.

But were the Greeks really in agreement on this point? In a passage of his *History*, Herodotus very clearly argues that, before Cleisthenes, political democracy had been “invented” in Persia by one of the Persian dignitaries involved in the conspiracy that brought down the usurper Smerdis. Herodotus bemoans the fact that the Greeks, during public readings of his work, had refused to accept this very clear, detailed assertion (III, 80). A great historian of Greece *and of Persia*, David Asheri, has written, correctly, that in this passage Herodotus is making a veiled attack on the typically Athenian (and more generally Greek) misconception that democracy was a Greek “invention.”¹

The fifth century BC (which, according to John Stuart Mill, began with a battle that was far more important for England than the battle of Hastings – the battle of Marathon) ended with a horrifying sight: that of the Greek city-states vying with each other to secure the favor and financial assistance of the Persian king. The Great King symbolized, in rhetoric of course, “Barbarian” slavery, but at the same time he was the ideal protector to turn to for military and financial help.

Plutarch tells of the widely held belief that at Sardis, at the time of the fall of the Achaemenid dynasty, Alexander the Great found a copy of the letters that the king of Persia had sent to the Ionian satraps, ordering them to support Demosthenes’ political action with large sums of money (Plutarch, *Life of Demosthenes*, 20). Aware of the danger that Philip of Macedon posed to his kingdom, the king of Persia paid Demosthenes because he was a pillar of Greek opposition to Philip. In the same context, Plutarch adds that,

in the archives of the royal capital, Alexander the Great was lucky enough to come upon not only the letters that Demosthenes sent to his “friends” in Persia, but also a list of the sums of money the satraps had paid him. The king of Persia had obtained confirmation of the rumors of a forthcoming Macedonian attack when Hermias, the Greek ruler of Atarneus (in the Troad) and a friend of Aristotle and the Macedonians, had fallen captive to him. The capture and brutal killing of Hermias are the subject of a poetic text by Aristotle, who was deeply distressed, entitled *Hymn to Virtue* (fr. 675 Rose). By contrast, in his so-called *Fourth Philippic*, Demosthenes evinces an almost savage enthusiasm at the capture of Hermias, exclaiming: “The time has finally come; the king will hear of all these plots, not as the complaint of the Athenians, whom he might suspect of speaking for our own private advantage, but from the lips of the very man who planned and carried them out” (32).

In the same context, Demosthenes sarcastically expresses his contempt for those who, in Athens or elsewhere, still used fatuous labels: “you ought to drop the foolish prejudice that has so often brought about your discomfiture – ‘the barbarian’, ‘the common foe of us all’, and all such phrases” (*Fourth Philippic*, 33). He adds: “For my part, whenever I see a man afraid of one who dwells at Susa and Ecbatana and insisting that he is ill-disposed to Athens, though he helped to restore our fortunes in the past and was even now making overtures to us (and if you did not accept them but voted their rejection, the fault is not his); and when I find the same man using very different language about this plunderer of the Greeks, who is extending his power, as you see, at our very doors and in the very heart of Greece, I am astonished, and, whoever he may be, it is I that fear him, just because he does not fear Philip.”

Realpolitik had taught Demosthenes that Asia was not dangerous, whereas the most fearsome enemy in the world for Athens was a powerful and hostile *European* neighbor such as, in his view, the king of Macedonia.

In the early stages of his career Demosthenes too had resorted to “foolish prejudice” and “anti-Barbarian” rhetoric, in the speech dealing primarily with economic and military matters entitled *On the Symmories* and, much later, in the *Third Philippic* (41–45), where the equation Asia = slavery is brazenly proclaimed for reasons of pure propaganda. He too shared the beliefs that were widespread among the Greeks for a long period: *Greece* meant *Europe* and, simultaneously, *freedom*; *Persia* meant *Asia*, and at the same time *slavery*. Such language was the only way to make an impact in the assembly.

The link between the ideas of *Greece*, *Europe*, and *freedom* has a long history. Its ideological essence is always the same; what changes is the

geographical area to which *Europe* refers. At first the two poles are quite clear: Rome on the one hand, Hellenism on the other. At the time of Augustus, the battle of Actium (31 BC) appeared, thanks to carefully orchestrated propaganda, to be the victory of the *West* over the *East*. The separation of these two “worlds” became formal and final as a result of the way the empire was organized after Theodosius: there was only one Christianity but the two parts of the empire – East and West – were distinct and soon, despite both being Christian, in opposition. That is when Greece became *Eastern* for good (though it was the “cradle” of the West). Until the Arab conquest (AD 640–642), and therefore a century after Justinian, Greece, Palestine, Egypt, and the Balkans were the East, “eastern” Europe. On the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, at the time of St. Augustine, the most civilized part of the West was North Africa.

By dividing the Mediterranean region in two, the Arab conquest “invented” Europe as we know it. Following that conquest – of Syria, Egypt, and immediately afterwards of North Africa as far as its northernmost point (as well as Spain) – the empire centered on Byzantium was displaced, becoming ever more “European,” while the West, and especially the papacy, shifted more and more to the north from a geopolitical point of view. It is thus thanks to the Arab conquest that the “Europe of Charlemagne” took shape. But for a long time there remained, at least until the first fall of Constantinople, *two Europes*, mutually hostile, in which Russia played only a marginal part.

“The Pope is the Antichrist” read the banner that fluttered on the Esphigmènou monastery, one of 20 on Mount Athos in the Khalkidiki peninsula in northern Greece, in January 2003. The patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, reacted with extreme irritation, for he was the banner’s target. Those mulish monks had even issued a writ in the Greek supreme court, accusing him of heresy for being too compliant towards Rome. Indeed, Bartholomew, the “ecumenical” patriarch of Greek Orthodox Christians – though at the head of a mere few thousand faithful in a Constantinople that has been Turkish for 600 years – is the most open to Rome of the heads of the Eastern Church. Despite his high-sounding “ecumenical” title he has no authority to impose his direction on any of the other Eastern sees, not only because his is almost “empty” but because his authority is certainly not autocratic in the manner of the pope in Rome. Thus, for example, the patriarch of Moscow has hitherto refused to contemplate a visit to Russia by the head of the Catholic church who, as far as he is concerned, is still essentially the heretical patriarch of the see of Rome. The “extremists” of Mount Athos apparently agree with him.

The split between the two halves of Europe – to which these dramatic conflicts bear daily witness – has roots that go far back into the past. The break that produced a lasting division of the European continent – replicating, in a sense, the division between the two *partes* of the Roman Empire made by Theodosius at the end of the fourth century AD – began, in religion too, with the long tug of war between Rome and Byzantium, culminating in the so-called Eighth Ecumenical Council (869–870) which the Eastern Church still considers illegitimate today. But the decisive break came 150 years later, when the Eastern Empire was still a great power and a “bastion” against Arab and Muslim pressure from the east.

Before it fell into Turkish hands in 1453, Constantinople played the card of reunification of the two churches. This was short-lived, however, and neither side fully believed in it: apart from anything else, given their relative strengths, it would have been more of a capitulation than a true union. Meanwhile the Slavs, Bulgars, and Russians had entered the Christian sphere thanks to Byzantium – which thus became the chief factor driving the “Europeanization” of this vast region of Europe – and these peoples were not prepared, now that the Eastern Empire was in its death throes, mechanically and automatically to follow its last-minute *Realpolitik* conversions. When Constantinople fell, the “lamp” – to use the old literary metaphor – of the Greek church passed to Russia. Soon, Moscow was the “third Rome.” And the prophecy of Filofei, which is in vogue today, declares that “there will be no fourth Rome.”

From that time onwards, the Russian world saw alternating waves of “Occidentalism” (Peter the Great, Lenin) and of turning in upon itself and its tradition as the root of its strength and continuity. Even the Bolshevik Revolution – which thought it would do away with “the opium of the people” and intended to exterminate the Orthodox church as an undeniable pillar of the tsarist *ancien régime* – gradually came round to making terms. The *de facto* reconciliation between Stalin and the patriarch contributed to the USSR’s ability to withstand the German invasion of June 1941. The church contributed to the victory in what is still known as the “Great Patriotic War.” Neither did a master of *Realpolitik* such as Stalin fail to notice that the church had not been exterminated at all: it lived on in the minds of the masses, who had also lived through the most traumatic transformation in history of a country of peasants into a predominantly urban and industrial one. This continuity and resilience of a deep-rooted structure such as religion interests the historian, but it impresses the politician, even the most radical doctrinaire, in equal measure.

In today’s Russia – which superficial observers until recently described as “liberal” or even “democratic” while still calling the former dictator-president

Yeltsin (not without reason) “Tsar Boris” – in this Russia suspended between the old and the new, the church is one of the pillars of the new presidency, which has its roots in the old KGB. Vladimir Putin may flaunt his religious faith by visiting churches, but he asserts the valuable continuity of the institution in which he cut his teeth as a Soviet apparatchik.

With the end of authoritarian state “enlightenment” (which even in Afghanistan had brought civil rights for women and enforced literacy, but was defeated by the Taliban cultural guerrilla war, armed and financed by the CIA) Russia once again turned in on its traditions. This gave the patriarch of Moscow many more strings to his bow with which to be intransigent in his dealings with the pope in Rome, who was the “Anti-christ” according to the monks on Athos. Why should he be compliant with Rome, now that he was once more strong and supremely authoritative (even Gorbachev had rediscovered the cult of Mary) and the long Soviet “interlude” was over? Rome could never yield over the matter of the supremacy of the pope – and Moscow could never contemplate negotiating on that point. This is one of those European rifts that, after a millennium, seem incurable even today. In the case of the US war against the Yugoslav federation, the original trigger for the conflict had nevertheless been the Vatican’s action in favoring the secession of Croatia. Then came the war by proxy: Islamic fundamentalists – from Saudi Arabia to Sudan to Pakistan – rushed to fight as “volunteers” for Bosnia, using American weapons, and immediately after that for the Kosovo Liberation Army. Western Europe, which speaks in vain of having its own foreign policy, servilely and to its own detriment fell in line with the bombardment of Belgrade. The Russian church, Greece, and the monks of Mount Athos (for what such a strange alliance is worth) found themselves, automatically so to speak, on the side of a Serbia overwhelmed by aggressors. The rift between the two Europes had been made even deeper.

“Soft racism” is how Claude Calame, an expert on classical Greece, has described the attitude of the Greeks at the time of Aeschylus and Demosthenes. There was an assumption of superiority, some of whose presuppositions and effects have been described above. And yet the idea that the “democratic” political order should be closely linked to a factor that it is repugnant to describe as racial, but which has been presented exactly thus, was a widespread belief in the European-Atlantic West and may still be at the root of the imperial initiatives finally offered to the public under the disconcerting formula of “bringing democracy.”

In 1863 a pamphlet entitled *A Dialogue on the Best Form of Government*, by George Cornwall Lewis, a minister in the Palmerston government

and a brilliant classicist, was published in London.² Among its admirers was the Italian Luigi Luzzatti, one of the most eloquent opponents of Giolitti's plan to widen electoral suffrage in Italy in 1912. In the pamphlet three characters, representing the three forms of government of classical political theory, hold a dialogue, while a moderator, Platonically named Crito, has the job of articulating the arguments that are perhaps "preferable" or at least favored by the author. It is Crito who at a certain point in the dialogue broaches the question of democracy seen in racial terms: "I question, moreover, the applicability of representative institutions to an Asiatic state" (p. 79). The character named *Democraticus* nobly protests, pointing out that, since the time of Tacitus, Bretons and Germans have made great progress. But his voice comes across as that of one who is losing in the dialectical clash that drives the dialogue. In a Europe that divided up not only Africa but also the districts of Beijing, and branded extremely ancient civilizations as "backward," the link between "democracy" (interpreted, of course, in a highly arbitrary way as meaning "representative regime") and "white race" was not a whim of political theorists but rather a deep-rooted and widespread conviction. The term "white race" – horrifying as it is – is not taken at random. It is there in the introduction to Julius Schvarcz's voluminous and rightly forgotten treatise *Die Demokratie* (1876).³ Schvarcz had intended to complete his work, which remained unfinished, with a book on *political anthropology* (*Ideen zu einer Politik des Menschengeschlechts*) whose conclusion was to be (as he announces on page XXIII of the introduction to the first volume): "The mission of the white race is to carry the domination of Civilization (*die Herrschaft der Cultur*) to the entire surface of the planet." Moreover, the second volume (1886) of the "Biblioteca di scienze politiche" ["Political Science Library"] edited by Attilio Brunialti, which includes Lewis's dialogue first and foremost, opens with a learned preface by the editor, entitled "Le prime forme politiche ariane" ["The First Aryan Political Structures"] in which we learn (p. XI) that "The Semitic races show themselves *instead* [*scilicet*: compared to the Aryan races] completely ill-suited to such a way [the Aryan way] of understanding and organizing the State. Their concept of political organization has never gone beyond that of the tribe."

In the positivist age, the *Storia Universale Ullstein* ["Ullstein Universal History"] (6 volumes, 1907–10) reigned supreme and was successful in translations, including one into Italian. Its co-ordinator and chief inspiration was the German medievalist Julius von Pflugk-Harttung (1848–1919). In this work, which includes some great contributions, in the first volume the "History of Evolution," by Ernst Haeckel, is followed by a chapter entitled "Races and Peoples" by the Austrian anthropologist Felix Ritter

von Luschan. The section devoted to America, which is a veritable paean to the destiny of the European races transplanted to the New World, offers the reader the following instructive overview:

the future of the black race in America is in contrast with this bright future. Only the most superficial of men would overlook the importance of the negro question for America today – especially for the USA of the politicians, who discern in their dark-skinned fellow-citizens a grave and lasting threat, not only to social conditions *and to democracy*, but in general for the Union's very existence. There are writers who see the negroes not only as a thorn in the flesh of the United States, but as a nail in its coffin!

Having proclaimed the danger posed by the blacks' fecundity, and the futility, in practice, of abolishing slavery (Alexis de Tocqueville too, in his day, noted that even in the northern states of the Union discrimination against blacks was normal in all areas of social life),⁴ Luschan complains that blacks, having become "suddenly" free and securing "political rights," have become even more dangerous, as demonstrated by the "continuous increase in crime." He does not stop there: "Even more worrying is the continuous increase in mulattos"; and he concludes: "this is a condition that in itself, and especially in a country governed as a free democracy, appears completely untenable."⁵

Certainly, at its height the French Revolution – an event that, with good reason, has towered over the history of Europe and beyond for two centuries – broke the cycle of racist prejudice. And it was this very radical character, the other side of the revolution's "harshness," that was and remains both the *scandal* of European history and its touchstone. In a sense, the rough ride the revolution received corresponded to, and moved in step with, the progress and development of the democratic movement, which for two centuries has sought to transform the principles the revolution sanctioned (in the implementation of which it became mired and was defeated) into *real* victories. The way the revolution was received varied from country to country. In Liberal England, throughout the nineteenth century, the French Revolution failed to recover from the blow dealt by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) – and that was certainly not the worst of its kind. The revolution was never accepted, and it remained anathema. Only the severe jolt of the Russian revolution – a new and even greater scandal – in the twentieth century rebalanced minds and refined historiographic judgment, though only in part. In Italy, Giosuè Carducci was persecuted by journalists and *bien pensants* for singing the praises of the revolution with his sculpturesque sonnets entitled *Ça ira*. Not

to mention the university lectures of Bonghi (who inspired the campaign) entitled *Europa nell'età della Rivoluzione francese* ["Europe in the Age of the French Revolution"] – a title that recalls H. von Sybel's *Geschichte der Revolutionszeit: von 1789 bis 1795*, whose judgment was more profound but no less negative.

However, behind the smokescreen of horror at the "Terror," what truly scandalized about the men of 1793 was their affirmation of equality beyond Europe's borders. In a delicious pamphlet published in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1889 (the first centenary) the liberal Catholic but not conformist Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu imagined a series of "toasts" to the revolution proposed by a diverse range of people; what he sees as the central problem of the now century-old event is the question of the equality of races and the liberation of blacks, as well as the emancipation of the Jews. The characters take turns to speak – a Jew, a university-educated black, an Austrian anti-Semite, an Indian gentleman, and so forth – and to each he attributes an imaginary but plausible speech. The Austrian anti-Semite's is worth reproducing here, the better to understand the serious and progressive essence that lies behind the pamphlet's veil of irony. He says: "Let the Negro and the Jew acclaim the Revolution: they have gained everything from it! But for us Christians of the white race, of Indo-Germanic stock, it is a different matter. What the Negro and the Jew see as its merit is what makes it suspect to me. The equality of races and of nations has been the Revolution's great error."⁶ Leroy-Beaulieu was also well acquainted with conditions in Russia (he wrote a trilogy, *L'Empire des tsars*, which is still in print). Significantly, the young Russian, who speaks immediately after the Indian in the series of toasts, predicts revolution in Russia that will have a far wider impact: "From the black *izbas* of our illiterate peasants will come a revolution more vast and human than all the revolutions of your bourgeois assemblies." This is 1889.

Eurocentrism surfaces even in Marx. His assessment of the British colonization of India as "the only social revolution to have taken place in India to date" is very much in tune with the times.⁷

Alexis de Tocqueville's famous and celebrated book *De la démocratie en Amérique*, first published between 1835 and 1840, contains the well-known "prophecy" regarding Europe's future: we will become like America, and will be "democratic." The book sets out to describe a situation that is still distant geographically but growing in its essentials. This prediction is not made with enthusiasm: if anything, it is resigned. Tocqueville clearly states his opinion of democracy in the introduction to a parliamentary speech given in November 1841:

I have an intellectual taste for democracy, but I am aristocratic by instinct – that is, I despise and fear the mob. I passionately love liberty, the rule of law, and respect for rights, but not democracy. This is the depth of my feelings. I hate demagoguery... I belong neither to the revolutionary party nor to the conservative party. However, when all is said and done I care more for the latter than for the former. Indeed, I differ from the latter over means rather than ends, whereas from the former I differ over both means and ends. Liberty is the greatest of my passions. This is the truth.⁸

He is convinced that the society “of the masses” will gradually establish itself everywhere, and believes that in the United States of America this is already the case, giving us a glimpse of what awaits us. Neither is he blind to the fact – as his notebooks especially make clear – that American “democracy,” at the time he is writing about it, still contains the monstrous phenomenon of slavery. Thus, even 20 years after Tocqueville completed his great work, George Cornewall Lewis could rightly observe that, after all, American democracy was as backward as those of antiquity, in which even the essential precondition – that the whole of the people enjoy freedom – was missing!⁹

At all events, the myth that Tocqueville’s “prophecy” came true during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries probably remains no more than a myth. It cannot be argued that European institutions (assuming that an overall assessment is meaningful) are emulating the US model. Certainly, the gradual achievement of universal suffrage is a unifying feature of the political and institutional history of France, Germany, Britain, and Italy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However – aside from the many differences that make each country a unique case – we can see in this a lasting effect of the French Revolution, and certainly not the arrival of a model imported from America. As far as the creation of a society “of the masses” – and for Tocqueville this meant dreariness, banality, and equality as he imagined it – it is obvious that some of the features of such a society have asserted themselves with the development of universal suffrage, universal education, and so forth. But the true influx of the American society of the masses and its attributes did not materialize until much later, with 1917 and the American intervention in the First World War, and with its economic and military consequences until 1945 and beyond – most of all in the aftermath of the Second World War.

This is nonetheless a recurring problem in historiography – if indeed we can meaningfully speak of a single “Atlantic revolution” beginning in the British American colonies, with an important French contribution, and continuing with the revolution that began in Paris in 1789: a revolution in

which, as François Furet admirably perceives,¹⁰ no end is in sight. This vision of a single “Atlantic” revolution, from the USA to the Netherlands to France, was fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s, from Jacques Godechot to Robert Palmer. They saw an antecedent in a few pages of Georges Lefebvre’s revised *Révolution française*, and a more remote antecedent in a sentence by Antoine Barnave, who, however, referred to “European revolution *that culminated in France.*” This over-broad view of a single forward march of the “spirit of the world” along both shores of the Atlantic is hazy, and risks losing its way in the generic. An abyss separates the two events.

This book is founded on the premise that the 1789 revolution was the matrix that shaped the entire subsequent history of Europe: accordingly, it refuses to water down this essence in a generic, Spenglerian vision.

The Beginning: Democracy in Ancient Greece

Herodotus relates, in lively dialogue form, the debate that took place among the most important Persian notables in 522/521 BC regarding the best form of government. He puts great emphasis on the fact that the proposals put forward included the idea of establishing “democracy” in Persia. He repeats this elsewhere, in his account of how the satrap Mardonius, preparing an attack against Greece, “went about setting up democracies in Ionia” (III, 80; VI, 43). What constituted a “democracy” in a kingdom as vast as the Persian empire is hard to say, but it cannot be ruled out that this was a well-founded tradition. Probably the Persian noble Otanes, who made the proposal, was advocating a return to the “equality” that was customary in ancient Persia: a return to the past that must have applied only to the original nucleus from which the immense empire had gradually taken shape. The proposal was rejected, but Otanes and his descendants were granted a special statute of independence.

It may be that, as noted above, Herodotus emphasizes the episode – which he does forcefully, building an entire dialogue around Otanes’ “scandalous” proposal – in order to highlight a certain Persian precedence in the matter of democracy. The episode predates by more than ten years the reforms of Cleisthenes, which according to Athenian tradition were among the most widely recognized “starting points” of the democratic experiment.

Some archaeologists have come to believe that wherever an urban site on Greek soil bears traces of an agora, these indicate that there was some custom of holding “assemblies.”¹ In the Middle East in ancient times, forms of representation in the local community – such as a community meeting or the appointment of representatives – may have constituted

embryonic democratic procedures. These have sometimes been described as “primitive democracy.”² However, although communities behaved locally in ways that seemed to foreshadow the people’s assembly of Greek city-states, the fact that they were embedded within the ever more solid and limiting framework of the imperial order means that these experiments cannot have appeared to the ancients as a stage in the history of “democratic institutions.” Within the even vaster framework of the Roman empire too, a series of urban communities retained the practices and institutions of a democratic “polis”; but these were for the most part in a highly reduced form, though periodically they saw a “drive” towards regaining the ancient *independence*, which also involved *ipso facto* a complete return to the practice of *democracy*. This was the case in Athens at the time of Sulla’s war against Mithridates, which was fought on Greek soil (88/87 BC). Independence (full sovereignty) and democracy go together, for a number of reasons. But there is one essential reason, which brings us to the root of the ancient concept of citizenship and democracy in the sense of a *community of soldiers*.

The first question is: who holds citizenship? Who are the “all” whose freedom brings democracy into being? The second is: even when *all* hold citizenship, how do the weaker members of society exercise this right? The latter problem – the subject of bitter argument – raises more, such as the question of what instruments are needed to allow citizens’ rights to be exercised *in practice* (in the absence of adequate intellectual and material resources), the question of the validity of the principle of “majority,” whether the “will of the people” or “the law” should prevail (a common dilemma in practical politics), and so forth.

Demokratia – both concept and word – was forged in the heat generated by all these problems. From the earliest mentions it has always been a word denoting “conflict,” a factional term, coined by the higher classes to denote the “excessive power” (*kratos*) exercised by the non-property-owning classes (*demos*) when democracy reigns.

Let us start with the first question. Who holds citizenship? *Polis* denotes the whole of the *politai* who, by virtue of who they are, are also *politeuomenoi*: that is, they exercise the right of citizenship. Therefore, strictly speaking, all cities not ruled by a “tyrant” (a figure who, “formally” or not, assumes powers above the law) can be thus described, in that the body of all the citizens exercises political rights. The problem is: how is that citizen body (which may vary) defined?

If we look at the best-known and most typical example, Athens, we see that at the time of Pericles this priceless right was possessed by relatively

few: adult males (of an age eligible for military service) as long as both their parents were Athenian and they were born free men. The last was a severe restriction considering that, at a conservative estimate, the ratio of free men to slaves was one to four. Moreover, in a city so devoted to trade and contact with the outside world, a considerable number of people must have been born of only one “pure-blooded” parent. An Athenian oligarch, to whom we are indebted for the first short work in Attic prose, the so-called *Constitution of the Athenians*, censures the frequency of Athens’s relations with outsiders, blaming it for its “hybridizing” effects on language and food (II, 8). At least until the time of Solon (sixth century BC) full political rights – which constitute citizenship itself – were not granted to those who did not own property. Modern scholars argue over whether Solon did indeed extend to such people the right of access to the assembly, as Aristotle claims in his short treatise on the Athenian system, the *Constitution of Athens*.

The vision of citizenship that was dominant during the classical period is summed up by the identification of the citizen with the warrior. Whoever was able to perform the chief function of free males, for which the whole of *paideia* prepared them – that is, warfare – was a citizen and fully entitled to be part of the community, participating in decision-making assemblies. Work was done by slaves, and to some extent by women. It is obvious, therefore, why a community that was “autonomous” yet incorporated into a great overarching empire that in effect governed it, practiced a restricted form of democracy.

For a long time, to be a warrior meant possessing the means to buy arms; thus the concept the warrior/citizen was identified with that of the *property-owner*. The property-owner, possessed of a certain income, usually from land, armed himself “at his own expense” (the so-called *hopla parechomenoi*). As long as this was so, non-property-owners occupied an inferior position politically, and risked considerable erosion of their civil rights under certain circumstances. In short, their situation was not far removed from that of those who were not free. About a century after Solon, as Athens turned towards the sea and acquired a fleet at the time of the Persian war, there was a huge need for a new type of military personnel: sailors. These were a social group and a military force that was not expected to “arm itself” but was instead essential for “pulling oars and moving ships,” as the anonymous oligarch who wrote the *Constitution of the Athenians* fastidiously puts it (I, 19–20). This was the turning point, the political and military development that caused citizenship to be extended to include those who did not own property (the *thetes*), who thus also attained the rank of citizens – in Athens’s case, by virtue of being sailors in the most powerful fleet in the Greek world. It is evident therefore that the birth of “democracy”

required, among other things, that a community be close to the sea and orientated towards it both commercially and militarily. It is no coincidence that, according to the anonymous oligarch mentioned above (who may have been the “Socratic” Critias, leader in 404 of the harshest oligarchic government Athens had ever seen) there were two categories of political model of the state: those that waged war at sea (Athens and its allies) and those that did so on land (Sparta and the communities similar to it, which were based upon the dominance of the hoplitic class).

What changed, therefore, was not the *nature* of the political system (which is always based upon the citizen/warrior) but the number of people who benefited from it. This is why, when the Athenians, or rather certain Athenian thinkers interested in political systems, tried to analyze the difference between their system and that of Sparta, they pointed to elements that were not the essential ones. Thucydides, for example, repeatedly refers to the “slowness” of the Spartans, in contrast to the “speed” of the Athenians (I, 70, 2; II, 39–40; VIII, 96, 5). Indeed, there are instances in Athenian political literature of eulogies to the Spartan order – praising not just “good government” (*eunomia*) as is customary but also an essential *identity* between the Spartan and Athenian systems. Isocrates writes: “With this democratic order, our ancestors surpassed by far all other men.” He adds: “and for this very reason, we can say of the Spartans that they possess the best political system: because the highest degree of democracy reigns among them” (*Areopagiticus*, 61). In a more markedly patriotic context, the *Panathenaicus*, Isocrates repeats, some years later, more or less the same sentiments: “I will speak at length of the institutions of Sparta, not because Lycurgus invented or devised any of them, but because he imitated in the best possible way the order of our ancestors, installing democracy mixed with government by the best of men among the Spartans: exactly as it was among us” (153). (It will come as no surprise therefore that Lycurgus, the ancient, semi-mythical lawgiver and creator of the Spartan order, became, in a completely different setting, one of the great points of reference of the Abbé de Mably (who was, with Rousseau, a lodestar to Robespierre and Saint-Just), or that Sparta, in Jacobin ideology, became the supreme model of the republic as well as of republican virtue).

Isocrates identifies a fundamental element: that in both communities the seat of sovereignty was the same. In both communities – and this is a distinguishing feature throughout the ancient world, until the city-state itself enters a crisis – the decision-making body was also the fighting force. Citizenship was therefore a precious privilege that was granted sparingly, and which demanded and involved firm and exclusionary criteria aimed at keeping to a minimum the number of people who enjoyed it.

The difference between the two communities, rather, lay in the way they drew the boundary between freedom and non-freedom. In Athens free men reduced those who were not free to the status of non-persons, and after Solon – who restored freedom to impoverished social groups that were descending into slavery because of their debts – an abyss opened up between freedom and slavery. This abyss was never bridged. As indicated above, in Athens the ratio of free men to slaves was one to four, or at least so it seems at certain times in the fifth and fourth centuries. The great mass of non-persons was indispensable for the functioning of the system, which for as long as it could lived off wars of plunder and imperial domination. Slaves were the bedrock of both the household and the public economy. Even the poorest, most wretched individual possessed at least one slave – for example, the desperately poor “Socratic” Aeschines, a pupil of Socrates himself, who according to Lysias’s portrait of him was reduced to courting a woman aged well over 70 who owned a pharmacy, in the hope of inheriting her shop. In the public economy – especially in mining – slaves were managed and controlled by foremen who were themselves in servitude. In the home slaves were supervised by women, who were also non-persons, insignificant and nonexistent individuals in Athenian political society. In Sparta, social stratification coincided with stratification by caste and race, in which the Dorians dominated subjugated peoples, whom these warriors reduced to various grades and modes of dependency. But “pure-blooded” Spartans, or Spartiates, were, like their Athenian counterparts, “free and equal.” If they were given to keeping their subordinates under control by terrorizing them, this was chiefly because they were outnumbered by them to a disturbing degree. The great majority of Athenian slaves spent their lives rotting in mines, chained up in pestiferous surroundings, as Plutarch explains, writing of the slaves of Nicias (*Life of Crassus*, 34, 1). It can hardly be denied that their situation was far worse than that of the helots, who at least were allowed to enjoy part of the fruits of their labors.

The broadening of citizenship – which made the Athenian model different from the Spartan one *in practice* – was thus inherently bound up with the birth of the maritime empire. Over time, the “democratic” seamen came to think of this empire as a world of subjects who were there to be “milked” as slaves. The extension of the democratic system (that is, the granting of citizenship to non-property-owners) to allied communities was considered a bond that increased allied solidarity. This means that, despite imperial exploitation by Athens, there were still elements in the allied cities that preferred alliance with Athens, which was to be cemented – willingly or not – by adopting the governing state’s political system. In short, democracy

nonetheless enjoyed support in the subject/allied cities, regardless of whether those who favored it were in the majority.

It should be borne in mind that participation in decision-making assemblies, and thus in the workings of democracy, was neither automatic nor granted indiscriminately. It could be argued that, as certain groups in society gained the upper hand, others retreated. This is analogous to what took place in revolutionary Paris in 1794, on the back of the Thermidor upheaval. Once Robespierre had fallen, and the power and active presence of the most radical *sans-culottes* in the sections was broken, other elements occupied the “sections” and “another people,” so to speak, came to exercise such (ancient-style) direct democracy as existed within the section mechanism. But more of this later. For the moment we need only consider that in the last quarter of the fifth century BC, with a total population of 30,000 adult, free, “pure-blooded” males of military age, the number of citizens attending the assembly hardly ever reached 5,000. Thus declared, without fear of contradiction, the oligarchs who in 411 staged an anti-democratic coup d’état aimed at reducing the number of citizens to barely 5,000 (Thucydides, VIII, 72, 1). Naturally, what the oligarchs did not say was that they proposed to give decision-making powers to 5,000 *other* people, picked using the criterion of the means to arm themselves at their own expense, and thus to exclude from citizenship the habitual 5,000 (*thetes*, seamen, and so forth) who made up the assembly in times of democratic-radical dominance. At any rate, even after full democracy was restored in 409 BC, incentives were needed to persuade people to attend the assembly. The famous *diobelia* (a salary of two obols) which Aristotle (*Constitution of Athens*, 28, 3) attributes to the initiative of Cleophon, one of the last popular leaders active before the military collapse of 404 of whom something is known, is also recorded in epigraphic documents for the years 410/405 BC. Such incentives aimed at reducing absenteeism by non-property-owners, who were encouraged to attend meetings in return for payment because this compensated them for the loss of a day’s work.

Within the ruling state, Athens, the extension of citizenship to non-property-owners produced an important change at the top of the system. The governing groups – let this never be forgotten – were and remained exponents of the upper classes, and belonged to the two richest of these. The *strategoï*, the hipparchs (military magistrates, who held the real political power in the city) naturally, and the *hellenotamiai* (who administered the treasury of the League and controlled finances) all came from those classes. The *bouloutai* who made up the council (consisting of 500 people, 50 from each of the 10 tribes created by Cleisthenes) were elected by drawing lots.

This allowed any citizen to join the assembly and, depending on whose turn it was, to occupy, albeit briefly, the position equivalent to the “presidency” of the republic. Even the annual lists of some 6,000 citizens, from whom the judges who constituted the various courts were drawn, were made up of volunteers, with no class excluded. And everyone knows the important role the courts played in the daily conflicts within society, which almost always arose from the way wealth was used.

Nevertheless, that the strongest and wealthiest classes prevailed in the political government of the city is unquestionable. To a great extent the rich, the “gentry,” loyally accepted the system and agreed to run it or, more accurately, they took on the job of running it *naturaliter*. Pericles, Alcibiades, Nicias, and Cleon, to name only the best-known, were all either rich or noble, or both. Whatever the value of the merciless caricature obsessively paraded by Aristophanes, Cleon belonged to the *hippeis* class, one of the two highest in terms of wealth. Did they lead or were they led? Contemporary authors are themselves divided on this point. The author of the *Constitution of the Athenians* declares bluntly that those from the upper classes who accept the democratic system are themselves scoundrels, mere criminals who have something to hide (II, 20). His comments make clear his total opposition. However, he knows he is in a minority. If we look at a towering, emblematic figure such as Pericles, it is instructive to observe how for Thucydides he is the anti-demagogue *par excellence*, who leads and does not allow himself to be led, and knows how to go against the flow, defying popular whims or instincts (II, 65). For Plato, on the other hand (*Gorgias*), Pericles is the incarnation of demagogy, one of the great “corrupters” of the people, whom he has favored, and thus corrupted. For Thucydides, Pericles is so anti-demagogic in his conduct of public affairs as to warrant the description of “prince” – and, what is more, to support the assertion that under his government “democracy” in Athens existed *in name only*. Indeed, when he quotes Pericles in the important oration to the dead in the first year of war, Thucydides has him say that “the law” rules in Athens. By contrast Xenophon – another Socratic writer – has him say, in the *Memorabilia*, that in the final analysis what counts in democracy, even above the law, is the will of the people. In any case, such is Thucydides’ awareness of the power of demagogy that he makes an extremely balanced judgment of the relationship between Pericles and the mass of people who attended the assembly: “He was not led by them any more than he himself led them.” These words, which refer to the person Thucydides had little hesitation in describing as “prince” of the city, contain a sober recognition that “to be led” (*agesthai*) is unavoidable *anyway* when practicing politics with the “mass of the people” (*plethos*). This is probably the main reason why Isocrates, a few

decades later, decided to contrive a tool (fictitious oratory as a “cloak” for political publicity-seeking) that “leapfrogged” the test of the assembly and attempted directly to influence or shape the governing groups themselves. Written oratory chose its own audience by the very fact that it was addressed to those who read regularly. In this area too, the search for “success” came into play: the indicator was the number of pupils – who in turn would themselves become active politicians and also have to take account of the *plethos*. (This did not apply to Plato’s school, which was seen by “democratic” leaders as a foreign, if not actually hostile, body.)

It is an arduous task, therefore, to give an accurate picture of the web of interests, compromises, and reciprocal concessions between the “gentry” (leaders and powerful families) and the “people” at work in Athenian democracy. Neither should personal and subjective factors be overlooked. Pericles’ authority, skill, and prestige were not unconnected to his deft and, according to his opponents, “demagogic” use of the city’s economic resources. However, it is not erroneous to see Thucydides’ point of view as well-founded, and to view Pericles as a leader who was capable of achieving hegemony and therefore also prepared to risk unpopularity. In any case, the only truly political speech Thucydides has Cleon give also does not hold back from speaking in unpopular terms. Judging from that speech, it appears that Cleon too “led more than he was led”: so much so that Demosthenes, in the next century, adopted the same terms when he wanted to take on the “Periclean” mantle of the unpopular “educator of the people.” Perhaps we will never fully unravel the web that linked the leaders with the mass of the people – a “circular” set of interactions which constitutes the essence of politics. What is important to note here is that in Athens democracy did not give rise to a “people’s government” but rather to control of the “people’s regime” by that substantial section of the “rich” and the “gentry” who accepted the system.

Now, the arrival of democracy – in the form of the extension of citizenship to non-property-owners – triggered a powerful phenomenon that led to upheaval. Faced with this new power of the non-property-owners, the ruling groups, who thanks to their high social position also benefited from a political education and thus had mastered the art of speaking (and therefore were natural candidates for governing the city) *became divided*. Some – we might say the greater part, but we have no means of measuring this – agreed to run the system in which non-property-owners were now the prevailing force. From this substantial section of the upper classes (powerful families, rich *hippeis*, and so forth) the political class who ran the city, from Cleisthenes to Cleon, emerged. Within this there developed a political dialectic that was often based on clashes of personality, prestige, power,

and leadership. Each was sustained and guided by the conviction that he embodied the common interest: the idea that his domination of the political stage was *also* the optimum means to the best government for the community. These individuals fought among themselves to gain political and military control of the city. None was against the “system”: hence they were all – Pericles, Cimon, Nicias, Cleon, and Alcibiades – equally “democratic,” in the sense that they accepted the system, played the game, and aimed to control it.

By contrast, a minority of the “gentry” *did not accept the system*. Organized in more or less secret groups (the so-called *hetaireiai*), they were a permanent threat to the “system,” always seeking its weak points, especially in times of military crisis. These were the so-called “oligarchs.” Their opponents referred to them as “the few” (*oligoi*). They certainly did not adopt this description for themselves; neither did they declare a desire for government by a small cabal. They spoke of “good government”, and a return to “wisdom” (*sophrosyne*),³ advocating a drastic reduction in the number of citizens: this would have excluded non-property-owners from the benefit of citizenship once more, thus taking the community back to the stage where only those “able to arm themselves at their own expense” had full citizenship rights. In this sense, they looked to Sparta as the model of *eunomia* (“good government”), because there the “peers” – free men and full citizens – were few in number compared with the mass of unfree and subjugated people. However the very operation they had in mind in emulation of this model, and which earned them the description of “Laconizers” – that is, the removal of citizenship rights from some of the free men – would have been unthinkable in Sparta. Here lies the contradiction: they “dreamed” of Sparta but could never have “been like Sparta,” and when they attempted to be so they were disappointed. Moreover, they themselves were already part of an economic and military system (the empire) that not only made it impossible for them to recreate a Sparta from scratch in Attica but also set them on a collision course with it, whatever political regime they mistakenly thought they could establish. For when they took power in 411 BC they were taken by surprise: Sparta continued with the war and refused to accept their “peace,” because its main priority was first to destroy the empire. In the midst of the conspiracy one of the shrewdest among them, Phrynichus, guessed what was about to happen and warned them, saying: “The empire concerns us too; it benefits us above all.”⁴ Even the “few,” though not engaged in the government of the city, had a hand in the material advantages to be drawn from the empire. The only consistent “Laconizer” was Critias, who during his short-lived government (404 BC) massacred, as Athenian sources never weary of repeating, many of the rich who were

democracy's guiding spirits, and tried to expel democracy's social base (the "demos") from the city *en bloc*. Probably he had in mind the breaking up of the political unit of Attica, which dated back many centuries to the time of the semi-mythical "synoecism" of Theseus. This plan went against an order that had been established for a long period, and was eventually defeated by the Spartans themselves.

As Aristotle notes, the term "few" (*oligoi*) itself creates confusion. He was the most perspicacious interpreter of the true nature, the "substance" of democracy and oligarchy. The whole of ancient Greek political theory came into being as a response to the "scandalous" phenomenon of democracy. In his essay on Socrates, Antonio Labriola writes that all Socrates' philosophizing placed itself in "inevitable opposition" to democracy.⁵ Socrates' followers of all tendencies, and Plato above all, maintained a radical aversion to it. Aristotle, on the other hand, studied it more dispassionately and got to the root of it, diminishing the importance of the very element that, in the eyes of democracy's Socratic critics, had seemed dominant as well as conceptually indefensible: the principle of majority. Aristotle observes that the difference between the two opposite political systems lay not in whether "many" or "few" held citizenship, but in whether they were property-owners or non-property-owners: their numbers were a "pure chance" (*Politics*, 1279 b 35). To his credit, he makes the link between the two systems and the classes that constitute them. He also highlights the fact that "the majority are in power in oligarchies too" (1290 a 31) and that, moreover, even within oligarchic groups decisions were taken by majority – which in his view confirms, if confirmation were needed, that there was no essential relation between democracy and the principle of majority.

In Athens's very case the numerical majority of non-property-owners compared with the rest of society was anything but a given. At any time property-owners – whose leading role in the city must always be borne in mind – could pick out and recruit to their own faction even a modest proportion of the poorer classes in order to secure a majority in the assembly. The "small middle class"⁶ could share the moods and aspirations of the "demos" but could also distance itself from it – which happened regularly at times of crisis. Certainly, for this class the practice of democracy meant "unrestricted access to cultural advances and the opportunity to recover, occasionally taking on a public role, from their daily labors." A hundred years after the events of 411, when Athens was defeated militarily by the Macedonian monarchy (the so-called "Lamian War" at the end of the fourth century), the property-owners, backed by Macedonian armed force, excluded the 12,000 non-property-owners from citizenship (Diodorus Siculus,

XVIII, 18, 5; Plutarch, *Phocion*, 28, 7), setting the minimum income required at 2,000 drachmas. This rout of the stronghold of Attic democracy ended with the complete *isolation* of non-property-owners. At that point, the “small middle class” was with Phocion, Demades, and the rest of the “reformers” supported by the Macedonians.

One of the main factors that cemented the pact between the non-property-owners and the “gentry” was the “liturgy” – the contribution demanded of the rich towards the functioning of the community. Made more or less spontaneously, and often very large, it ranged from sums demanded for the fitting out of ships to funds lavished on festivals and the state theater. Ancient “people’s regimes,” in their Greek version at least, did not practice expropriation except as a form of punishment for certain crimes; they allowed the rich to remain rich (only Plato and utopians questioned the right to own property), but they placed a heavy social burden on their shoulders. Arthur Rosenberg, in pleasingly up-to-date language, writes:

The capitalist was like a cow, which the community carefully milked dry. It was therefore important to make sure that this cow should receive enough fodder. The Athenian proletariat had no objection if a manufacturer, merchant, or shipowner made as much money as they could abroad: all the more for them to pay to the State.⁷

This explains the interest that the Athenian proletariat shared with the “capitalist” in exploiting allies and, more generally, in an imperialistic foreign policy.

When they were the governing force in the city, the Athenian non-property-owners unreservedly supported the conquest of other states. It is worth noting that this was the very phase in its history when Athens engaged in two (unsuccessful) pillaging wars overseas: against the Persians for the conquest of Egypt, and against its great commercial rival, Corinth – a 27-year conflict during which Athens even tried to extend its empire into the West by attacking Sicily.

To win prestige and a following among the people, the gentry who ran the system lavished their money not only on “liturgies” but also on generous donations which the demos could enjoy directly. Such a one was Cimon – a rival of Pericles – who opened up his land to the public. Plutarch writes of him:

He had the fences around his fields taken down, to allow foreigners and citizens to pick fruit in season freely if they so desired. Every day he had a meal prepared in his house which, though simple, was enough to feed many

diners. All the poor who wanted to partake of it were allowed in; since they could satisfy their hunger without effort, they were able to devote their time to political activity. (*Life of Cimon*, 10, 1)

Aristotle (fr. 363 Rose) makes clear that Cimon did not offer this treatment to all Athenians, but reserved it for those of his deme. Festivals, too, offered a solution to the problem of meals for the poor; on such occasions non-property-owners had easy access to meat – which they rarely ate because it was expensive. The “old oligarch,” the presumed author of the *Constitution of the Athenians*, does not forgive the people for this parasitism and explicitly denounces it in his short book: “the city sacrifices many victims at public expense, but it is the people who eat and share out the victims” (II, 9). Cimon also supplied clothing. Plutarch relates: “when he went out he was always accompanied by very well-dressed young friends, each of whom, if the party met some elderly, poorly dressed man, exchanged cloaks with him. And this gesture appeared to be worthy of respect” (*Life of Cimon*, 10).

Although they were prepared to take up arms against each other to fight over the precious privilege of citizenship, “pure-blooded” citizens were unanimous in refusing to contemplate any extension of citizenship *outside* the “community.”⁸ Only at times of extreme danger and real desperation did the Athenians imagine the possibilities offered by a drastic broadening of citizenship. For the slaves who contributed to the bitterly fought naval victory at the Arginusae islands (406 BC), with its high cost in human lives, the reward was enfranchisement from servitude. The average Athenian, however, was not fond of this kind of concession. Thus, the following joke in the *Frogs* by Aristophanes was sure to go down well with the audience: the timid servant Xanthias bewails not having taken part in the battle (slaves were by definition thieving, cowardly, untrustworthy, and so forth) and wants to take part in a battle already fought and won by others. After the loss of the last fleet assembled at the end of the draining conflict (Aegospotami, 405 BC), the Athenians granted – in an unprecedented gesture – Attic citizenship to the inhabitants of Samos⁹ which, after the brutal repression of the revolt of 441/440, had become the most faithful of allies. *In extremis*, they tried desperately – and in vain – to duplicate their community. This belated and short-lived initiative was swept away by the unconditional surrender of April 404 and by the expulsion, a few months later, of the Samos democrats by the victor Lysander (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2, 3, 6–7). However, it was proposed a second time by the restored democratic regime (403/402 BC) for Samos’s democratic exiles.¹⁰ This is a highly significant episode, because it demonstrates that there was some awareness,

albeit *in extremis*, that “numbers” were a determining factor, one which was damaged by too niggardly an approach to granting the privilege of “citizenship.” The episode also demonstrates the strength of “class” ties between popular factions in different cities – a point that should not be overlooked, and which corrects the crude idea that allies were generally the “victims” of a dominant city. It was the property-owners of allied cities that were worse off, not the “demos” (the popular faction), as the author of the *Constitution of the Athenians* well knew and polemically argued.

The situation in Sparta was similar – if possible, even worse. There, the dominance of the Spartiates (that is, the true “peers”) began to be challenged soon after the great military victory over Athens. The “conspiracy” of Cinadon, which championed the interests of Spartans who had fallen into poverty despite being free, dates from 398. The solution adopted was the expulsion of the rebels from the community, which impoverished it further. At the time of the Messenian revolts it was said that the drastic remedy to inject new blood into the rapidly decreasing citizen body was to pair off Spartan women with *perioikoi*, in order to produce a few reinforcements in a short time. Sparta was not averse to using such “breeding” systems to deal with the ever-looming demographic problem. But here, too, the attempt to subvert this tendency came too late: with the reforms of Cleomenes III, the “revolutionary” king defeated in the battle of Sellasia (222 BC) by Antigonos, the Macedonian ruler called upon by Aratus, greatest champion of the Achaean Confederacy, and adored by Polybius, who sang the praises of the “pacificatory” dominion of Rome over Greece.

Centuries later, at the beginning of the second century AD, the historian Cornelius Tacitus reflected on the causes of the decline of the world of the Greek city-states. He quotes the emperor Claudius, in a memorable speech on citizens’ rights, thus: “What else indeed caused the ruin both of the Spartans and of the Athenians, despite their military strength, but the fact that they *excluded* – after their victories – the defeated, treating them as if they belonged to a different race (*pro alienigenis*)?” (*Annals*, XI, 24, 4). Tacitus clearly perceives the connection between a community becoming closed and that community’s decline. Indeed, Polybius himself had spoken of *oliganthropia* (XXXVI, 17).

The most famous and instructive example of a community becoming stubbornly and suicidally closed is the short-lived and clumsy attempt to free the slaves of Attica en masse, made amid the panic sown by the victory of Philip of Macedon against the coalition led by Demosthenes in 338 BC. The Macedonian phalanx scattered the Greek forces, and there was nothing to prevent the enterprising and tireless victor from marching directly on Athens, which was totally undefended. Philip had a well-earned reputation

as a destroyer of defeated cities. So imminent was the danger he posed that the orator Hyperides, a highly respected politician well known for his hostility to Macedonia, proposed that a vast army be formed – from nothing, so to speak – for the desperate defense of Athens, by immediately freeing some 150,000 slaves who were working on the land and in mines in Attica (fr. 27–29 Blass-Jensen). However, he was immediately dragged before a court, accused of “illegality” – the most dreaded charge in Athens. Who was his accuser? The popular leader known as the “dog of the people,” Aristogiton, who rose up in the name of the defense of democracy (hence the trial for “illegality”) against the improper, unheard-of, opening of the flood-gates in broadening citizenship. The full citizens of Attica, who numbered not many more than 20,000 at the time, would have been “submerged” in the much bigger numbers of a democracy that encompassed everyone. The argument Aristogiton put forward (which is known to us from a late source) was, on this singularly dramatic occasion in Athenian history, the typical argument of the democratic orator. Aristogiton thundered: “As long as there is peace, the enemies of democracy respect the law and are forced, so to speak, not to violate it; but when there is war they easily find all sorts of pretexts to terrorize the citizens, arguing that *it is impossible to save the city without passing illegal proposals!*”¹¹

Democratic legality, an attack on democracy, the “people’s” interests: with such weapons someone as thoughtless as the Syracusan demagogue Athenagoras could proclaim – even as the Athenians sailed on Syracuse – that the alarm over a “presumed” Athenian attack was nothing but an “oligarchic trick” (Thucydides, VI, 36–40). With such weapons someone who championed the selfishness of those who held citizenship could prevent their numbers being increased by freeing the slaves, the city’s resources, en masse – even though Philip, the hated Philip, was at the gates of the defenseless city. Needless to say, Aristogiton was completely successful in his action against Hyperides’ “illegal,” “antidemocratic” initiative.

How Greek Democracy Came Back into Play, and Finally Left the Stage

“That the Commons of England, in Parliament assembled, do Declare, That the People are, under God, the Original of all just Power:

And do also Declare, That the Commons of England, in Parliament assembled, being chosen by, and representing, the People, have the supreme Power in this Nation:

And do also Declare, That whatsoever is enacted, or declared for Law, by the Commons, in Parliament assembled, hath the Force of Law; and all the People of this Nation are concluded thereby, although the Consent and Concurrence of King, or House of Peers, be not had thereunto.”

Journals of the House of Commons, 1648–1651.

On January 4, 1649 the Rump Parliament – that is, what remained of the Long Parliament after the “mutilation” (the arrest of 90 members of the intransigent Presbyterian wing) inflicted by Pride’s Purge on December 6, 1648 – ratified this principle, which can be seen as the culmination of the first English revolution and, at the same time, as the most advanced formulation it produced. The resolution summarizes what had been discussed in a series of fierce debates in the Presbyterian church in Putney, a small London suburb, at the end of October 1647 – debates in which all social groups had had a voice. It also confirmed the victory of the most progressive faction, which had certainly not allowed itself to be intimidated during those debates, which had been anything but academic.

What is striking in the minutes of those discussions¹ is not just their obvious religious and “Reformation” frame of reference, but the absence of references to traditions other than those of the Bible and Christian history. For Cromwell’s men, Exodus was the story of future liberation: Scripture foretold the history that was about to happen rather than recounting that of the past. Michael Walzer has referred to the “Revolution of Saints.”²

From the beginning the English revolution took the shape of a logical development, on a directly political level, of the anti-authoritarian rupture of the Reformation. In the eight long and tortured years from 1641, when Parliament approved the Grand Remonstrance, to 1649, the religious aspect

dominates not only in official documents but in the vast amount of propaganda that, like a background commentary, accompanied the entire episode. An example is the text of the Grand Remonstrance itself, which divides the roots of “evil” equally between the “Jesuitic Papists,” bent on subverting the Anglican religion, and “the [Anglican] bishops and the corrupted section of the clergy, who fuel formalism and superstition as the natural consequences and most likely props for their tyranny.” The revolution did result precisely in the suppression of the Anglican church’s episcopal structure. The war of ideas was fought *on the battlefield of religion*, and the concepts employed, the myths that served as reference points, were those that came from Scripture and from the conflict that had erupted in the previous century with the Lutheran “rebellion” against Rome. Moreover, it is beyond doubt that the Anglican church, which was extremely hierarchical and determined to return to highly ritualized forms of worship, was the main support of monarchic absolutism (though the accusation that Charles I wanted to restore “Jesuit Papism” remained essentially groundless). On the opposing side, Presbyterians and Puritans were well aware of the connection, inherent in their actions and their propaganda, between religious affirmation and assertion of the principle of “sovereignty of the people” (“That the People are, under God, the Original of all just Power”).

If we glance at random through the Putney debates, we can see this clearly. In the discussion of October 29, Rainsborough replied firmly to the “Great Ones”: “I can see no passage in the Law of God that asserts that a Lord should be allowed to choose 20 members, a gentleman only two, and a poor man none.”³

There is another element in the Levellers’ thinking that should also be taken into account: their reference to the “native” factor. During the second day at Putney, Henry Ireton, Cromwell’s brother-in-law, argued that before William the Conqueror the Anglo-Saxons had a very ancient constitution based upon liberty and equality. The “inherent rights” of the English were inherited from this “constitution,” and had been crushed under the rule of the Norman kings until the reign of Charles I. Thanks to Ireton’s elementary dialectic, this vision of England’s distant and recent history led to the blocking of the radicals’ demand for true universal suffrage. The ambiguity came from the phrase uttered by the Levellers’ exponent himself: “We believe that all people *who have not compromised their inherent right* should have an equal vote in the elections.” The expression “inherent right,” coupled with the theory of the Anglo-Saxons’ ancient liberty, was used as the grounds for the argument that, in any case, not all members of a community were necessarily equal with regard to the right to vote, and that such a right was connected to “ethnic” origin.

There is not a word about the “others.” The political freedom and greater equality demanded by these revolutionaries rested on two pillars: the ideological basis provided by the Bible on the one hand, and the “nation,” the “race,” on the other.

The biblical reference is clearly present also in the language and political rhetoric of the American colonizers:

Since it has pleased almighty God, in the wisdom of his divine providence, to order and arrange things in such a manner that we are gathered together and living on the banks of the Connecticut river, we assemble and associate ourselves to form a single public State or Commonwealth, to maintain and preserve freedom and the purity of the Gospel . . . All who are considered to be citizens, who have sworn the oath of allegiance, who are recognised as *residents* by the majority of those who live in the town where they reside etc. shall take part in the election of magistrates . . .

Having undertaken a voyage to found the first Colony in the northern region of Virginia, to the greater glory of God and for the propagation of the Christian Faith etc.

The style of these documents, drawn up in the first half of the seventeenth century, is echoed a century and a half later in the Declaration of Independence, whose final text is largely based on the draft written by Thomas Jefferson in July 1776. “When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them”; and “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights etc.”⁴

Beyond the “biblical” emphasis, however, the picture is clouded by powerful, concrete conditions. In a recent essay, tellingly entitled *How Democratic is the American Constitution?*, Robert Dahl recalls that, in its original draft (1787) the US constitution accepted the institution of slavery and even “gave constitutional sanction to one of the most morally objectionable by-products of a morally repulsive institution: the Fugitive Slave laws.” Moreover, it left intact the restrictions on the right to vote imposed by individual states, which excluded African-Americans, women, and native Americans.⁵

Once again, the “specter at the feast” in these grandiloquent documents is the institution of slavery. And once again, as was the case in England, the two supporting “pillars” were the Bible and attachment to race. Well might Jefferson in Paris dwell on his Encyclopedist sympathies, but he could not

avoid the embarrassment of being reminded by his French friends and questioners – who were his chief source of inspiration – that the institution of slavery endured in a free, republican regime. As governor of Virginia, he had a law passed in that state that forbade the import of more slaves – though this did not prevent him keeping slaves himself, albeit humanely treated ones, on his model estate of Monticello.

In the memorable session of the National Convention on 16 Pluviôse of year II (February 4, 1794), the citizen Louis-Pierre Dufay de la Tour (one of the three deputies elected at Santo Domingo, who had reached Paris only the previous day after a journey full of adventures, some of them unexplained, and had immediately been admitted to the Convention) demanded and secured a decree in support of “our brothers in the colonies”. He observed that their attachment to the Republic was so strong that there was a need for a new measure “that restores peace to the New World and promises the colored people who live there – who are worthy of being French! – the advantages conferred by our Constitution and all the rights inherent in freedom and equality.”

Dufay’s extremely long speech – of which he immediately circulated a *brochure* “imprimée par ordre de la Convention” [a pamphlet “printed by order of the Convention”] – mentioned an episode on which the newly-elected deputy placed much emphasis. A delegation of black slaves presented itself to the French, who were fighting the English and Spanish, and demanded freedom in the name of the Declaration of the Rights of Man (“ ‘Nous sommes nègres, Français, nous allons combattre pour la France: mais pour récompense nous demandons la liberté’; ils ajoutèrent: ‘les Droits de l’Homme’ ”) [“ ‘We are negroes, and French. We will fight for France; but in return we demand our freedom’; they added: ‘the Rights of Man’ ”]. Similarly, the Sarthe deputy René Levasseur, a faithful Robespierriest and staunch opponent of the Thermidoreans (who later imprisoned him in harsh conditions for having approved the abrogation of slavery on 16 Pluviôse) said, immediately after Dufay:

I ask that the Convention decree – not in an impromptu burst of enthusiasm but in observance of the principles of justice and in keeping with the Declaration of the Rights of Man – that slavery be abolished everywhere in the Republic, with immediate effect. Santo Domingo is part of this territory, yet we have slaves there. I demand therefore that all men be free, regardless of their color.

The deputy Jean-François Delacroix (who would soon be swept away in the trial of Danton’s supporters) spoke in Dufay’s support. He began by making

a telling observation on the inadequacy, or at any rate lack of explicitness, of the constitutional documents drawn up until that point:

While working on the French people's constitution we have not however cast our eyes over the hapless colored people. Posterity will thus reproach us harshly in this regard; but we must right this wrong. In vain have we resolved that no feudal right will be claimed within the borders of the French republic. You have just heard, from one of our colleagues, that there are still slaves in our colonies! *It is time that we raised ourselves up to the standards of liberty and equality.* To reply that we do not countenance slavery on French soil is not enough: is it not true that colored men are slaves in our colonies? We must therefore proclaim the liberty of colored men. By committing this act of justice you will give an important example to colored men who are slaves *in the English and Spanish colonies.* Colored men have wanted to break their chains, exactly as we have. We have wanted to break ours; we have refused to submit to the yoke of any master: let us grant them the same gift.

Levasseur's second speech is interesting also for its vocabulary. Interjecting briefly, he said: "If it were possible to place before the Convention's very eyes the harrowing picture of the evils slavery involves, I would make you tremble by portraying the oppression [the word used is '*l'aristocratie*'] inflicted in our colonies by some whites."

Delacroix took the floor promptly and effectively: "President! You cannot tolerate that the Convention dishonor itself by prolonging further a discussion on this subject!" and he immediately proposed a draft resolution: "The national Convention decrees that slavery is abolished throughout the lands of the Republic. Consequently all men, whatever their color, shall enjoy the rights of French citizens."

At this point some deputy came forward with a rather ambiguous and potentially insidious remark: "Let us avoid that the very word *slavery* should besmirch a decree made by the Convention: all the more so since liberty is a natural right." In effect this was an invitation to do nothing – not to make a specific decree abolishing slavery, on the specious grounds that such an abolition was "implicit" in the general principle: it was already acknowledged that liberty was indeed a natural right. The contribution of the Abbé Grégoire resolved the matter, however. Sharply dispelling the sophistic *escamotage* [trickery], he said: "It is essential that the word *slavery* be included; otherwise, at some future time it may be argued that you wanted to say something else; instead, you all want slavery to disappear."

The assembly rose to its feet and to loud acclaim approved the wording suggested by Delacroix. The president, who that day was Marc Vadier – an unpleasant character, certainly, but one who paid personally for his part in

the Babeuf “conspiracy” – proclaimed formally and solemnly the abolition of slavery while, to cries of “Long live the Republic! Long live the Mountain!” the three deputies from the colonies were embraced, according to the parliamentary chronicler: “étroitement serrés dans les bras de leurs collègues” [“tightly clasped in the arms of their colleagues”].⁶

In the Antilles, where the contrast with liberal England’s stubborn defense of slavery was most glaring, the liberation set in train by the Convention with its decree of 16 Pluviôse proved immediately explosive. Here two different conceptions of freedom clashed: that of the liberal English who, weapons in hand, defended the institution of slavery, and that of the Montagnard Convention, which – while regretting having delayed – set about “raising itself up to the standards of liberty and equality,” explicitly abolishing the personal subjection of black people. The emphasis on skin *color* is of central importance. The English liberals’ calm reinstatement of slavery in a colony in the Antilles, as soon as they had snatched it from the French, betrayed a racism that saw black men as non-human, or inferior humans.

Henri Bangou, Guadeloupe’s leading black historian, described the episode vividly in his *History of Guadeloupe*. On February 4, 1794, the very day the Convention voted on Delacroix’s motion, the English fleet appeared off the coast of Martinique. On March 24 the English occupied Martinique, and soon afterwards landed on Guadeloupe, summoned by the “great whites” (who lost no time in signing a treaty with London) and to the indifference of the “small whites.” Whites – even “republicans” – did not object, arguing that “l’intention de la République n’est pas de régner sur des cendres et des débris” [“It is not the Republic’s intention to rule over ashes and dross”]. Administratively, all the apparatus of the *ancien régime* was restored, and the legitimacy of the institution of slavery was reiterated. Indeed, there had not even been time to abolish it, given that the Convention’s vote was held as the English attacked the two islands in the Lesser Antilles.

The organizer of the fight against the English occupiers and the architect of the liberation of the island’s slaves – after years of guerrilla war ending with the island’s return to republican, abolitionist France – was Victor Hugues, former public prosecutor in the Rochefort and Brest revolutionary tribunal and later (in early 1794) commissioner of the Convention on the Leeward Islands. He gave the English slavers a run for their money, driving them back to the sea and conquering other islands such as Marie-Galante. Black former slaves formed the backbone of his army.

How can it be that none of the proclamations of “rights” from the English revolutions and the American Revolution produced a vision, or practical

action, that called slavery into question? How can those asserters of “rights” and “freedom” have found it normal to coexist with slavery in their colonies (or those of others, when they occupied them) and even at home, in the case of the United States?

Certainly, one overriding reason was a practical and economic one. Writing about the United States, Henri Bangou rightly argues that North America is the most interesting example of the “historical, economic, and political relativity of the notion of freedom, as well as of the mystification to which it can be subjected.” The war fought against England culminated in the proclamation of independence, but the clearest proof of the mutilation of liberty, of its application to the advantage of a given class, lies in the retention in this new “free” state of an institution that was the negation of freedom: slavery. “The true driving force of history and of political and social institutions – that is, economics, and not the soul, or reason, or some other demiurge – did not demand that slavery as a means of production should disappear from the landscape of the United States,” Bangou writes ironically, going on to observe how it did not take much for all 56 delegates entrusted with drawing up the new state’s laws to reach agreement. “There was no longer a trace even of that lack of coherence apparent during the war [against the English] when blacks were being enlisted with the promise of freedom, while whites were being promised black slaves in return for their collaboration!”⁷

It is not entirely true, however, that other factors had no influence. A strong biblical-Protestant streak also played its part. The New Testament was a structural part of the mentality of these men, carrying as much weight in their value system as the Greeks and Romans did in that of the French revolutionaries – perhaps more so. Now, Scripture contains a useful justification for continuing the practice of slavery.

The apostle Paul writes in the Letter to the Ephesians (6: 5–9):

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do, we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality.

And when a slave, Onesimus, belonging to a master who is also a Christian, Philemon, fled and reached Rome, where he contacted Paul, the latter sent him back to Philemon in the distant Phrygian town of Colossae, bearing a

letter which, tellingly, is included among the letters of Paul. It is a masterpiece of artfulness, calculated to calm his master, faced with one of the most serious crimes against property:

I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother. (Letter of Paul to Philemon, 12–16)

Writing to the Galatians, Paul reiterates that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female” (3: 28). However, in the first Letter to the Corinthians he warns: “Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (7: 20). It is an unstable state of equilibrium but a productive one in practical terms – all must stay in their place: the fugitive slaves must return to submit to their masters, who must however treat them humanely – even though *elsewhere* and in the next world these distinctions do not count. It is easy to understand why the founders of the state of Virginia initially considered a law against fugitive slaves.

When rebellious Jesuits who were true to their beliefs came face to face with the reality of colonial domination, they attacked the very basis of social inequality and especially of slavery – in the name of the Gospel, thus risking being accused of renouncing their faith or of heresy. We need only think of the subversive teachings of Father Vieira – echoed, in our times, by the Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú’s reminder of the revolutionary nature of the Bible, which had been completely forgotten by Europeans.⁸ But such Christian radicalism, though emerging in the world that the English rebels had labelled “Papist,” was neither present nor particularly appreciated in that of the Reformation, or among the dissidents of the Reformation who made up the intelligentsia at the head of the revolutions in the English-speaking world. A “conception of the world” based upon the Bible did not lead to the affirmation of liberty for *all* here and now, in the visible, tangible society of the present.

The Convention’s session of 16 Pluviôse did not lack scenes of drama, such as the patriotic fainting of the black female citizen “who regularly attends sessions and has shared in all revolutionary movements from the outset” in the words of the deputy Cambon. Danton, too, stood up to speak, chiefly to ensure that implementation of the decree abolishing slavery be entrusted to

the two committees of public safety and of the colonies. He began with a highly significant observation: “Until today we have asserted the principle of liberty in the manner of egoists: only for ourselves. With today’s decision we proclaim *universal* liberty, before the whole universe, and future generations will find glory in this decree.” He added: “We are working for future generations: we are launching liberty in the colonies. With today’s action the Englishman has died. (*Applause*) Once launched in the New World, liberty will bring you abundant fruits, and will put down deep roots.” (Danton spoke as if “freedom” had not shown its face in the “New World” – an implicit judgment on the United States.)

It is worth pausing to look at this idea of “egoistic” liberty. As we know, the charge laid against the ancient (classical) model of freedom, which was at the center of revolutionary and especially Jacobin ideology, is indeed that freedom in classical antiquity was “egoistic” par excellence, reserved for few or at any rate for a minority.

Between March and April 1795, in year III of the Republic, a voluminous biography and bibliography of Xenophon was published in Paris. *Vie de Xénophon, suivie d’un extrait historique et raisonné de ses ouvrages* was written by Citizen Fortia, a former nobleman, now a republican, who was particularly scrupulous in the monthly compilation of civic awards. This book, whose publication has a long history, opens with several sentences of unquestionably “patriotic” flavor, as the saying went at the time. “Liberty and philosophy are our watchword [*cri de ralliement*].” It continues clumsily in this vein. Xenophon being a philosopher, and one who lived when Greece was a free country to boot, there could have been no better subject. At the time books were printed extremely sparingly, for the Republic was assailed from outside by a war waged by the united powers, wounded within by the Wars of the Vendée, and devastated economically by the flood of counterfeit public bonds from England. Above all, priority was given to books deemed useful or educationally important. It is therefore highly significant that the good Citizen Fortia, though a former nobleman and thus forced to live outside Paris in compliance with the “Germinal decrees” of the end of April 1794, succeeded not only in writing his work on Xenophon but also in sending it to the printers and having it printed. The book was published within the circle of Jean-Baptiste Gail, a former abbot turned republican and a professor at the Collège de France, having succeeded a “suspect” who had been flung into prison.

These details help to understand how the work was dressed up to appear loyally republican to get past the censors, but it is really not so in its contents. However, the reader needs to go deep into the book to become aware of this. When we get to *Hieron*, a short treatise on tyranny, we realize

that, after many contortions, Fortia is using the Greek author as an excuse to criticize “people’s tyranny” wielded in the name of equality (not without some well-aimed barbs directed at Rousseau). When we reach the *Constitution of the Athenians* (the work of doubtful attribution mentioned several times above, which in Fortia’s time was universally attributed to Xenophon) the attack on democracy becomes pointed.

Fortia’s masterstroke is to pass off everything that is said as being the work of the Abbé Arnaud (which is true – it is almost plagiarism), whose paraphrase of Xenophon’s short book is presented anew to the reader because it is “almost unobtainable at present.” The author promises: of course I will soften some expressions (of Arnaud’s) that are too monarchist in character, but I will let many stand “which are characteristic of Xenophon, whose ideas were not always republican [*sic!*], and who must therefore be taken for what he is” (p. 391). There follows a paraphrase by Arnaud of Xenophon’s attack on the defects of the Athenian democratic system. The reader will naturally wonder how much remains of the original premises (*liberté et philosophie*) that led to Xenophon being chosen in the first place. But Fortia is clever too in choosing Arnaud as the interpreter (a convenient way of avoiding having to say the same things in the first person), where other interpreters read the work – albeit wrongly – in the opposite sense: as a patriotic defense of Athens.⁹ At the end of the paraphrase of Arnaud (who does not neglect to recall that the entire Athenian philosophical tradition that traced its descent from Socrates had been hostile to democracy), Fortia returns to Xenophon:

Such are the reflections of the Abbé Arnaud on the works of Xenophon. I will however keep within my subject and not allow myself any political reflection on the principles affirmed by the three great Greek philosophers. I will confine myself to a purely historical observation, aimed at counteracting the effect of an opinion as highly regarded as that which Arnaud has drawn from those three profound judges of the human heart. My observation is thus the following. Those three great thinkers could judge freedom only in the form in which it presented itself to their eyes, that is, *stained by the existence of slavery*. At that time *slavery was everywhere to be found alongside liberty*. Indeed, all ancient nations had an enormous number of slaves, *whatever their form of government*. And in none of the ancient states did this monstrous pairing – whatever form of government was in place – offer the fine spectacle of true freedom.

Here the naïve writer, deliberately banal in much of his work, acquires a singular substance and power, in one of the most modern analyses of the Greek world’s disturbing entanglement of freedom and slavery – going much further than the generic approach of Rousseau in *The Social Contract*

(III, 15). The fundamental idea he wants to highlight is the drastic limitation inherent in *all* ancient republics, but he takes a tortuous route. After evoking an antidemocratic figure who praises the reservations of Socrates' followers regarding democracy, he declares he wants to distance himself from him, but not to defend the ancient democracies – rather, to dismiss them as false democracies! The key argument for this is the “stain” of slavery. He has given much thought to this, and his highly modern conclusion is that slavery was present *in all aspects of life in antiquity* (a description that recurs in some of Moses Finley's most brilliant essays). Freedom and slavery were inextricable in ancient society, thus rendering differences between different forms of government insignificant. Fortia uses the term “assemblage monstrueux” [“monstrous pairing”] to denote the highly accurate and modern concept of this inextricability. The conclusion is disarming: nowhere in the classical world ever offered “le beau spectacle d'une véritable liberté” [“the fine spectacle of true freedom”].

And yet those were the *models*, the supreme models, obsessively reaffirmed by the new republicans.

A few days earlier, or perhaps even at the same time that this strange book was published in Paris, Constantin-François Volney, a historian and anthropologist no longer in his first youth, who had just taken a post at the newly-founded École Normale Supérieure, was ending his fifth lecture (3 Germinal year III, or March 23, 1795) with a vehement onslaught on this very subject:

We reproach our ancestors for their superstitious adoration of the Jews, yet we have ourselves fallen into no less superstitious adoration of the Greeks and Romans! Our forefathers swore on the Bible and Jerusalem. Now a new sect [he is clearly referring to the newly-disbanded Jacobins] has sworn on Sparta, Athens, and Livy. [The attack is on the *erroneous idea* that this new “sect” had formed of conditions in antiquity.] What is curious about this new type of religion is that its apostles have not even had an accurate view of the doctrine they have been preaching, and that the models they have proposed are diametrically opposed to their own declarations and aims. They have exalted the freedom of Rome and Greece, and concealed from us that in Sparta an aristocracy numbering 30,000 nobles kept 600,000 slaves under a hideous yoke; that to prevent this kind of Negro from increasing in numbers young Lacedaemonians used to hunt helots by night like wild beasts; that in Athens, that sanctuary of all freedoms, there were four slaves for every free person; that there was no house where the despotic regime of our American colonists was not exercised by these presumed democrats; and that of some 5 million people living in the whole of Greece, more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ million were slaves.¹⁰

Volney was undermining the very “liberating” image of ancient democracy and recalling its essential nature of democracy for an elite of full citizens, the “free and equal” – a broad elite, but narrow nevertheless in comparison with the mass of slaves.

Moreover, by citing “our American colonists,” Volney was certainly supporting – to his credit – the abolition enacted by the Convention the previous year. As we shall see, Bonaparte was to break with Volney on this issue, repealing the measure and reinstating slavery in the colonies.

However, although it focused on the real issue of slavery’s awkward prominence in ancient society, this was not a new idea. Rousseau touched on it at the end of chapter XV of book III of *The Social Contract* – and the chapter did not escape the notice of S. N. H. Linguet, who made use of it in *Annales politiques, civiles et littéraires du dix-huitième siècle*.¹¹ A decade or two earlier, David Hume had dealt with the question in depth, studying populations in the ancient world and, perhaps alarmed by the high number of slaves cited by ancient sources, also began the shameful process in which so many modern historians, or aspiring historians, have achieved notoriety. Following in Hume’s footsteps, these have worked hard at massaging the figures ancient writers give for the slave population. Every student of Roman law knows that slavery was so ubiquitous in Roman society that, in Fortia’s words, “slavery was everywhere to be found alongside liberty.” There was no regulation or aspect of social and family life in which slavery was not involved.

In short, there was nothing new, as far as the facts were concerned. What was new lay elsewhere. A few months after the fall of Robespierre, the *attack on the “ancient republics,” in the form of an attack on the Jacobin republic*, began. And, in a scenario that would be repeated and consolidated during the twentieth century with reference to “communism in practice,” the reproach was: you are not what you claim to be. Just as the most bitter and committed anti-communists inveighed harshly against the USSR, complaining that it was not a “truly communist” country (and defectors’ tales of woe offered raw material, eagerly seized on as gospel), so the French Republic in year II was attacked in these terms: this republic is in reality despotic, and its ancient models were in reality savage oligarchies.

It is worth throwing a little light on this story, in which liberal thinkers and political theorists distinguished themselves and became, retrospectively, authorities (for example, Constant, Tocqueville). Clearly, though they were following a train of thought begun by others before them, the Thermidorean and later liberal attackers of the “cult” of the ancient republics were pointing out the truth, revealing – as if that were even necessary – those republics’ real nature. It goes without saying that they contributed to creating a realistic,

truthful, and anti-rhetorical image of those “republics,” for which historical scholarship owes them a debt of gratitude. This unmasking, which recurs in some admirable pages of Max Weber’s *The City* (which contains the famous description of ancient democracy as a “guild” that divides up the spoils) has not won the acclaim it deserved. This is not due to crypto-Jacobins still lurking in dark recesses of historical research but because, on the one hand, the banal classicism that, long before the Jacobins, idolized antiquity and hid its horrifying aspects (such as slavery and ferocious brutality in peace as in war) has never died out, and on the other because nineteenth-century historiographic debate continued to deal with ancient democracy – whether to exalt it or condemn it – as *the immediate antecedent and model of modern democracy*. George Grote (a progressive liberal and admirer of Cleon) and, on the other side of the argument, Eduard Meyer (who continued to see in the Athenian republic of Cleon’s time all the horrors of the hated French Third Republic) have done sterling work from the point of view of reconstruction, but they have kept the level of historical understanding of conditions in ancient times well below that of the lucid analyses of the likes of Volney, Constant, and Tocqueville. And they have clearly won a great many more followers, given the volume, authority, and erudite usefulness of their monumental histories.

However, the point to be borne in mind is a different one. In the *political laboratory* that was the ancient city, or rather the ancient political civilization with its vast *written* (oratorical, philosophical, historiographic) legacy, two processes were at work. On the one hand, conflicts of *the day* were being fought, and powerful contingent interests of *that time*, involving *those* social classes, were in action. At the same time, however, models and concepts were being developed – and this is what is special about that great flowering of *written* political culture – which eventually had a legitimate *value in a general sense*, beyond their concrete significance in their own time. This is the reason for their extremely long-lasting and legitimate “vitality,” and why a political elite, the Jacobins, and before them the “philosophical sect” of their masters, Mably and Rousseau, turned to that ancient model. It was the only known political civilization that had produced ideological, emotional, and anecdotal baggage that could cross the borders imposed by time and be adopted anew as immediately useful for the *general values* (especially equality and freedom) it had formalized and conceptualized. This is aside from the fact – all too easily discovered – that this intellectual construct was also the tool by which a dominant class represented itself at a given historical time, in a given harshly class-ridden situation that was obviously deeply anti-egalitarian.

The Jacobins were the first to be aware of this, however. They had heard Condorcet’s report to the legislative assembly, when the greatest champion

of the “moderns” had harshly denounced the “corruption” that the ancients had hitherto introduced into the moderns’ way of thinking. They had approved a general system of public education, centred on the *Écoles Centrales*, in which the place occupied by the classical languages was drastically reduced. The Jacobins’ “paradox,” so to speak – which in no way detracts from their great contribution to the shaping of modern Europe – consisted in their unquestionable derivation from the “moderns” (they were born of the *Encyclopédie*) and, at the same time, in their adoption of an ancient “ideology.” This was the political and virtuous model of the ancient republics in which – and this is what fascinated them most of all – *liberty and equality had seemed able to coexist*, or at least (so it seemed to them) had been indicated as values that were concomitant and convergent, equal in power and conviction.

During the months of government by the Committee of Public Safety, the study of Greek, as well as Latin, was reduced to a basic level, the preference being for study of the ancients through paraphrases and translations. (Already, Condorcet’s report had said, “now translations of the great authors are available.”) However, at the same time, the great classic writers (some more than others) and the towering figures of that monumental period of history were adopted as models that set a *standard*. Their strength lay in their nature, which could be seen to be truly universal and not anchored in any religion or sect. This explains that reassertion of what the Greeks had said and thought for ever. Their experience long predated Christianity; it affirmed values that did not need that prop and were not – or at least could be seen as not – anchored in a people, a faith, or a particular history. They were the incunabula of a *universal* recognition of rights asserted as such. Clearly, this was a case of making metahistorical use of that experience, whose interpretation and adoption as a *model*, over millennia, had favored precisely such a metahistorical application. And the vaguer and more approximate the idea they had of the ancients, the more easily they could use them for ideological ends – and the easier it was for anyone with a sound knowledge of sources and facts to prove them wrong.

This is why, aside from other factors that need not be repeated here, the revolutions in English-speaking countries and the French Revolution produced such different results. Usually, the emphasis is placed on other differences between them: freedoms and individual rights in the former, centralism and Jacobin *dirigisme* in the latter. But the biggest difference is often overlooked. The former coexisted happily with slavery, and indeed contributed to keeping it alive (the US had to face the longest and most savage war in its history to free itself of it); the latter led directly to the realization that the “rights of man” meant nothing if they depended on skin

color or if – outside Europe – they allowed a mass of cheap, brutalized labor to be condemned to slavery. The former looked to the Bible as their primary source of inspiration; the latter aimed to derive from the far more ancient and decidedly transfigured experience of the Greeks and Romans the foundations of a practical prospect for *equality and liberty* with truly universal aims.

Such an “ideology” could indeed be unmasked in the name of a more profound and accurate knowledge of the ancients. But this was too convenient an *escamotage* [trick] to rebut the *substance* of what the Jacobins, albeit arbitrarily, claimed to have drawn from classical antiquity. They were the first to abolish colonial slavery, and understood before many others that a purely European viewpoint was synonymous with privilege; but as they did so they were inspired by the ghosts of a society founded on slavery.

Even so, there was a more immediate similarity with the politics of the ancient democracies: democracy as “violence,” as coercion, wielded by one social group of non-property-owners (such as the Parisian *sans-culottes*) over the privileged classes and the wealthy: the latter were not expropriated, but placed under pressure in the manner of the “people’s dictatorship” of Athens described with furious hostility in the *Constitution of the Athenians*. It is therefore not wide of the mark to observe that those who denounced the false idea of the ancient republic current during the Jacobin period were not really concerned with harrowing slavery, but with society’s attack on wealth instigated by the Jacobin dictatorship – for example, through the device (which lent itself to considerable development) of investigation into “suspect riches.” Thus these well-educated Thermidoreans were in fact defending the freedom of wealth, while fulminating against the slavery in antiquity “concealed” by their opponents.

Hérault de Séchelles – who, on being asked to draw up the 1793 Constitution, urgently asked the curator of printed documents at the Bibliothèque Nationale to produce “sur-le-champ les lois de Minos qui doivent se trouver dans un recueil des lois grecques” [“immediately the laws of Minos, which should be in a compilation of Greek laws”] – attracted the ridicule of Hippolyte Taine, which was as blundering as it was factious. Fustel de Coulanges writes, in his introduction to *La Cité antique*: “The idea we have formed of Greece and Rome has often troubled present-day generations: since we have not clearly perceived the institutions of the ancient city, we have imagined that we could recreate them. But we have merely deceived ourselves about the freedom enjoyed by the ancients, and thus the only result has been that the freedom of people in modern times has been endangered.” He adds that this misunderstanding is due to the

“unmediated” classicism typical of an educational system which “makes us live among the Greeks and Romans from childhood, and accustoms us to comparing them continually with ourselves.”

Until the revolution, all culture and language (including political language) has a classical base. But as we gradually move away from the revolution, classicism and progressive thought diverge, and a sounder understanding of antiquity – as in the case of Volney, Constant, Tocqueville, and Fustel – tends to assert itself, within a conservative and anti-democratic perspective. The more European classicism regains the elitist and anti-egalitarian values of the classical world and its surviving tradition, the more it gains in depth of understanding. (However, the phenomenon of identification with the ancients reappears in a symmetrical form: drawing inspiration from Fustel, Charles Maurras in the 1930s declares his enthusiasm for a “republic founded on the enslavement of the majority” and thus likes to feel himself “Athenian.”)

This official “reunion” between scholars of classical antiquity and the political powers born of revolutionary upheaval had been attempted, and in part realized, by Bonaparte, within the framework of a wider, moderate reordering of the whole of French and imperial society.

The official document of this reunion, which persuaded all French (and European) scholars of antiquity to adhere to it, was *Rapport à l'Empereur*, promoted by the mediocre but well-connected Bon-Joseph Dacier, and presented to the emperor in 1808. The man who symbolized the operation, and also wrote the section of the “report” devoted to classical antiquity, was Ennio Quirino Visconti – originator, with Pius VI, of the Museo Pio Clementino in Rome – a cosmopolitan intellectual who was also in charge of the “antiquities” in the Louvre. In the event, Bonaparte made himself the official, and highly authoritative, promoter of “state” editions of the Greek classics, such as the great edition of Strabo’s *Geographia*, entrusted – among others – to the Greek republican exile and naturalized Frenchman Adamantios Korais. It will be evident that the (easily recognizable) model for this initiative was the “Collection du Louvre” of writers on Byzantine history, promoted in his own time by Louis XIV. Thus *ancien régime* and *Révolution* were reunited, at least – though not only – in the sense of the restoration of the classical tradition.

It is no accident that it was Bonaparte – the “sword of the revolution” – who reinstated slavery in the colonies, despite the protests of his friend Volney.

In December 1797 the government of Victor Hugues in Guadeloupe found itself in severe difficulties because of a number of rebellions, notably on the island of Marie-Galante, where thousands of blacks seized and

disarmed whites, whom they accused of being in league with the English. This would have constituted a threat to the island but, of course, even more so to the black population, who would have faced the return of slavery if the island had been returned to English control. Hugues succeeded in putting down these rebellions, but soon afterwards suffered the bitterest disappointment of his life: he was told that he had been removed from office and replaced by General Desfourneaux. The general then treacherously arrested him, fearful of Hugues's continued presence on the island even as a common citizen.

With the events of 18 Brumaire, much began to change. The demarcation of the electorate according to income, for example – which reached its conclusion under the Empire and in the absurdities of the new “nobility” invented by the emperor – already had its foundations in the new measures that the first consul, on becoming permanent consul, prepared with the help of trusted ministers and legal advisers. The reinstatement of slavery in Guadeloupe was sanctioned by the law of May 20, 1802, strengthened by the legislation of June 16 the same year. Significantly Fourché, Bonaparte's interior minister, had substantial colonial holdings. It is even more significant that the elimination of the black leader Toussaint-Louverture began almost simultaneously at Santo Domingo – he was arrested on June 12, 1802 – even though he had been a loyal administrator of Joséphine Beauharnais's (that is, the empress's) income on the island. Toussaint was allowed to die, unheard, the following year, under the ridiculous and defamatory accusation of being “in league with the English.”

The text of the law that reinstated slavery in Guadeloupe is a highly instructive example of colonialist manipulation of history:

Considering that, as a consequence of the Revolution and of an extraordinary war, certain abuses that undermine the security and prosperity of a colony have found their way into the people and affairs of this country;

Considering that the colonies are nothing other than settlements built by Europeans, who have taken blacks there as the only people suited to exploiting this country; that these two fundamental categories – colonizers and blacks – have produced races of mixed blood, who are however distinct from the whites and who have populated these settlements;

Considering that these alone are natives of French nationality, and that they must exercise its privileges;

Considering that the benefits granted by the motherland, in assigning the essential principles of these settlements, have served only to denature all the elements of their existence, and progressively to engender this general conspiracy, which has erupted in this colony against the whites and the troops sent on the orders of the consular government, whereas the other colonies, which

submitted to this domestic and fatherly regime, presented a picture of all categories of men living in prosperity, in contrast with the vagrancy, sloth, poverty, and all the other ills that have oppressed this colony, especially the abandonment of the blacks to themselves; thus both national justice and humanity, as well as politics, demand a return to the true principles on which the security and success of these settlements built by the French in this colony are founded, while the Government will forcefully proscribe the abuses and excesses which occurred formerly and which may yet reappear. . .

And here is article 1:

Until it is decreed otherwise, the status of French citizen will be adopted only by whites within this colony and dependencies. No other individual can adopt this status, or carry out the functions and work connected to it.¹²

On July 2 non-whites were barred from entering the metropolitan territory. On February 19 a new measure forbade register office officials to formalize marriages between white men and black women, or vice versa. From that moment, the island's cultural and sanitary decline became unstoppable. Naturally, the authorities did not neglect to purge the army severely of elements who by this time were considered "undesirable."

Constantin-François Volney, who for various reasons has earned the reputation of being "independent" of the emperor, tried to prevent what he saw as a departure from the principles proclaimed by the revolution. He was a man imbued with the culture of the *Encyclopédie* but, perhaps more important, he had also observed America at close quarters. In the United States he had seen two "parties" – one Francophile, the other Anglophile – clashing, and had also observed how the situation in the Antilles played a part in this tension. On his return from America in 1798, Volney found himself part of Bonaparte's inner circle. However, his anti-religious secularism, exquisitely faithful to the Enlightenment, made both rapprochement with the Catholic church and the Concordat unacceptable to him; his republican mentality rendered the idea of proclaiming an empire repugnant to him. This independence had already cost him his chances of being promoted to the Consulate with Bonaparte. It did not, however, prevent the pragmatic emperor from forcing him to accept, by degrees, a seat in the Senate, the role of "Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur," and finally even the title of Count of the Empire. The emperor was steering unerringly towards the triumph of the bourgeoisie – a triumph of which both the elimination of universal suffrage and the reinstatement of slavery (on the English model) were bastions. Volney was a somewhat jarring note: he was entangled in the contradiction between the universal (and thus extremely

“tiresome”) value of the principles of 1789 and the actual practice of rule by the class that finally gained ascendancy – a contradiction that soon became starkly clear. For this class used summary methods, and had no desire to continue abiding by the universal principles to which a great many nobles (later ex-nobles) had adhered as individuals in that dawn, so rich in promise, of the epochal fracture of 1789.

It is clear, therefore, that the days of the gigantic Greco-Roman “puppets” that made up the oratorical and emotive armoury of the Jacobin political class were over.

In fact, the “disguise” of antiquity by these modern revolutionaries was an unnatural one. Trivializing a famous judgment made by Marx, Edward Hallett Carr described this classicism as an “anomalous strand” of the Jacobins’ political culture.¹³ In the sixth chapter of *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels capture the contradiction of Jacobin “classicism”:

To be forced to recognise and sanction, in the *rights of man*, modern bourgeois society, the society of industry, generalised competition, private interests that freely pursue their ends, anarchy, and completely alienated, natural and spiritual individualism; and at the same time to want to annul, for individuals, the vital manifestations of this society, imagining that this society’s political leadership can be organised in the old way: what a colossal illusion! The tragedy of this illusion erupted the day Saint-Just, walking to the guillotine, pointed to the great tablet of the “Rights of Man” set into the wall of the Conciergerie and exclaimed proudly: None the less, I am its author! This tablet proclaimed, as it happens, the *right* of a *man* who could hardly be that man who lived in ancient society, just as the economic and industrial conditions in which he lived could not be those of *antiquity*. It was under the Directory that bourgeois society erupted uncontrollably – a society that the Revolution itself had liberated from its feudal shackles and recognised, even though the Terror had attempted to sacrifice it to an ancient conception of political life.¹⁴

Marx and Engels see the brief “forcing” of the “Terror” as the utmost effort to bring into being “ancient democracy.” The Roman armory was dismantled with the end of Jacobin ascendancy. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Marx writes: “Once the new social order was established, the antediluvian colossi vanished and, with them, the resurrected Roman world.”¹⁵ Soon, it would be the pivotal events of the revolution (its various stages, its sudden impetuses, its falls, its defeats) and the factions formed in that decade from 1789 to 18 Brumaire that would, in their turn, constitute the new *myths* and the new *language*.

Liberalism's First Victory

In the days immediately following the Bonapartist coup d'état of 18 Brumaire, the versatile Barère – sometime “Anacréon de la guillotine” – wrote to Bonaparte (7 Frimaire) with prophetic far-sightedness: “Revolutionary ideas are timeworn; reactionary ones are loathsome: there is now room only for liberal ideas.”¹ As a member of the Convention and of the *Comité de salut public*, Barère had been neither a moderate nor tolerant. Some now believe that, just when he was at the height of his extremist frenzy, he was actually an English spy.² However, this does not necessarily suggest that he secretly nursed liberal feelings or instincts. What he wrote to Bonaparte, when the latter had just crossed the Rubicon of republican legality to embark on the adventure of personal power, may have been dictated purely by opportunism. Nevertheless, the fact is that, once the 15-year Napoleonic storm had passed, the liberal “happy medium” appeared on the European horizon as the preferred solution, the way out. The paradox is that Napoleon had been fought and defeated in the name of “liberty,” first and foremost by liberal England, which demanded from the returning King Louis XVIII the concession of a Charter. However, also in the name of “liberty,” opposition movements, mostly clandestine and often persecuted and repressed, fought against the “new” order that emerged from the victory of the allied forces over Bonaparte and from the laborious Congress of Vienna, which culminated in the formation of a Holy Alliance, promoted by the tsar and supported by Prussia and Austria, though not by England.

Thus a scenario already began to take shape which – though it had its high and low points, and was again overshadowed during the Second Empire – was to be a constant in relations between the European powers:

greater closeness between France and England, in opposition to the king of Prussia and the two emperors of Austria and Russia. The Holy Alliance, a product of the mysticism-obsessed mind of Tsar Alexander I, attracted (despite Metternich's initial assessment of it as a "pompous nullity") the rulers who, with him, controlled the central and eastern half of the continent. The document proposed by the tsar stipulated that relations between rulers should henceforth be based "on the sublime truths that the Holy Religion of Our Saviour teaches," and that the princes should, from then on, observe the "precepts of justice, Christian charity, and peace." Rulers and peoples should consider themselves part of a single "Christian nation," and the three signatory monarchs would play the role of "paterfamilias" to their subjects. Coming from a ruler who was also the most influential defender of the Greek Orthodox faith, this document and the resulting agreement could not secure the adherence of the Roman pope who, even though he had suffered directly from Bonaparte's irrepressible aggression, was one of the few heads of state not to join the Holy Alliance.

The document was worded as if the religious rifts that still constituted barriers between European states had been resolved. The only Catholic prince to have contributed (though in reality on a very modest scale) to Bonaparte's fall was the Emperor of Austria: the other three were an Anglican, a Lutheran, and an Orthodox. However, the signatories to this unusual and "ecumenical" (in terms of faith) agreement had been anything but consistent in their behavior towards both revolutionary France and Bonaparte – to say nothing of the princes (such as the ruling house of Baden-Württemberg) who had been integrally allied with the Emperor of the French. The whole of Rhenish Germany had looked favorably upon him. In April 1797 the King of Prussia had even signed a peace treaty with the French republic, which at the time was governed largely by men who had been regicides. The "peace of Basel" deprived the anti-French coalition of a crucial component. At Tilsit in 1807, the tsar himself had clinched a treaty with the "usurper" Bonaparte – to the horror of the swarms of émigrés who populated the salons of the Russian nobility – in effect dividing Europe. However, it was precisely Bonaparte's campaign against Russia that truly brought his political and military adventure to an end.

England – unshakeable, never compliant, and always on a war footing whether alone or with others – had maintained an unbroken hostility. Its secret services had distinguished themselves through their tireless penetration and attrition from within, first of revolutionary and then of imperial France. This constant threat was mounted with unsurpassed skill, and included such virtuoso intelligence "coups" as the corruption of top-ranking generals (or, in Barère's case, of prominent politicians entrusted with

sensitive responsibilities). It contributed decisively to rendering the French regime – first the republic, then the empire – repressive and police-driven. Most of the daily bulletins that Fouché and his successor Savary sent to the emperor dealt with the activities, identification, and possible liquidation of English spies.

It is almost understandable, though grotesque and anachronistic, that Alexander I, searching for common ground that could forge a lasting tie between the rulers and princes who had been involved in the (finally victorious) struggle against Bonaparte, could find nothing better than an imaginary “Christian nation,” and no other binding ideology than “the Holy Religion of Our Saviour.” However, defections, by the pope on the one hand and England on the other, would immediately have shown him that Europe was not a single entity even from that point of view.

England had “kept warm,” so to speak, the brother of the guillotined king in order to put him back on the throne. The count of Provence became, on returning home after Napoleon’s first abdication, Louis XVIII (“Louis le désiré” as he was known then), the man whom Mirabeau would willingly have seen on the throne and who had been brought up on Voltaire and other thinkers of the Enlightenment. And, despite the swarm of *chouans* – the ultra-reactionary émigrés, fanatics, and frauds who made up London’s motley and quarrelsome expatriate French community, within which Louis skillfully kept his distance – it was through England’s choice and determination that the form of government imposed on post-Bonaparte France was constitutional monarchy, albeit a highly conservative one with *extremely* limited suffrage, bordering on the laughable. This clear interference, where the victor imposed on the vanquished its political system of government (on the assumption that the system previously in place was a dark stain as well as the cause of conflict) was first tried in Europe by the Spartans who, when Athens surrendered in 404, forced it to adopt an ultra-oligarchic government. Similarly, in the last months of the First World War, with Germany by now on its knees, it was Wilson himself who insisted that the kaiser appoint the moderate-liberal Bavarian prince Max von Baden to the post of chancellor of the Reich. It was in the same spirit that the England of Castlereagh, Wellington, and the Earl of Liverpool imposed on France a “caricature” of English liberalism as a form of government that was at last acceptable. The two powers then found themselves close as regards the three rulers held together by the “Holy Alliance.” Of course England had not fought a relentless war against France for more than 20 years solely to assert the superiority of the English constitutional model (idolized by Burke and other ideologues) as against extreme Jacobinism and the even more extreme interventionism of Napoleon. Ever since the armies enlisted by the

revolution at the time of greatest danger had routed the over-restricted professional armies of the *ancien régime*, the British government's real problem had been its panic at the reappearance, in unprecedented and even more dangerous forms, of French hegemony on the continent, after Richelieu and Louis XIV. This was the reason for its tenaciousness and boldness in securing allies, including the "infidel" Sultan aided by Nelson at the time of the French expedition to Egypt, and again at the Congress of Vienna, when the highly embarrassing problem was raised of giving the oppressed Greeks their freedom from the great Ottoman power.

But, as everyone knows, the victor's propaganda is at least as powerful as its weapons. For the English and continental moderate tradition, the victory over Bonaparte had been the crowning achievement of the just struggle against the "tyrant" and thus for the cause of "liberty." ("Democracy" was a much-disliked word, which had not yet been permanently coupled and made synonymous with "liberty," as it would be in the era of anti-communist propaganda.)

The return of Bonaparte from Elba revived this panic. The brave Louis XVIII had fled to Ghent and waited there in trepidation, surrounded by the various Chateaubriands, for his chance to return home. But this second return, the second restoration, was harsher and more ferocious. The "white terror" – of which the treacherous killing of Marshal Ney was only the best-known example – was in every way the equal of the preceding "terrors": the Jacobin and the Thermidorean (elegantly described as "terrorist" by their opponents). Maurice Duverger writes, in a study to which we will return:

The extreme right began massacring its adversaries later, and with greater moderation. However, it did so more regularly and on a vaster scale. In its strict sense, the term "white terror" refers to the royalist reprisals against the liberals after the Hundred Days. It raged most of all in southern France: Bonapartists and soldiers were killed on the streets of Marseille and Nîmes. Marshal Brune was assassinated at Avignon, and many Protestants were killed in the Gard, as were hundreds of people in the towns and villages on the Mediterranean coast. Starting from Toulouse, the ultra-royalists linked to the Duke of Angoulême redoubled assassinations and executions in many other *départements*. The government had General La Bédoyère, the Faucher brothers, Marshal Ney, etc. shot.³

One might say this was the "bloodthirsty liberalism" phase. The irony would be too macabre. The fact is that almost nothing remained of the liberalism that marked the first restoration – pallid as it had been – except the Charter. This was especially true of the "liberté de la presse" (freedom of the press), the area dearest to the surviving liberal elites (of whom more later).

It is therefore somewhat surprising to read, in the “holy” text of nineteenth-century liberalism, *La Liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes* (a speech delivered by Benjamin Constant at the Athénée Royal in 1819):

Called upon by our happy revolution (I call it happy despite its excesses, because I am concentrating upon its results) to enjoy the benefits of a representative government, it is interesting and useful to try to understand why this type of government – the only one under which *we may today find a little freedom* and a little peace, remained almost completely unknown to the free nations of the ancient world.⁴

This passage occurs almost at the beginning, on the second page of the celebrated pamphlet. What is most striking about this opening declaration is that, in the author’s view, the France of the second restoration (we are still, it is true, in the months that preceded the assassination of the duke of Berry and the subsequent police crackdown) is a country that enjoys “peace and liberty” within the framework of the best possible constitutional model, that of “representative government.” What also becomes clear on reading these lines is that, for the author, there is a kind of continuity between “our happy revolution” and the Charter of Louis XVIII, save that the revolution produced some “excesses” which can now be put in parentheses. These excesses consisted of “forcing France to enjoy that good – the *pouvoir social* – which she had not wanted”: that is, the forced adoption of the ancient model of liberty. Does Bonaparte too, therefore, come under the heading of representative government? Judging from the ups and downs in Constant’s relations with the emperor, it is hard to say. Madame de Staël’s anti-Bonapartism certainly lies at the root of *De l’esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation* (1814): but the fact remains that Constant was at Bonaparte’s side during the Hundred Days, and was even the author, as a member of the Council of State, of *Acte additionnel aux Constitutions de l’Empire*. In the preceding months however, during the first restoration, he had worked hard at writing constitutional drafts which, in essence, prefigured the declaration of Saint-Ouen (May 3, 1814), and the publication of the new ruler’s “Constitutional Charter” (June 4). In short, it seems that for Constant the story of these turbulent years was essentially the progressive affirmation – albeit amid setbacks, excesses, and diversions – of a master principle: that of “constitutional government,” that is, of the “liberty of the moderns.”

There was continuity also in his commitment as a member of parliament. He thundered against the returning “tyrant” in the *Journal des débats* of

March 19, 1815. Having failed to embark at Nantes to take refuge abroad, he did his utmost to meet the “tyrant” at the Tuileries on April 14. Dazzled by the charisma of the reborn emperor, he agreed to enter the Council of State, and wrote for him the *Acte additionnel*. However, by 1818 he was a candidate in the elections, and succeeded in getting elected in the Sarthe the following year, just at the time of *La Liberté des Anciens comparée à celle des Modernes*. He was to hold parliamentary office twice more (1824–7 and 1827–30), and lived to see the July Revolution. On December 8, 1830, he was honored with a “national” funeral that took the form of a true apotheosis. This is continuity indeed.

The electorate in the 1818 elections numbered 88,000 people. For liberals like Constant, however, what was really at stake was not the widening of the franchise (without, of course, such “extremist” proposals as universal suffrage, which until then had been sanctioned only by the ephemeral Constitution of the year II) but the “liberté de la presse.” The press was the main means – and a precious one – through which an experienced parliamentary minority made its voice heard within a parliamentary and institutional framework which was completely stifling, despite being unanimously described as a “free regime.” Constant supported the “Independents” (both the party and the name are inappropriate to this period, with such a restricted electorate), a faction considered “extreme” because it was unequivocally liberal. The faction brought together those “republicans” (who might be called Jacobins *tout court*) and Bonapartists who could continue to be politically active only through a simplistic identification with this group. It should not be forgotten that they too needed to get elected within the context of a mechanism that was so shamelessly oligarchic and based on wealth. The disguise cannot have been easy to achieve, and, moreover, their actions in parliament were being constantly watched. We shall soon see the misfortunes suffered by Jacques-Antoine Manuel: a man of the utmost integrity and universally respected, but no more than a crypto-Jacobin in the eyes of those in power, he was even arrested in the chamber for “speaking in defense of terror.” At this time, “liberal” meant simply “revolutionary” in the eyes of the reactionary governments of the Holy Alliance on the one hand and the Quadruple Alliance (including England) on the other. At the same time, it was obvious that certain words could no longer be uttered, and therefore every “revolutionary” and “democrat” described himself as a “liberal” – a course of action that fell halfway between taking note of the changes and “bitter blows” of history and adopting a “disguise.” Indeed, a similar phenomenon occurred in Europe with the swing to the right that followed the end of the Soviet

experiment. A great many of the political groups that sprang out of that upheaval ended up by becoming "liberal" in outlook and language, if not in name.

The story of Jacques-Antoine Manuel is symptomatic and deserves a mention here. Born in 1775, he enlisted in the republican army at the height of the events of 1793, aged 17, and took part in its military campaigns until Campofornio. He then decided to become a lawyer, and played a part in the Chamber of Representatives during the Hundred Days. He was elected to the Chamber in 1817 and, despite government intrigues and the violent opposition of his political rivals, was unfailingly re-elected until his dramatic ejection from Parliament by the gendarmes on March 3, 1823. To the order, uttered in full parliamentary session, "Gendarmes, empoignez M. Manuel" ["Men, seize M. Manuel"], the forceful deputy replied to the gendarme who was nearest to him: "That is enough for me, sir; I am ready to come with you." He then allowed himself to be taken by the arm, to demonstrate that force had been resorted to in order to remove him from Parliament. What was his crime? One impassioned biographer writes that he had taken upon himself "the honorable task of defending the revolution from the shameless and unjust attacks that were constantly aimed at it in Parliament. Many deputies hesitated to respond to those attacks, for fear of appearing to defend the excesses that had sullied that period." By contrast, Manuel's unflagging efforts were aimed at "demonstrating that for the most part the effects of the Revolution had been unquestionably and eminently positive," and that it was necessary to "curb this torrent of invective that counter-revolutionary zeal poured forth on all sides."⁵ What was at stake, therefore, was both historiography and politics at the same time. The revolution was being put on trial and condemned (in the style of Joseph de Maistre's *Les Bienfaits de la Révolution*) – a process that was in full swing, riding on the crest of the wave of political and military victory by the allied powers and the forces of international reaction. Thus revisionism – in a pro-revolutionary sense – was taking place on two levels. The arguments that needed to be countered were the same ones as we saw at the end of the twentieth century: the list of "crimes," the "black book."

The pretext used to remove Manuel from Parliament was seized upon precisely in his allusion to the episode crucial to the revolution. Policy regarding Spain was being discussed. Attacking the bill, Manuel was very outspoken on the subject of Ferdinand VII, hinting that this king, who was being held prisoner, might suffer (rightly, he implied) the same fate as the entry of coalition forces on to French soil brought upon Louis XVI. These were the words that drove the *ultras* into a fury. However, Manuel's expulsion was to have an unexpected consequence. The deputies on the "left"

walked out of the chamber, to the cry "We are all Manuel!" A huge crowd welcomed the expelled deputy as he left the Palais Bourbon, and bore him in triumph to his home. This was the first resounding public success of the revolution, which had been vilified by the victors and defended weakly, if at all, by a left that was too submissive or subordinate. Thus, Constant's allusion to "our happy revolution" had not been entirely hollow.

A central aspect of the political battle that erupted during the dramatic, and prolonged, end of the Empire is the passion generated by biographical dictionaries and other works. These began to appear in large numbers from the time of the great undertaking begun by the Michaud brothers in the last years of the Empire, but especially following the shock produced by the successive editions of the deadly *Dictionnaire des girouettes* (1815). What was taking place was a historiographic and political settling of scores. Biographies of living people – a new genre – began to appear. These not only denounced individuals' unscrupulous behavior but, equally, amounted to an assessment of an era: 25 years that had changed the world and which only gave the appearance of having ended with a return *ad pristinum*. The two most respected and widespread series – *Biographie nouvelle des contemporains*, by Arnault and his collaborators (begun in 1820), and Rabbe's *Nouvelle biographie des contemporains* (begun on the eve of the July revolution) – are both imbued with the idea of "saving" the revolution and the empire. Both are ambitious revisionist projects, and they form a skillful and effective counterweight to the *damnatio memoriae* attempted by the victors.

The anonymous *Discours préliminaire* of the *Biographie nouvelle* is the "manifesto" of this historiographic reconquering. The opening is telling: "The French Revolution is the greatest epoch in our history, and perhaps in the history of Europe." The basic inspiration is Girondist (it is not quite true, as is occasionally asserted, that the Girondists were the only "faction" of that period to have had no political descendants); the central idea is that the restoration could not avoid basing itself on the fundamental values affirmed by the revolution. The author of the preface (possibly Arnault) writes:

In vain was the Revolution put back on trial on several occasions, and this process may be continuing – still in vain. To uphold the interests of the old order, the advocates of the absolutist regime have had to use every means to demonstrate that this type of government was *free*. That is, they have been obliged themselves to enter the arena of liberty, presenting the singular spectacle of a band of besiegers who seize and appropriate the colors of the besieged in order to enter their fortress.

However, he goes on, they were recognized beneath their disguise because they did not know the watchword: fatherland. Here, the preface's author touches on one of the pro-revolutionary revisionists' strongest arguments: the revolution had saved the nation and made it great. It succeeded in this precisely because it was able to mobilize the patriotism of the masses, who had identified with the republic. Manuel too, under attack in Parliament, had told his critics that it was simply not true that virtue had taken refuge in the *armée* during those years. He even persuaded those who were arguing against him to admit that the revolution's patriotic wars were a common heritage (in the same way as the "Great Patriotic War" arouses the spirit and is the heritage of all, or at any rate the great majority, in present-day, post-communist Moscow).

The other great strength of this extraordinary *Discours préliminaire* lies in the fact that it looks not only to Europe but beyond. The revolution has won, despite the humiliation of seeing the coalition forces enter Paris twice within a short space of time. This is because "our political reform of 1789, vainly fought against by coalitions doomed to defeat, and vainly disdained by victorious coalitions, *but recently adopted by three southern peoples* [a reference to South America] and awaited by all others, has become the epochal event, the starting point, the prototype of the new civilization spanning both hemispheres." What is noticeable is the writer's awareness of the universality of the principles affirmed by the revolution, due in part to its extraordinary capacity to spread, and the absence of any reference to its US antecedent. The latter is not an oversight but a judgment.

In the concluding section there is a comprehensive discussion of "crimes." However, the argument turns back upon itself: it "saves" both Charlotte Corday and the Montagnard deputies who "committed suicide because they were accused before a military court"; and it goes so far as to argue that "to fight against crime, virtue is sometimes forced to model itself on it, and use its methods."⁶ "Those such as Robespierre, Couthon, and Marat" remain beyond redemption. Nevertheless, we have already come a long way. It could be said that every step forward on the road to real democracy was matched by a step forward in the historiographic rehabilitation of the great, and still keenly felt, event of the French Revolution.

Certainly, it was not easy to retain a feeling of coherence amid so many upheavals. The *Dictionnaire des girouettes* (1815) attributes to Constant no fewer than three "banners" or "flags" each corresponding to a sudden change of direction. These are not many compared to Talleyrand's 12, but still a respectable total. The list was not written lightly, and the bitter and spiteful ripostes and corrections that it provoked prove that it found its mark. *Le Censeur du Dictionnaire des girouettes, ou Les honnêtes gens*

vengés, which presents itself as by an anonymous author with the initials C. D. (Paris, September 1815; a second edition of the *Dictionnaire* had been published in the meantime) runs to a couple of hundred pages, many disquisitions, and few facts. In the event, the most powerful argument put forward by the “censeur” is that, at “the present time,” all that is needed in France is the ability to forget.

In fact, Constant’s participation in Bonaparte’s new adventure involved, as well as the writing of the *Acte additionnel*, also that of the *Manifesto*, which Napoleon had asked should be published in his support. It is not clear who, apart from Constant, were its signatories. Napoleon asked Constant to perform this service on June 8, but on the 11th he left for the front, and six days later the Battle of Waterloo was fought.⁷ In such cases, it is tempting to think that the hapless “hired” intellectual obeys out of a sense of duty or simply because he feels he has no choice. In Constant’s case, however, we can read his diary from that time. The entry for June 8 reads: “Nous avons besoin d’une victoire. Manifeste à faire. Il faut que ce soit un morceau superbe. L’Europe en sera frappée, si elle n’est pas convertie.” [“We need a victory. There is a manifesto to be written. It must be a superb piece of writing. It will make an impression on Europe, if she is not converted by it.”]⁸ The last sentence – in a passage written to himself – throws unequivocal light on Constant’s support for the rebirth of the empire.

Also in 1815, the publisher Delaunay brought out the *Dictionnaire des Protées modernes*, “par un homme retiré du monde” [“by a man who has retreated from the world”]. This too targeted Constant’s U-turns, essentially on the basis of the text of his own attack – mentioned above – on Bonaparte when he returned from Elba. What is noteworthy here is not so much the unscrupulousness of the publicist, who is always ready, as the anonymous author writes, to present “ses idées pour des principes, et ses rêveries pour des vérités” [“ideas as principles, and day-dreams as truths”] – a real “tête à constitutions” [“constitution-monger”] as the caustic lexicographer puts it. It is more interesting to note that in the article of March 19, 1815, there is already the gist of the speech made at the Athénée Royal in 1819. Constant writes: “On the side of the king there is constitutional freedom, security, and peace; on the side of Bonaparte, slavery. . . Under Louis XVIII we enjoyed a representative government: *we governed ourselves*. Bonaparte will subject us to a government of Mamelukes etc.”

A little farther on Constant brands Bonaparte an Attila and a Genghis Khan (although a few days later, having failed to escape via Nantes, he venerated him as the generous bestower of the title of Councillor of State). But aside from the insults flung at Bonaparte, what counts here is the description of the “free” regime established by Louis XVIII. This rests on

three principles: “constitutional freedom,” “representative government,” and “self-government” – the very same that underpin the “liberty of the moderns” in the comparative *Discours* of 1819.

Here, all becomes clear, including the concrete contribution made by such elegant formulae. Let us look at the conclusion: “For us, liberty must consist of the peaceful enjoyment of private independence.” “Private independence” simply means wealth. This is made evident in the final passage, where Constant sings a hymn of praise to the supremacy of wealth over government authority:

Money is the most effective curb on despotism . . . Force is useless against it: money conceals itself or flees . . . Among the ancients, credit did not have the importance that it has for us today. Their governments were more powerful than private individuals. Today, by contrast, private individuals are everywhere stronger than political power. Wealth is a force that is more readily exerted on all interests, and consequently it is far more real and *more readily obeyed*. Power threatens; wealth rewards. Power can be evaded by deceiving it, but to obtain favours from wealth *it is necessary to serve it*. In the end, it will gain *ascendancy*.⁹

Expressions such as “more readily obeyed,” “it is necessary to serve it,” and “ascendancy” – and, in a more general sense, this reversal of the relationship between “government” and “wealth” in favor of the latter – indicate an analysis of this society, newly burgeoned under the eyes of the moderns, that sounds very close to Marx’s intuition that the structural predominance of “capital” was a feature peculiar to these new economic relationships. Both Constant and, later, Marx aim to describe the essential character of a real situation “scientifically,” rather than taking the preaching or moralistic approach of someone who describes “how things should be.”

It should not be seen as pedantic to observe that Constant too looks at the ancients in a “schematic” way. One of the few texts that deal with economic policy is Demosthenes’ speech *On the Symmories*, dating from the middle of the fourth century BC. In it, he theorizes on this very subject: “let the money remain for the present in the hands of its owners, for it could not be in better keeping, for the benefit of the State; but if ever the threatened crisis comes, then accept it as a voluntary contribution” (28). This testimony is not definitive, of course, nor is it to be taken in an absolute or generalized sense. However, it shows how, since wealth was at stake in relations between classes, these were unstable or marked by conflict even in the ancient city.

Universal Suffrage: Act One

At the dawn of representative democracy in Europe, two significant voices were raised that questioned its meaning and value at the root. The first – well known, and tainted by all manner of accusations, from naivety to historical disinformation, an innate tendency towards “totalitarianism,” and so forth – was that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in chapter XV of the third book of *The Social Contract* (1762), already mentioned above. His premise, well known, is that “sovereignty cannot be *represented* for the same reason that it cannot be transferred.” It is worth noting that the French word *représentation* means both political representation – that is, the elected representatives themselves – and representation in its more usual sense. Sovereignty consists of “the general will, and the general will cannot be represented.” From this comes Rousseau’s famous devaluing of the representative system, which by then had been in place in England for many decades: “The English people believe they are free, but they are grossly mistaken. They are only so during the elections of members of parliament. As soon as these have been elected, the people are immediately consigned to slavery; they are nothing. The way they use their freedom during the brief moments when they possess it means that they thoroughly deserve to lose it.” The acid test, so to speak, for Rousseau lies in the historical precedent of antiquity: “In the ancient republics, and also in monarchies, the people never had *representatives*.” It is striking that he is not especially concerned with highlighting the severe limits that the “free” English system placed on representation, that is, the system by which members were elected to the House of Commons; it is the existence of representation in itself that is called into question. This may seem an

extreme paradox but, in a far-seeing way, he emphasizes a disastrous effect of the representative system: the transformation of elected representatives into what we now call a “political class” (whatever their political affiliations), their essential separateness from the specific interests of those who have designated them their representatives, and the way in which they function, at decisive moments, as a separate, self-referential body. Rousseau condemned this vice at the outset from a logical and philosophical standpoint but also – though not explicitly – from a legal one. This is therefore both an admonition and a premonition.

The other “preventive admonition” is that formulated by Condorcet in 1785, well after the American Revolution and almost on the eve of 1789. His *Essai sur l'application de l'analyse à la probabilité des décisions rendues à la pluralité des voix* argues that confusion must result from any electoral procedure in which voters are presented with more than two choices. According to the now famous (though readily forgotten) “paradox,” it is manifestly impossible to obtain a meaningful overall result (or, as the phrase goes, “extend the transitivity of individual preferences to social ones”).¹ An individual’s choices regarding three options, expressed in an *order of preference* (A, B, C), can be stated and are meaningful – “Mr x prefers A to B and B to C” is perfectly clear. The same is not true of the “sum” (or the balance) of many individual choices of the same kind. The illustration of this apparent paradox is based upon three options and three “voters”: x , y , and z .

CYCLIC ORDERS OF PREFERENCE

x : ABC
 y : BCA
 z : CAB

It follows that A defeats B and B defeats C. However, C also defeats A since, if we compare its result directly with that of A, we see that two voters have preferred C to A, whereas only one – x – has preferred A to C. Half a century ago the economist and mathematician Kenneth Arrow “rediscovered” Condorcet’s paradox and demonstrated – via a theorem that was also arbitrarily described as a “paradox” – that in majority voting systems the result is arbitrary: it depends on the *order* of individuals’ preferences, and these, for the reasons given above, cannot “fuse” into a meaningful “overall” result.²

It is unlikely that Rousseau’s admonitions had an effect on the direction taken by the legislators who set in train the highly active “electoral machine” of the revolution years. On the contrary, these generally sought – except in the

case of the Constitution of Robespierre – ways of *counteracting* suffrage, and limited it to certain social groups.

For the elections that brought into being the States-General that gathered in May of 1789, the system was a two-tier one. A great mass of the French people in towns and cities designated not elected representatives but electors. All these people could make their voices heard only through the famous *cabiers de doléance*. The designated electors met in the district capital and elected one or more deputies.

The constitution of 1791 also adopted a two-tier electoral system. The constituent assembly, which drew it up, essentially accepted Sieyès's idea of classifying the entire population into *active* and *passive* citizens, and excluded the latter from primary assemblies. Who were these passive citizens? All who were in a "dependent" situation and all domestic staff. Also excluded were those who paid no direct contribution, or paid a contribution of less than three days' pay. There were also other exclusions, relating to criminal records. The break with the past, in a truly democratic sense, was sanctioned by the Constitution of Robespierre, passed on June 24, 1793: this abolished "indirect" voting and removed limitations on the right to vote based on wealth or class. In any case, the Convention had abolished the very category of "domestic servant." That constitution never came into force; it had been postponed until such time as the war against the Coalition's attackers was over, but the coup against Robespierre, and his elimination, wrecked the introduction of the sole significant precondition for "democracy" – universal suffrage. All successive constitutions until that of 1848 contained severe restrictions on the right to vote.

At the first restoration, the charter so assiduously promoted by liberal England and "conceded" by Louis XVIII made the right to vote conditional upon a contribution of 300 francs, and demanded no less than 1,000 francs from those seeking election. However, such a brutal wealth-based model was nothing new: it was the reappearance, in a different form, of what Bonaparte had established after 18 Brumaire. What happened in 1814 was no more than the codification of the dominant class's coup of 1799 (redoubled in 1804). Under the electoral system introduced after 18 Brumaire, indeed, citizens gathered in cantonal assemblies chose "voter candidates" (*sic*) from the 600 biggest contributors to the public purse (the famous lists of the 600, who would become the *grands notables* of the empire). The voter candidates, in turn, gathered in *departmental* elections to elect not deputies but "deputy candidates," from among whom the first consul nominated the "representatives of the nation." The *Acte additionnel* of the Hundred Days, written by that supreme exponent of liberty, Benjamin Constant, again proposed this very same monstrosity.

The law of February 5, 1817, did not differ greatly from the electoral law of 1814, except that it concentrated the entire electoral procedure in the hands of prefects. The law of May 1820 made matters worse by introducing the double vote mechanism. This produced the septennial Chamber, which supported Villèle's ministry, favored religious gatherings, took the decision to intervene in Spain, and ejected Manuel from parliament. However, it was a chamber elected by these very methods that declared (by 221 votes) that the reign of Charles X was at an end. Once again the push for democracy had come from the barricades – the three days of fighting that began on July 29, 1830 – but the beneficiaries were the wealthy. The law of April 19, 1831, stipulated that those who wished to be voters must pay a “direct” contribution of 200 francs; members of the Institut de France, and army and navy officers, enjoyed a 50 percent discount. It is interesting to note – as an indication of the extent of these obstacles – that teachers in a provincial literature faculty would generally be excluded from the electorate precisely because they were not wealthy enough. In one case the faculty's porter was the only one who could afford the contribution, and he became a voter.

Those who have studied the electoral system based on income have always highlighted its most shameful aspect: the buying and selling of votes. It has been asserted that deputies bought voters and that those in power bought deputies. This is a realistic snapshot of the electoral practices under the July Monarchy, which saw the unbridled power of wealth. Never did mobile wealth circulate faster than under François Guizot. But the taint of the use of votes as commodities had not appeared yet. Article 32 of the constitution of the year III (which came into force on September 25, 1795) stated: “Every citizen found guilty under the law of having sold or bought a vote is excluded from primary and communal assemblies, and from all public office for 20 years; in the event of a second offence, the exclusion is permanent.” The phenomenon therefore already existed, otherwise the very idea of such a punishment would have been nonsensical. It is worth noting how – since the trade in votes has become common even in regimes which have universal suffrage (“adjusted” to a greater or lesser extent) – theories have been put forward that aimed to defend the practice as one aspect of the wider, global triumph of the “market,” which liberal thought has extolled ever since its most recent victory. This is the equivalent of those theories that defend prostitution in the name of the right to sell one's own body. Such theories are inevitably stretched, on a conceptual level, to defend the trade in human organs (as for prices, the market decides, so it is “logical” that this traffic should take place chiefly in the so-called Third World). The conceptual culmination of such theorizing must be the “right” to sell ourselves to a master as slaves (or perhaps to sell a minor, who is not

yet a person in the full legal sense). An antidote to such aberrations can be found in the words of one of the founders of “liberalism,” though one forgotten, in this case, by his followers: Montesquieu. “Freedom can consist only of being able to do what we should want to do,” he writes. The conclusion of his argument – which is developed in many directions including that of social justice – is “and in not being forced to do what we should not want to do” (*De l’esprit des lois*, book XI, chapter 3). In this same vein Robespierre wrote, in his *Declaration of Rights*, that freedom certainly consists of being one’s own master, but that “it is limited by justice.”

A glance at the way England was evolving at this time shows how there too the development of industry, and the resulting growth in the numbers of people working in or dependent upon factories, went hand in hand with demands for greater political and social rights. A conflict that was to mark the nineteenth century was taking shape in the two countries that were in closest contact and most in step with each other following the “reordering” of Europe brought about by the Congress of Vienna: the conflict between liberalism and democracy. What is meant by “liberalism” here is not the abstract, though vivifying, affirmation of absolute principles, but the concrete actions of the property-owning classes, determined to protect their social ascendancy through limited suffrage.

“Democracy” here is a vaguer term than ever. Until 1848 it covered many ways of thinking, from progressive liberalism (or ex-Jacobinism or crypto-Jacobinism) to socialism in its newer and more remote incarnations (from Babeuf to Buonarroti to Proudhon, if we look at France alone, but in England the Chartist and Owenite tendencies were essential components of the democratic movement). After 1848 the divisions became ever clearer, and it is no longer true to speak of a single “democratic” movement. Until 1848, however, its use as a blanket term reflects the essential unity of the battle against regimes that were avowedly based upon wealth.

In England, the Canning era marked a break with the conservative policies of Castlereagh, the leader who had nevertheless taken his country into the treaty with the three powers of the Holy Alliance. In the third volume (*The Liberal Experiment*) of his *History of Europe*, the liberal historian Herbert Albert Fisher consoles himself thus regarding Castlereagh’s policies:

Castlereagh, the foreign minister who carried the country triumphantly through the concluding stages of the Napoleonic war, was denounced by his compatriots as the incarnation of all that was reactionary and obscurantist. Compared to Alexander of Russia and the Austrian Metternich, the English Tory was an angel of liberal and enlightened good sense.³

However admirable the English Tories' capacity for self-control and adaptation to changing times – and their continuity remains unbroken to the present day – there is no denying that a break was needed. From the same roots as the Tories came men of a progressive-liberal tendency, who found common ground with the Whig party. The man who represented this shift was George Canning, who is to be admired above all for a number of foreign policy decisions. He kept England out of the tangled situation in Spain (September 1822 and March 1823). In November 1824 he wanted England to stay out of “European” decisions on the Oriental question. In December of the same year he recognized the independence of the Spanish colonies, and the following year that of Brazil. Replying to criticism of his South American policy, he told the Commons on December 12, 1826: “I have allowed the New World to be born in order to redress the balance of the old one.”

Canning's death in 1827 appeared to halt the progressive trend, but the stamp of innovation he left behind did not fade. In 1829, after strong pressure from Ireland, the hateful Test Act – which made membership of the Anglican church a condition of appointment to any public office – was repealed. Once again the liberal impetus in English politics was facilitated – if not initiated – by a religious minority's campaign for rights.

Meanwhile, the industrial revolution was reaching its peak – symbolized, also in a visual sense, by the first railway (Manchester–Liverpool, September 1830). The large-scale development of capitalist-owned factories brought the collapse of the traditional dominance of the big Tory landowners – who also dominated parliament thanks to the electoral system. This was the so-called “rotten borough” system, under which country towns that had become depopulated or contained only a handful of voters sent more members to the Commons than did highly productive centers with large populations – thanks to the absurd, inequitable drawing of constituency boundaries. The impetus towards reform came from the accession of the new, Whig-leaning king, William IV, in 1830. For the first time, a government containing both liberal Tories and Whigs was formed, under Charles Grey. The parallel development – or reciprocal influence – of events either side of the English Channel made itself felt in this delicate situation. For the hitherto dominant hardline Tories, yielding over the electoral law meant losing a great deal of their power, and they would certainly have blocked electoral reform in the House of Lords. The unexpected events of the July revolution in Paris, however, convinced them to abandon their rigid opposition, which might have provoked a similar insurrection in England. The Reform Bill was finally passed in April 1832. This was certainly not universal suffrage – which still in 1861 was regarded as heresy by John

Stuart Mill in *Considerations on Representative Government* – but it did mark the breaking of the wealthy classes’ parliamentary monopoly, and a group of “radicals” now appeared on the threshold of the Commons.

In 1830 the House of Commons passed the first law governing work in factories. It prohibited the employment of children under nine years old (except in factories producing silk!) and set a limit on the number of hours those older than nine could work. This seems like a caricature of social legislation, but it faithfully reflects the dominant feature of “Manchester” capitalism: its ability to *bring together the great majority of the urban population into the productive cycle* – a “phagocytosis” of the whole of society. Marx sums up this very phenomenon with extraordinary effectiveness in the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto* (February 1848):

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities...and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life...

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together...

Modern industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory...Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organized like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants.

All intermediate classes “*sink gradually into the proletariat*, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on, and is swamped in the competition with the large capitalists, partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by the new methods of production. *Thus the proletariat is recruited from all classes of the population.*” In the second chapter, Marx unmasks one of the most hypocritical aspects of the bourgeoisie’s dominance, wrapped in “average” morality:

In its completely developed form this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its *complement* in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution... The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about the hallowed relationship of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into *simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour*.

This is clearly a reference to the mass employment of child labor, to which the reforms of the enlightened Grey government applied an extremely limited remedy.

It will be clear that such a vision, which was entirely realistic at the time and in the place where it was conceived and written, entails an almost obvious political corollary: a belief in the disruptive power of universal suffrage as a means of unhinging this social “order.” The vision of a rapid and progressive growth of the proletariat in society – borne out by the experience of Europe’s most advanced country (and the only world power at the time), England, and supported by the fact that Louis Philippe’s “bourgeois” France was speedily evolving in the same direction – led logically to a *program* that was not utopian but practical. This involved the immediate seizure of political power by this great majority of the population – in other words, the conquest of “democracy.” This is clearly stated in the practical parts of the *Manifesto*, which deal with the program, at the beginning and conclusion of the second chapter (“Proletarians and Communists”):

The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole . . . The *immediate* aim of the Communist is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois *supremacy*, conquest of *political power* by the proletariat.

To make matters absolutely clear, the end of the same chapter asserts that the “first step” is “*to win the battle of democracy.*” This conquest will be the platform for the proletariat to “use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie.”

All this means, unequivocally, that the aim is precisely to destroy the supremacy that enables the class that dominates all society, despite its smaller numbers, to monopolize political power. The proletariat (which, according to a reliable study of this brief period, means the vast majority of the population, almost all of which was being absorbed into that class) must be able to “conquer political power,” which is synonymous with “winning the battle of democracy.” Therein lies the importance of universal suffrage, and hence also the terror it inspired on the opposing side.

Writing in December 1847, Marx did not foresee the Parisian revolution of the following February. It would be a misinterpretation to see that short book, rich in predictions about the future (though not the immediate future), as the trumpet call of the European revolution. As Eric Hobsbawm rightly wrote: “Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto* is a declaration of

future war against the bourgeoisie but – at least for Germany – of present alliance.”⁴ Hobsbawm also reminds us that in 1848 it was the Rhenish industrialists who offered the brilliant 30-year-old publicist Karl Marx the editorship of their radical publication, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*: “he accepted and edited it not simply as a communist organ, but as the spokesman and leader of German radicalism.” What is slightly disingenuous is the way Marx backdated the rhetoric of communist hagiography. What Marx did and wrote *after* February, and after June 1848, is obviously different from what he wrote in December 1847.

In a political sense the program of the *Manifesto* is one of alliances – some broad and even expedient – but not of seizure of power, precisely because the aim is “to win the battle of democracy.” This is the immediate, imperative goal; once this is achieved, the next step is “to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie.” The intention is to break through on the immediate, most accessible front – the victory of the *majority* – in the certainty that, thanks to the communists’ action, that majority will be able to distinguish clearly its interests and aims from those of the tiny but hitherto all-powerful minority which carefully granted limited voting rights. The communists will play an important part in ensuring the “formation of the proletariat into a class,” and that the majority of the population that comprises it can develop class consciousness.

To this end, the whole thrust of the *Manifesto* is towards the formation of *coalitions with other political forces*. The fourth and last chapter, entitled “Position of the Communists in Relation to Other Opposition Parties” begins: “Section II has made clear the relations of the Communists to the existing working-class parties.” It is “clear” precisely because their common aim is “to win the battle of democracy.” This is the prime goal of the vast mass of people that capital has made into proletarians; the communists have no interests *of their own*: they have “the same interests as the proletariat.” This is why Marx uses the forceful, almost arrogant phrase “has made clear” (*verstehst sich von selbst*). He adds, as a first example, “such as the Chartists in England and the Agrarian Reformers in America.” The Chartists’ program was centered entirely on altering the fraudulent electoral processes based on wealth and a majority system. They demanded:

- 1 Universal suffrage for men.
- 2 Second ballots where the result was open to doubt.
- 3 New parliamentary elections *every year* (an empirical remedy, but easily criticized by *bien-pensants* as extremely awkward and involving regular disruption, an aspect highlighted by Rousseau precisely with reference to “the English people”).

- 4 Abolition of wealth assessment of candidates, to allow the election of non-property-owners.
- 5 Salaries for elected members (clearly a demand that complements the preceding one, and one with a remote Athenian precedent).
- 6 Equal constituencies (despite the abolition of the “rotten boroughs” the situation remained unfair, and unfavorable to opposition parties).
- 7 Revision of constituency boundaries *after every census*.

Clearly these demands embody a program for securing substantial representation in Parliament, if not a majority, through equal and universal suffrage.

From here the authors of the *Manifesto* move on to France, another country considered ripe for winning the “battle of democracy.” They write: “In France the communists ally themselves with the social-democrats, against the conservative and radical bourgeoisie.” In a note to the 1888 edition of the *Manifesto*, Engels explains what was meant in 1847 by the French “social-democratic party”: “It was the party then represented in parliament by Ledru-Rollin, in literature by Louis Blanc, and in the daily press by *La Réforme*.” He adds: “The term *social democracy* means, for these, its inventors, the section of the democratic or republican party whose political hue was more or less socialist.” In the preface to the fourth German edition (1890) Engels also explains that Marx and he himself adopted the term “communists” for their *Manifesto* because “socialism” by then had come rather to denote a “bourgeois” movement, whereas “communism” was widespread in working-class circles: “Socialism, at least on the continent, was a doctrine for the drawing room; communism was the exact opposite.” In short, “socialism” was at the time more of a philosophical, sentimental, and literary term. However, by the time the First International was founded in 1864, workers’ parties were gradually beginning to describe themselves as socialist or social-democratic, while continuing to regard the *Communist Manifesto* as an important landmark text, and its authors’ prestige as unquestionable.

In Switzerland they [the communists] support the Radicals, without losing sight of the fact that this party consists of antagonistic elements, partly of Democratic Socialists, in the French sense, partly of radical bourgeois. In Poland they support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation . . . In Germany they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie.⁵

Just how far Marx was from foreseeing what was about to occur can be seen from the next paragraph: “The Communists turn their attention chiefly to

Germany, because that country is on the eve of a bourgeois revolution.” He explains that, for obvious reasons, this German bourgeois revolution will erupt at a time when the (German) proletariat is “more developed” than its French counterpart was in 1789, and that therefore Germany’s bourgeois revolution “will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.” It would have been difficult to make a political prediction that was more wildly wrong. The two-stage revolution was to erupt within a matter of weeks in France, and the “proletarian” one of June 1848 was to be crushed by the “advanced” bourgeoisie. In Germany, meanwhile, the liberal revolution was to be dissipated by the dissolving of the Frankfurt assembly, with no indication of a forthcoming “second phase.” The prediction was that the revolution would erupt in a “backward” country (Germany), whereas in France and England, where capitalism was advanced, the battle for democracy would be won through alliances with the already strong workers’ parties that existed in those countries.⁶

As we know, Marx had the good fortune to be elevated to the status of an ideal and practical reference point for a great and lasting political movement, above all for the three Internationals. The Third International, which was certainly the most dogmatic of the three, made him the permanent, and permanently authoritative, interpreter of reality (even where that reality had changed completely). This was good for the worldwide circulation of the great Rhenish intellectual’s writings (only with the Third International did the *Manifesto* achieve true global circulation, with many millions of copies printed in all languages), but extremely damaging to the non-mythologizing reading of them – and especially of these pages.

Their perspective is clearly a European one (leaving aside the passing reference to the rather insignificant North American agrarian reformers’ party). This viewpoint – a legacy of the European growth of Jacobinism that also features in the Mazzini of the years 1834–6 – is made explicit from the first line: “A spectre is haunting Europe.” It is reiterated in the brief final review, which looks no further east than Poland and ignores the whole of southern Europe but which, in an abstractly universalist twist, ends with the famous incitement: “Working men of all countries, unite!”

To win elections through truly universal suffrage: this was the plan. It was seen as certain that equal suffrage would enable the excluded majority to regain its influence and its role. The great disappointment was that this did not happen.

On February 22, 1848, Louis Philippe and his not very perspicacious minister Guizot prohibited the grand “banquet” organized by the opposition, which was to have been held in the twelfth *arrondissement* of Paris.

Such “banquets” were a way of organizing public protest, and their main aim was the dismantling of the wealth-based electoral laws which in their essentials were similar to those in the Charter of Louis XVIII. Such protests were widespread and sought the modernization of the parliamentary system, not necessarily outside the framework of a constitutional monarchy. The prohibition unleashed a revolt. By February 24 the insurgents controlled the capital; on some of the barricades, the red flag was flown. It had already made an appearance during the Paris revolt of June 1832, which had broken out on the occasion of the funeral of General Lamarque and had been fomented by the more or less Blanquist association, the “Friends of the People.” It had been immortalized by an exceptional chronicler: Victor Hugo, in the tenth book of Part IV of *Les Misérables* (first published in Brussels in 1862).

The nomination, *in extremis*, of Adolphe Thiers to the ministry, and of the count of Paris as the new ruler – which was acclaimed by the now anachronistic assembly, elected along wealth-based lines – was swept away by the mob, which imposed a provisional republican-socialist government. Its members included Lamartine, Ledru-Rollin (the ally “predicted” by the *Manifesto*), Louis Blanc, and the manual worker Martin, known as Albert. This was the first time a worker had been part of a government.

The decision to bring into being a republican government had been taken readily. It certainly reflected the beliefs and intentions of the new leaders, and of the capital as a whole. The inertia demonstrated during the crucial hours by the rest of France prompted an extraordinary decision: to elect a national constituent assembly, certainly, but to postpone the election date by some months (it was held on April 23, 1848) in the hope of securing the consensus of a majority of voters, who by now numbered some 9,000,000. This was the first experiment in holding an election by universal suffrage Europe had ever seen. The country that had come closest in constitutional terms, England, was at the time still a long way from adopting universal suffrage. A paradox was thus produced. It might have been expected that those who feared the coming of universal suffrage, the dangerous harbinger of a social revolution, would be the men who wanted to maintain the established order. Had not Tocqueville predicted, in October 1847, that “the political struggle will soon be between those that have and those that do not,” and that “the great battlefield will be that of property” – the same property that the French Revolution had not dared to call into question?⁷ Well, the exact opposite happened. It was the revolutionaries, who had begun to call themselves “the reds,” and the neo-Jacobins, who had reverted to calling themselves “the Mountain” who feared the electoral adventure. In the meantime, the provisional government tried to enact the reforms that

might calm social tensions. As early as 1789, and again in 1830, the authorities had opened a number of *ateliers nationaux* [“national workshops”] to combat unemployment; these had hired a substantial number of workers. The provisional government revived this experiment. Indeed, the public works minister himself, Alexandre-Thomas Marie – who saw in this measure a way of counterbalancing the influence the so-called “Luxembourg workers” wielded over the government – represented the moderate wing of the provisional government. What the moderates had not expected was that the numbers entering the workshops would grow enormously in a short time. Nevertheless, these were still “vanguards.”

On two occasions, on March 17 and April 16, large worker demonstrations (“revolts” in the eyes of Lamartine, Marie, Cremieux, and others) tried to force the postponement of the election. Their action was in vain: on April 23 the poll was held. The historian Charles Seignobos, whose grandfather had been a candidate, recalls the climate of exultation and quiet excitement in which voting took place:⁸ “Summoned at the same time, the voters of each individual commune arranged to travel to the polling station all together, like conscripts on the day lots were to be drawn. They trooped into the canton’s main center, often with a flag and a drum, and led by the ‘authorities’ of the time: the mayor and the priest.” This first experience of universal suffrage, Seignobos continues, took place in a climate of “almost religious enthusiasm.” Indeed, 84 percent of the electorate (about 8,000,000 people) voted – a record that has remained unequalled in France for centuries. The results were unambiguous. Out of 900 elected representatives, 450 were moderate republicans, 200 were Orléanists, no less, and 200 “democratic-socialists.” Only 26 deputies were of working-class origin. Even in Paris, the defeat was clear: Lamartine received 260,000 votes, and Louis Blanc 121,000.

The constituent assembly took office on May 4. On May 15, urged on by Blanqui, Raspail, and Barbès, the workers invaded the assembly, but were driven out by the National Guard. The motive behind the assault on the newly elected parliament had been to demand a commitment to restore freedom to Poland, if necessary through armed intervention. However, it was also an attempt to throw into crisis the governmental “commission.” The day after the failed revolt, Blanc and Albert were expelled from the government. Louis Blanc was accused of being well aware of the imminent action, and subjected to an incriminating procedure in the chamber, which he narrowly escaped (369 votes against and 337 in favor).

The events of May 15 were ruinous. One hundred and fifty thousand people marched on parliament, crying “Long live Poland!” but when they invaded the assembly chamber they found other demands to make. Their

leaders, Blanqui and Barbès, vied with each other in their extremism. Barbès demanded a severe wealth tax. The cries in praise of Poland became mingled with those in favor of “the Labour Organization.” Amid the bedlam Louis Huber, authoritative exponent of the Société des Droits de l’Homme, tried repeatedly to declare the assembly dissolved and to announce a new government, reading out the list of ministers he had chosen: Proudhon, Leroux, Considérant, Blanqui, Louis Blanc, and so forth – an all-socialist administration. He was arrested twice during the course of the day, and finally hid in the house of some friends. Later, having rendered himself unrecognizable by shaving his head completely, he fled to London. His trial, held a year later at Versailles, turned into a painful settling of scores between him and his former party comrades.

The repression of this chaotic demonstration that had turned into a trial of strength contained an important lesson: it demonstrated the impossibility of re-enacting a former scenario. The aim had been to replicate the events of May 31, 1793, when the Mountain had had the Girondist members of the Convention arrested, and had put in place government by the Committee of Public Safety. The plan had been the same: then too, the 33 sections dominated by the Mountain had prepared, during the night between May 30 and 31, the assault on the Convention. Then, the Girondists – dispersed, terrified, and reduced to a minority by defections from their ranks – had been defeated. Contemporary newspapers describe with relish that blend of revolt and *putsch*. The *Journal de Paris* relates how at Barère’s suggestion it was proposed – just as it was about to be decided that the Girondist deputies should be arrested – to “consult the people.” The deputies descended among the crowd of rebels gathered outside the Convention and, from the cries of agreement that greeted them on their exit from the gruelling session, deduced that the “will of the people” was to proceed with the arrests. On May 15, 1848, it was immediately obvious that history was not repeating itself: the attempt to reproduce a scenario that had already been tried was of no benefit, and would lead to defeat. This time it was Lamartine (author of *Histoire des Girondins*), who was victorious over those who were mimicking the Montagnards’ coup d’état.

The Paris rebellion of June 23, 24, and 25, 1848, was triggered by the brutal abolition – despite “soft” possibilist speeches in parliament by the likes of Victor Hugo – of the *ateliers nationaux*, whose unstoppable growth had accelerated further precisely in the aftermath of the disastrous events of May 15. The provisional (and now reduced) government had also taken some extreme measures, such as suspending entry permits (internal passports) for workers who wanted to move house or settle in Paris. The

faubourgs of Saint-Antoine, Saint-Martin, and Temple were the most heavily involved, and the call to the barricades went out to some 7,000 workers who had gathered around the Bastille column. The “executive commission,” as the government was then called, stood down, and the constitutional assembly gave full powers to General Cavaignac, son of the Convention member and regicide Jean-Baptiste Cavaignac. It was an experiment in dictatorship. “France would sooner put itself in the hands of a general than of a prince,” as P. Bastid wrote.⁹ All repression was entrusted to the army. At Cavaignac’s side, generals Lamoricière and Damesme directed a full-scale battle on the right bank of the Seine and in the Latin quarter. No fewer than three generals – Bréa, Duvivier, and Négrier – were killed in the fiercest fighting, the storming of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. The state of siege continued well after the revolt was over; more than 4,000 workers were deported, without trial, to penal colonies overseas.

This was not a limited or ephemeral event; it was not flash in the pan. In his *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848*, Tocqueville describes it as “the greatest insurrection of our history, and perhaps of any other.” More perceptive than his politically partisan colleagues, Tocqueville understands the revolution without, of course, sympathizing with it: it was a *combat de classe*, a direct consequence of what had been said, and proposed, in February. It was the class struggle in its purest form, one might say, not only because of the social homogeneity of the rebels and the directly anti-worker nature of the measure that triggered it, but also because the revolt was largely spontaneous and, from an organizational point of view, improvised. Its leaders, or at least the best-known among them, sat in parliament. Their action could only be the result of events, and characterized by an intention to mediate rather than to exercise political control. In June 1848, as indeed some 20 years later with the Commune, the proletariat risked everything, and was decimated in a disastrous pitched battle.

Writing the epic of *Les Misérables*, the former “moderate” deputy Victor Hugo – by then in exile – retained all his former reservations over the June Days. So important was the episode to Hugo – who had contributed to giving Cavaignac full powers but then rose up against Louis Bonaparte – that he devotes entire pages to reflecting on it at the beginning of the fifth part of the novel, taking as his cue the recreation of the anti-Orléanist revolt of June 5, 1832 (which plays such a large part in the plot). The tone is the one familiar in Hugo’s work, described as “plein de beautés et de bêtises” [“full of beauties and blunders”] by Baudelaire, who nicknamed him “Olympio.”¹⁰ Marx, for his part, describes what Hugo wrote and said as a parliamentarian in those months as “the brilliant tirades of an old notability of Louis Philippe’s time, Mr Victor Hugo.”¹¹ Hugo writes:

The fury of this crowd that suffers and bleeds, its misguided violence against the principles that give it life, its assaults on the law, *are people's coups d'état and must be suppressed*. A righteous man devotes himself to this and fights against the crowd, for very love of it. But how can he find it pardonable, while yet facing up to it? How can he venerate it while resisting it? This is one of those rare moments when, in doing what we must do, we feel something that disconcerts us and almost advises us against going further. We persevere, for it is necessary, but our conscience, though appeased, is saddened, and the fulfilment of duty brings with it a pang in the heart.

June 1848 was, let us hasten to say it, an event unlike any other, and almost impossible to classify in the philosophy of history. All the words we have uttered must be put aside when we speak of this extraordinary rebellion in which we felt the sacred anxiety of labor claiming its rights. It was necessary to fight it, and it was a duty, because it was attacking the Republic. But after all, what was June 1848? A revolt of the people against themselves.

After this masterpiece of conformist hypocrisy, which is untypical of him, Hugo indulges in a virtuoso, one might say an affectedly aesthetic, description of the barricade erected in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, perhaps to prove that he witnessed it directly: "Those who saw those two frightful masterpieces of civil war, towering before them under the splendid blue of the June sky, will never forget them." Perceptively, he sees, in the various layers of objects that make up the barricade, a sort of historical-geological accumulation of all the preceding revolutions, from 1789 to 1848: "That barricade was worthy of being placed on the very spot where the Bastille was torn down." And, throughout the interminable pages he devotes to his description, he does not stop simultaneously reviling and exalting it: "It was a pile of rubbish, and it was Mount Sinai!" Nevertheless, it must be swept away: it attacked the revolution in the name of the revolution. "That barricade – the result of chance, disorder, dismay, misunderstanding, and the unknown – had before it the Constituent Assembly, the sovereignty of the people, *universal suffrage*, the nation, the republic. It was the Carmagnole defying the Marseillaise."

Universal suffrage: exactly. The first bitter disappointment in this area fell precisely to the butcher Cavaignac, in the election for president of the republic, held on December 10, 1848. Despite enjoying the advantage of having risen to the status of national savior in the eyes of the moderate majority, and despite being well placed as president of the council of ministers (a position he held until the election), Cavaignac received only 1,448,000 votes, against the 5,434,000 won by prince Louis Bonaparte, who was already preparing his Bonapartist-imperialist "leap."

Universal Suffrage: Act Two

“We know what the elections of December 10, 1848 were,” the *Grand Dictionnaire* of Pierre Larousse tells us. “A sort of *trombe populaire* sucked up millions of men from their villages and made them whirl around the ballot-boxes, all holding the same name in their hand” (III, 637). The obvious question is: how was this consensus formed? In the case of the electoral triumph of Louis Bonaparte, there were long-standing reasons and, at the same time, people knew instinctively that something distinctly new was taking shape in the political and social scenario of “democracy.”

In 1848 Louis Bonaparte was 40 years old, and had a fair amount of political experience under his belt. Left-wing political culture is prone to seeing an antithesis, and an abyss, between the “great” Napoleon and Napoleon III. At one point in his *Quaderni del Carcere* [*Prison Notebooks*] Antonio Gramsci draws an entirely schematic distinction between “positive” and “negative” Caesarism, the former being personified, for example, by the first Napoleon, and the latter by Napoleon III.¹ In fact, the dominant feature of “Bonapartism” – that is, its demagogic, seductive, almost irresistible class inclusiveness directed at the less politicized masses, yet at the same time firmly anchored in a relationship of mutual assistance with the property-owning classes – is already fully present in the person of the first “emperor of the French.” From the drastic reduction of suffrage to the reintroduction of slavery, from the creation of a new class of notables to severe censorship, it was all there under the First Empire – indeed, already with 18 Brumaire. The stark distinction drawn between Napoleon I and Louis-Napoleon is partly the result of the contemptuous tone of the pamphlets unleashed against the

latter, from Victor Hugo's *Napoleon the Small* to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

All this, however, has obscured the essence of the matter: the precocious birth, from the very bosom of the revolution, of the so-called "third way" between democracy and reaction – that is, Bonapartism, which is in fact nothing more than the "second way" (reaction) in modern, pseudo-revolutionary forms. Its twentieth-century continuation was fascism, in its various incarnations (European, South American, and so forth). Its model was "Caesarism" – an absolute obsession in the case of the two Napoleons, both of whom wrote interesting works on Julius Caesar, whom they adopted as an archetype and used for comparison (and, if necessary, contrast). It is not surprising that Auguste Bailly – a minor French publicist of the 1930s who wrote a wide-ranging essay dedicated to Julius Caesar in 1932, when Mussolini's prestige was at its height and Hitler was not yet chancellor – used the phrase "a democratic fascism" to describe the type of regime Caesar would have tried to put in place.

Louis Bonaparte's attempted coups of 1834 and 1840 failed (but then the wealthy did not need him, as Louis Philippe was firmly on the throne). Drawing valuable lessons from the events of his illustrious relative's life, he chose three guiding stars: populism, ostentatious deference to the Catholic church, and a steady relationship with wealthy circles who could support his entry into the political arena.

While still in prison, after the failure of 1844, Louis Bonaparte wrote a booklet, *The Eradication of Poverty (Extinction du paupérisme)*, in which he offered himself as a "friend" of the working classes. In it he emphasizes the balance between industry and agriculture, and attacks rampant industrialism, which, "a veritable Saturn, devours its children, and lives only from their death." At a time when the industrial working day was 12 hours long, child labor was widespread, and in the US the advocates of slavery in plantations could argue that their archaic, dependent working relations were more human than the fierce harshness of factory life, the new Bonaparte's proposals seemed particularly attractive, especially in the provinces and among agricultural workers. One of the pamphlet's proposals was the creation of agricultural communities that would farm the 9,000,000 hectares of uncultivated land (the figure given in official statistics). This vast network of agricultural colonies would not only have provided food for a large number of poor families, but would have offered a haven for the multitudes of workers rendered unemployed by economic stagnation, which was severe during those months and would remain so at least until the winter of 1848–9. The profits – and here the booklet becomes a real manifesto for class inclusiveness – would be split between workers and

employers. Bonaparte writes: "At present, wages are left to chance and to violence. The employer oppresses, and the alternative is for the worker to rebel." His proposed solution is "a salary set not according to a relationship based on power but according to justice, taking account of the needs of workers and the interests of those who provide work." This, he goes on, should be the goal of a competent government. "The triumph of Christianity has destroyed slavery, the triumph of the French Revolution has destroyed privilege, and the triumph of democratic ideas will destroy poverty."² There is an undeniable historiographic inspiration to this, a desire to underpin his reform program with a broad sweep of universal history.

An adventurer like his uncle, Louis Napoleon certainly did not benefit from the unique situation that allowed his relative to prove his military talent. However, he did attempt to make money in the most imaginative ways, including an appeal to Old and New World financiers for funds to build a canal linking the Pacific with the Atlantic. The millions he ran up in debts were periodically redeemed by providential circumstances: on the eve of the February revolution, his "assets" and his "liabilities" were balanced. Benefactors who were disinterested to varying degrees, such as Miss Howard, lavished cash unsparingly to put his finances back on an even keel.

A memorable episode starkly illustrates the ever-present ambiguity in the Bonapartist attitude. On the eve of the February revolution, on the 22nd, he left London in the utmost secrecy. He arrived in Paris just as the provisional government had been announced, and no Bonapartist activity was discernible on the horizon. Nevertheless, he wrote to the new government offering to collaborate with it: "I have hastened from exile to enlist under the banner of the Republic. With no other ambition than to serve my country, I announce my arrival to the members of the provisional government and assure them of my devotion to the cause they represent." The government, fearing his intrigues, sent word to him ordering him to leave France immediately, on February 26 at 4 a.m. As he set off, he sent another message to the government: "Gentlemen, you believe that my presence in Paris is at present a cause for concern. I shall therefore leave, temporarily. In this sacrifice, you can ascertain the purity of my intentions and of my patriotism." Back in London once more, the versatile prince happened to witness a political demonstration by Chartists, clearly triggered by the news from Paris. The English government was appealing to all conservatives to oppose the protests. Immediately Louis Bonaparte enlisted in the special corps, armed with sticks, whose job it was to block the path of the protesters, who were marching on Parliament (April 10, 1848).

In the French elections that April, Louis Bonaparte did not even succeed in getting himself elected. However, he did succeed in the supplementary

elections of June 3, thanks to the all-pervading action of his supporters, who urged the people to vote for him as the “republican, the patriot, the brother of each of us, who fights for *the most complete development possible of democratic principles*.” It is noticeable how his name figured among the elected representatives not only in Paris but also in the departments of Charente inférieure, Yonne, and Corsica. Throughout this phase his propaganda pandered to popular demands, which were unconditionally embraced by *Le Napoléonien* (his own propaganda organ). However, although most support for avowedly socialist politicians was concentrated in Paris, support for prince Bonaparte was broadly spread also in the provinces. His election jolted moderate opinion. Lamartine tried to persuade the Assembly to vote for the law of 1832 that stipulated banishment for individuals that were “a danger to the cause of liberty.” After lengthy discussion, however, the Assembly rejected the proposal, and Louis Bonaparte’s election as a deputy was thus confirmed. He chose to take his place among the benches on the Mountain – that is, with the republican left which drew inspiration from the most radical experience of the First Republic, and alongside a mentor and “teacher” of his, Narcisse Vieillard.³ Victor Hugo recalls this, with irony, in the first chapter of *Napoleon the Small*.

On June 14 a letter by prince Bonaparte was read out to the Constituent Assembly. Among other things, it asserted: “If the people imposed duties upon me, I would know how to carry them out.” Cavaignac immediately demanded the resignation of a deputy who expressed himself thus. The next day, in an adroit maneuver, Bonaparte resigned while protesting the purity of his motives. Thus Bonapartist propaganda gained a free hand in all directions. When the revolt of the June Days erupted, Bonapartist agents slipped into the crowd and mingled with the rebels. Daix and Lahr, two members of the group that assassinated General Bréa, were certainly Bonapartist elements. The prince was gaining credit in all circles while remaining in London, “forced” to do so by the ostracism inflicted on him by men such as Cavaignac, who had meanwhile besmirched himself with blood by massacring the rebels. In the “complementary” elections held in September, Bonaparte, still in London, submitted his candidacy and won in no fewer than five constituencies. His program was “to place the Republic on broader and stronger foundations.” He declared to voters: “The democratic Republic will be my object of worship, and I will be its priest.” He took his seat in the Assembly on September 26, but his attendance was infrequent. He did not want to be compromised by association with any unpopular decision. When his candidacy for the December elections was announced, there were protests from some quarters, but he defended himself some days later, arguing that it was right to accept a candidacy that was being urged upon

him, after such success in the deputy elections. Meanwhile, outside the chamber, he negotiated both with socialist leaders (Proudhon and Louis Blanc) and with the monarchists (Thiers, Montalembert, and others), thus skillfully closing in on his antagonist, Cavaignac. The election results speak for themselves: Bonaparte received 5,500,000 votes, and his main rival, Cavaignac, 1,400,000. More telling still are the almost negligible numbers of votes for the “officially” socialist candidates: Raspail (36,329) and Ledru-Rollin (370,719). The new Bonaparte had “hogged” all the opposition and all those unhappy with the Cavaignac government, and at the same time drawn on his stable and vast reserve of support in the provinces.

Bonaparte’s electoral program was, in its way, perfect. He promised to maintain order and to protect religion, the family, and property. He professed a desire for peace, decentralization, freedom of the press, and the abolition of proscription laws (at that time, the thousands of workers deported after the June Days were proscribed). He also promised to seek a reduction in the taxes that imposed the greatest burdens on the common people, to encourage enterprises that could offer work to the unemployed, and to put in place measures to support elderly workers. In short, he pledged to work for the well-being of each, based on the prosperity of all. Moreover, he gave his assurance that he would hand over to a successor at the end of his four-year term. In comparison with the high-sounding, heated, or extremist tone of his rivals, this was a program destined to succeed. The legend of the first Bonaparte – which was as alive as ever – did the rest.

During the period between the “unanimous” election of December 10, 1848, and the coup d’état of December 2, 1851, Louis Bonaparte steered a skillful course between the people and parliament, constantly heaping blame on the latter for its erratic and unpopular decisions. He wanted all to see clearly the “disorder” resulting from the supremacy of parties and factions, and acted decisively when he believed the country would identify with his use of force.

The two decisive moments were the crisis of June 13, 1849 – the result of the Roman expedition in support of Pius IX, aimed at sweeping away the last “anomaly” of 1848 (the Mazzini government in Rome) – and the partial elections of March 10 and April 28, 1850, in which the left recovered strongly.

It is well known that the Rome expedition, for which liberal, anticlerical deputies such as François-André Isambert and many others voted, was desired by the president-prince to satisfy the clerical party, since Catholic rural France was one of his electoral strongholds. The hypocrisy lay in the claim that the expedition was bringing the pope back to Rome, but did not intend to overthrow the Roman republic: that it was an act of mediation,

not restoration. It should not be overlooked that the decision had been taken by the Constituent Assembly (by then on the brink of being dissolved) – the same assembly that had been elected in April 1848 and had given more representation to the left, certainly, but which still contained a republican majority. On May 28, 1849, the new Legislative Chamber, where moderates were in the majority, came into office. On June 2, General Oudinot unleashed the assault that, in less than a month, crushed the Roman republic. Only on June 13 did a prominent exponent of the left – Ledru-Rollin – raise in the chamber the issue of the unconstitutionality of the intervention against Rome, and demand that the president-prince be charged with violating the constitution. He failed. The government easily crushed street demonstrations; there were arrests, and a state of siege was declared. But after Rome had fallen and papal repression had begun, Louis Bonaparte adroitly distanced himself, in the name of the “true objectives” of the Roman expedition! This was another way of slipping out of the firing line, placing himself *super partes*, and passing damaging responsibilities on to the Assembly. To this end, in August he circulated a letter he had written to Colonel Ney, his orderly, which said, among other things:

The French Republic did not send an army to Rome to strangle Italy’s liberty but, on the contrary, to discipline it, saving it from its own excesses! . . . It truly pains me to learn that the pontiff’s benevolent intentions, like our own action, have been rendered futile. Is the aim perhaps to place proscriptions and tyranny at the root of the Pope’s return?

Thus others were made to appear responsible. Thus the president-prince was in the clear with the clerical party, and at the same time immune to the damaging effects, especially to his image, of the attack on Rome and the (foreseeable) vindictive papal-revanchist terror.

Bonaparte’s real masterstroke, however, was the coup d’état carried out *in the name of universal suffrage*. This was a symbolic episode. Here too, the president-prince’s tactic was constantly to separate himself from the executive and the chamber of deputies in the mind of the public, by means of careful and repeated statements. At the end of October a message from the president to the assembly provocatively cast the great shadow of the emperor (Napoleon I) over the inept “political class,” in a tone of seemingly bitter disappointment:

I have allowed men of the most diverse views to enter government,⁴ but I have not obtained the results I expected from this attempt at rapprochement. Amid

this confusion France, uneasy because she lacks direction, seeks the hand, the will, of the man who was elected on 10 December. . . With my election, an entire political conception [*un système*] triumphed, since the name of Napoleon in itself constitutes a program. It stands for order, authority, religion, and well-being in domestic policy, and national dignity in foreign policy. This is the policy I shall cause to triumph, with the support of the country, the assembly, and the people.

The Assembly did not welcome this sally openly stating a political program, even though on concrete issues – especially education, where Catholics were making concessions and teachers were being placed under the control of prefects – the agreement between the chamber, with its Catholic-moderate majority, and the president was clear.

This substantial rightward shift of the political axis is seen as the reason behind the left's successes in the partial elections of March 10 and April 28, 1850. ("Left" here means the republican democrats, who still called themselves "the Mountain" and who had been extremely successful at the time of the February revolution, and the socialists of various tendencies.) Pursuing his policy of *super partes* ambiguity, Bonaparte had meanwhile made a left-leaning gesture, by freeing and returning to their families no fewer than 1,341 detainees imprisoned after the June Days rebellion. This move was calculated to attract the reproaches – ineffectual, to boot – of the parliamentary majority. The latter had been severely alarmed by the electoral results of March and April 1850, and on May 2 a parliamentary commission was formed to draw up a law that *would limit universal suffrage*. The commission comprised, among others, Thiers, Piscatory, Daru, and Léon Faucher. On May 31 the chamber passed the law, which abolished universal suffrage and in effect removed from the electoral roll about 3,000,000 Frenchmen (that minority of "non-property-owners" which can win if it can find itself some allies). The law was passed by 433 votes to 241. Its main clauses stipulated that to be eligible to vote, it was necessary to have lived in a canton for three years, this to be proved by being on the list of direct taxpayers or, for workers, by an employer's declaration. All those convicted of political crimes (in the first place the publication of subversive material) or common crimes (including vagrancy, adultery, and begging) lost their right to vote. The number of voters was thus reduced from 9,600,000 to 6,800,000. There were protests from Cavaignac, Lamartine, Victor Hugo (who in later years would devote an epic to the class of *misérables*, who were something other than proletarian factory workers), and others. Thiers replied: "No one is thinking of calling into question universal suffrage or keeping the people from the polls; it is the vile crowd [*la vile multitude* – an

elusive concept indeed] that the law aims to exclude.” Specifically these were *les mauvaises blouses*, a definition Thiers explained thus: “I refer to those nomadic workers who are always ready to be convinced by the slogans they hear in the *cabaret*.” The future mass-murderer of the Communards, who became a millionaire while in office under Louis Philippe, at least had the merit of consistency.

For the president-prince Bonaparte this unpropitious law offered a splendid opportunity. It enabled him, more than ever, to appeal directly to the people, openly disagreeing with the reactionary and self-referential parliamentary assembly. His coup d'état was prepared over months, not only by strengthening links with senior military figures and a network of prefects, but through a long campaign of travel in the provinces and speeches aimed at preparing public opinion for a change of regime. When December 2, 1851 dawned, the conspicuous proclamation adorning walls all over the country read: “In the name of the French people, the president of the Republic decrees as follows. Article 1: The national assembly is dissolved. Article 2: Universal suffrage is restored, and the law of 31 May abrogated. Article 3: The French people are summoned to the polls.”

Trouble for the “Old Mole”

On December 3 and 4 barricades went up. The number of people who died in those days was never made public. To discourage citizens from taking to the barricades, shots were fired at passers-by on the boulevards. Certainly, few people did rally – perhaps not more than a thousand. Immediately afterwards Bonaparte began the dissolution of secret societies, and then of clubs. Under the new law, members of these associations could be deported to the colonies: it has been calculated that after some months the deportees numbered about 26,000.¹

Riding on the wave of the almost unopposed success of his December 2 coup d'état, the president-prince addressed the nation directly in a manifesto: “The Assembly, which should have been the bastion of order, became a den of intrigue. The patriotism of one third of its members was not enough to stop this fatal tendency. Instead of passing laws in the interests of all, it forged the weapons for civil war.” (The last sentence is an allusion to, among other things, the electoral law of May 31, seen as an incentive to strife and tension.) Then came the invocation: “If you trust me, give me the means to accomplish the great mission you have assigned to me.” He asked for a 10-year mandate, an executive not bound by the assembly, a council of state, and two chambers: a legislative body elected by universal suffrage “without list voting, which distorts the election,” and a senate (unelected), made up of the “*illustrations de la nation*,” to safeguard public freedoms.

The law of May 31, 1850 having been abrogated, all the French voted again, on December 20, 1851. About 8,200,000 people voted, of whom 7,500,000 were in favor of the proposal. On January 14 the following year, a constitution was promulgated that faithfully reflected the articles

approved by plebiscite three weeks earlier. A century later, in 1958, the constitution of the Fifth Republic was passed in exactly the same way, demonstrating the durability of the Bonapartist phenomenon as a readily available variant of the "parliamentary game." But we will return to this later.

Left-wing historiography has not, as a rule, felt comfortable with this surprising stage in the history of universal suffrage. "To conceal the counter-revolutionary nature of the coup d'état, and to deceive democratic circles among the people, Louis Bonaparte announced the abolition of the law of 31 May, which limited the right to vote," explains the *Universal History* of the USSR Academy of Sciences.² This discomfort goes back farther, however – arguably to Marx himself, who wrote extraordinary and brilliant articles on French politics of the period. These appeared in part in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* under the title *The Class Struggles in France from 1848 to 1850*, and in part in the periodical *Die Revolution* (published in New York) under the now famous title *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

It has already been observed how the conquest of political democracy, identified with its chief instrument, universal suffrage, is at the center of the program, to be put into practice immediately, contained in the *Manifesto*. This is authoritatively confirmed by a reliable interpreter – its co-author, Engels, in the introduction he wrote at the end of his life to the new edition of Marx's *Class Struggles in France* (1895). In this important essay, which can also be seen as his testament, Engels writes: "*The Communist Manifesto* had already proclaimed the winning of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks of the militant proletariat" (p. 20). From the context it might appear that he is referring to universal suffrage in Germany, but this is not the case. So important were the events in France between 1848 and 1852 in Marx's eyes that he devoted to them a series of writings that made him into one of the most perceptive and belligerent historians of the nineteenth century. He was to return to them after the defeat of the Commune, in writings that are no less dramatic, again describing them as central to the development of democracy in the whole of Europe.

Like every great historian who deals with contemporary, burning events, Marx is deeply involved and does not spare his sarcasm: he is anything but a detached narrator. At the same time he displays minute knowledge of facts, polemics, the dissemination of information and propaganda, and parliamentary debates, such as only a contemporary, and a factious one, could possess. A further consequence of his closeness to events is that he gives

some of these an immense prominence which, viewed from a distance, is difficult to understand.

The third and fourth chapters of *The Class Struggles in France* are dated March and November 1, 1850, respectively. The former is devoted to the reconstruction of events between June 13, 1849 (the uprising against the Roman expedition) and March 10, 1850 (the partial elections, which were won by the left-wing parties). The latter is entitled *The Abolition of Universal Suffrage*. Marx places immense emphasis on those elections, and writes without hesitation:

The election of March 10, 1850! It was the revocation of June 1848: the butchers and deporters of the June insurgents returned to the National Assembly, but humbled, in the train of the deported, and with their principles on their lips. It was the revocation of June 13, 1849: the Mountain proscribed by the National Assembly returned to the National Assembly, but as advance trumpeters of the revolution, no longer as its commanders. It was the revocation of December 10: Napoleon had been rejected with his minister Lahitte... Finally, the election of March 10, 1850, was the cancellation of the election of May 13 [1848], which had given the party of order a majority. The election of March 10 protested against the majority of May 13. March 10 was a revolution. Behind the ballot papers lay the paving stones. (p. 128)

If we did not know that these lines were written by Marx, we might imagine they were by Hugo, such is their carefully constructed rhetoric, with its twin repetitions in the first and second parts (*It was... The election of March 10...*) and their hyperbole, culminating in the final assertion that a partial election result was a "revolution," no less.

In the following pages, March 10, 1850 becomes the start of a new chapter in history: on that date, the constitutional republic entered "the phase of its dissolution." "The different factions of the majority are again united among themselves and with Bonaparte;... he is again their *neutral man*." The moderates' counterattack culminated in the "abolition of universal suffrage." Here Marx, drawing near to the conclusion of his essay ("March 10 bears the inscription: *Après moi le déluge!*"), already attempts to write a *history* of universal suffrage, centered on the (relevant) idea that when elections by universal suffrage go wrong, bourgeois elites hasten to place limits on it. This indeed happened with the regrettable law of May 13. Marx produces the following highly perspicacious observation:

By ever and again putting an end to the existing state power and creating it anew out of itself, does not universal suffrage put an end to all stability, does it not every moment question all the powers that be...?

By repudiating universal suffrage, with which it had hitherto draped itself and from which it sucked its omnipotence, the bourgeoisie openly confesses, "Our dictatorship has hitherto existed by the will of the people; it must now be consolidated against the will of the people." (p. 130)

Aside from the polemic and apologetic context, which in a sense diminishes the significance of this passage, this is an insight of prime importance in a legal sense too. It is a vision of the intrinsically destructive effects of universal suffrage, in that it continually calls into question the state's "present" power and presents itself as the sole source of authority and power.

Because Marx is so close to his subject, he magnifies it to gigantic proportions. The partial elections of March 10 take on the significance of an epochal turning point. This distorted perspective can be seen in the contextual polemic relating to the next round, that of April 28. In the fourth chapter of the *Klassenkämpfe* – originally an article devoted to the "abolition of universal suffrage," written a few months later for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* – Marx even inflates the significance of the choice of Eugène Sue, in the second round, as candidate for the Paris seat left vacant because the socialist Vidal had opted for the Bas-Rhin constituency. This choice alone is enough for Marx to conclude: "The victory of March 10 ceased to be a decisive one . . . The revolutionary meaning of March 10, the rehabilitation of the June insurrection, was finally completely annihilated by the candidature of Eugène Sue, the sentimental petty bourgeois social-fantast, which the proletariat could at best accept as a joke to please the *grisettes*" (p. 136). (This is a gratuitously anti-women comment, and does not in any case explain the epochal or catastrophic nature of Sue's candidacy in a constituency which, a month earlier, had seen Vidal emerge victorious.)

Moreover, at the end of this piece, written about a year before the coup d'état of December 1851, Marx changes his assessment of the accord reached by Bonaparte and the moderates against the winners of March 10. In his previous essay, he had described them as having immediately closed ranks; here he guesses, though it is only a hint, that "As against the Assembly, he [Bonaparte] would seemingly appeal even to universal suffrage."³ This is indeed what happened. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* the restoration of universal suffrage by Bonaparte is mentioned only briefly, in the chapter entitled "The Decomposition of the Party of Order."

In the last chapter Marx reflects on the remark that Guizot, the old, faithful Orléanist and minister of Louis Philippe, made regarding the coup d'état of December 2: "It is the complete and final triumph of socialism!" Marx

certainly does not dismiss this assessment: he observes that Bonaparte's victory did in fact completely destroy the Orléanist bourgeoisie ("that is, the most vital section of the French bourgeoisie"), and that with Bonaparte's victory over the moderate-dominated assembly,

the revolution has concluded the first half of its preparation . . . now that it has achieved this result [of overthrowing parliamentary power] it carries executive power to its perfect state, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, and places it in its sights as the sole obstacle, on which to concentrate all its destructive powers. And when the revolution has concluded this second half of its preparatory work, *all Europe will spring up from its seat and shout: 'Well dug, you old mole!'* "4

This entire tirade contains interesting elements – above all Guizot's assessment of Bonaparte's victory. However, it is also a sign of great discomfort at being confronted by the simultaneously left- and right-wing phenomenon of "Caesarism." After all, does not Littré's great dictionary describe "Caesarism" as "government by princes brought into office by democracy but endowed with absolute power"? (This definition, incidentally, would also have fitted Pisistratus.) However much this assessment of the second Bonapartist experiment may annoy those with republican-Montagnard sympathies, it is partly borne out by the events of just a few years later: the end of the Second Empire, military disaster, the revolution of the Paris Commune. However, the destructive ferocity with which Thiers, Gambetta, and their colleagues massacred the Communards in the name of the Republic, helped by generals who were prepared to do anything, and with the support of the rest of the country, demonstrates that the "old mole" had not dug so well after all – at least not until that point.

That Marx was attached to the conclusions reached in these pages is confirmed by the fact that in 1869, just a year before Sedan, he reprinted this essay with a brief introduction in which he refers rather ironically to Victor Hugo. However, the link between the Bonapartist solution and universal suffrage caused him problems. In the preface to the 1895 reprint of the *Klassenkämpfe*, Engels – in tracing a sort of historical outline of universal suffrage – evinces a similar discomfort, and gets round this by a rather vague sentence: "Universal suffrage had existed in France for a long time, but *it had become discredited because of the way the Bonapartist government had abused it.*"

Other critics were to emphasize the plebiscitary mechanism to which Napoleon III resorted for changes of course such as the promulgation of the new constitution or the creation of the empire, which was approved by a huge majority of voters. It is a mechanism that is sometimes criticized for

“oversimplifying” choices and sometimes for the “climate” in which a plebiscite takes place. (Among other things, being a choice between two alternatives, the plebiscite escapes the devastating effect of Condorcet’s “paradox.”) In reality, what counts is manipulation of the vote – an essential and ever more sophisticated device, to which most of the following pages are devoted.

Europe “on the March”

Sixty years were to pass between the presidential decree of February 2, 1852 – with which Louis Bonaparte reorganized the electoral system after the new constitution was promulgated – and Giovanni Giolitti’s reform of 1912, which vastly extended the right to vote and is optimistically described as universal suffrage by some Italian historians. It is striking that, in contrast to Bonaparte’s legislation, Giolitti’s reform was still partly restrictive. Both limited suffrage to men; it was extended to women only with the Russian revolution.

The law of February 2 was implicitly aimed at two targets: the iniquitous way constituency boundaries were drawn – which, as in England, profoundly distorted the electoral system – and the exclusion measures put in place by the French electoral law of May 31, 1850, against which Bonaparte orchestrated his coup d’état. Under the new law every department had a right to a deputy for every 35,000 voters, and to a further deputy if the remainder of voters numbered 25,000 or more (article 1). This was intended to avoid the monstrous inequalities produced by what were known as “rotten boroughs” in England. The main change to the exclusion measures was that six months’ residence in a commune was enough to acquire the right to vote (reduced from three years under the previous law) and that voters whose six months came up between the date an election was called and the election date itself should be included on the electoral roll (articles 12 and 13). Convicted criminals were excluded under articles 15 and 16, but article 17 stipulated that lists be revised annually. Article 27 established the principle that parliamentary duties were incompatible with employment as a government official. Any *paid* official was considered to have resigned from his job from the moment he entered the legislature (unless he had applied to have his official powers verified). The foundation stone of the

electoral system was the single-member constituency, a way of ensuring that "notables" predominated. The minimum age for voting was 21, and for candidates 25.

Under the Giolitti law of 1912 the minimum voting age, without wealth or other restrictions, was 30. For those aged between 21 and 30 the right to vote was granted only to those who possessed "educational qualifications or honors" or who were in military service.¹

This was clearly a big step forward for Italy, given that until 1880 only 2 percent of the kingdom's population had the vote, a figure that rose to 10 percent with the reform of 1882. At the 1913 elections, after Giolitti's reform, 23 percent of the population had the right to vote.² Commenting on Giolitti's innovation in his *Storia d'Italia dal 1871 al 1915*, Benedetto Croce rightly says that the aim was to "approach" universal suffrage,³ and highlights how the reform was "nobly" designed to bring the poorer classes into public institutions. To conservatives who objected that "the government would have granted what the working classes were *not* demanding" Croce replies, identifying with Giolitti's vision, that "the educated ruling class does not deserve to be described thus if it does not use its consciousness to make up for the incomplete and as yet unexpressed consciousness of the lower classes, and does not in some way anticipate their requests even by stimulating their needs." To calm the fearful, after the event, he points out that although in 1913 the number of socialist deputies increased, and a few Catholics were elected, "the complexion of the chamber remained a liberal one." All this is illuminating in a number of ways, including for its concrete reaffirmation of the idea of *hegemony* – though this is not, of course, expressed in such terms. The dominant classes could broaden suffrage even drastically if they were, and could remain, dominant in practice. Equally telling is the suggested distinction between the parties of the left, which demanded universal suffrage, and the people (in whose name these parties often spoke) who were far from making such a demand and, on the basis of the election results, did not even seem interested in taking advantage of their new opportunity.

Liberal coolness towards universal suffrage is well documented in another work by Croce, *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono* (1932), no longer in a detached manner but in vibrant, polemic terms. Here he seeks a clear distinction between "liberal beliefs, mores, and actions" on the one hand and "suffrage that is broad to a greater or lesser degree, or even universal" on the other. The breadth of suffrage, he asserts, "tells us nothing about the extent or depth of liberalism." The implication is that a ruling elite imbued with "liberal beliefs" can impart a far more *free* character to the whole of society than can the abstract, merely arithmetical device of suffrage extended to all. He takes issue with certain countries where suf-

frage is "very broad," and especially with universal suffrage itself, "[which is] often very dear to the enemies of freedom: feudal lords, priests, kings, and demagogues or adventurers." This is far less detached language than Croce devoted a few years earlier to the "wisdom" of Giolitti's reform. It also conveys an unshakeable pessimism regarding that *indiscriminate* and potentially dangerous form of admission to "citizenship." The following illustration compares large European states, but the chief comparison appears to be between England and Germany.

England had a more restricted suffrage than France or Italy or even Germany, with conditions laid on voters of having to own a house or to have a certain income represented by the amount of rent paid, and other similar requisites; and yet her [England's] life of liberty was not inferior to that of France and Italy, and was certainly far superior to that of Germany.⁴

Germany, though dear to Croce for many other reasons, is here presented in the light that would become commonplace later, in wartime anti-German propaganda. His assessment, which centers on the "life of liberty," appears not to take account of the social rights secured in Germany under universal suffrage. What is noteworthy, however, is his conviction that the positive qualities of a society depend essentially on the effectiveness of the values ("liberty," for Croce) that the ruling classes can impart to the whole of society independently of its "electoral" characteristics.⁵ Clearly, this idea offers scope for development in many interesting ways. As for Italy, Croce's vision of the Giolitti era is somewhat simplistic. It appears to be a country that is harmoniously moving towards the political involvement of the masses – skillfully guided by the wise helmsman – within the framework of the liberal state. The reality was a little different. Already in Crispi's time Gaetano Mosca had pointed out the role of prefects, whose bounden duty it was to influence voting directly. He writes:

That prefects are the ministry's electoral agents is a fact now so well known that any attempt to demonstrate it seems superfluous. In France this has been happening for quite some time; in Italy it is more recent, but certainly not new or introduced in recent years. Now, admittedly, it is becoming ever more widespread, because formerly only so-called *political prefects*, who were sent to certain large cities, were electoral agents, whereas now all are, without distinction.⁶

At the beginning of the new century, after the severe crisis of 1898 when Zanardelli was prime minister and Giolitti minister of the interior, Giuseppe

Rensi – a thinker far removed from the “detached” Croce – followed in Mosca’s footsteps with a veritable indictment of electoral fraud. Here is the essential passage:

To repeat that elections reflect the people’s will only to an infinitesimal degree is, by now, to utter a banality. As everyone knows, a thousand circumstances conspire to prevent that will being exercised in elections, or to ensure it is deflected or confounded. One of the chief ones, aimed directly at suppressing it, is government action in the form of pressure or corruption. Those that aim to deflect or confound it include the actions of the candidates themselves, of their prominent voters, and of the press.

Suppose that public opinion takes a turn that displeases the government, and that this current constitutes the majority. In a political system that claims to differ from its predecessors precisely because it offers a mechanism through which the will of the majority can be normally expressed, such a current in public opinion should soon triumph. But in parliamentary government it risks succumbing, perhaps to the extent of total emasculation, unless it acquires such force that revolution threatens.

Indeed the government has the means, through pressure and corruption, to prevent that current of opinion, which comprises the majority in the country, from becoming a majority in the chamber of representatives, and can ensure it remains a minority in the legislature. And this is precisely what normally happens.⁷

In his *Memorie*, Giolitti describes with some irony the electoral system in force in 1882, when he was first returned to parliament in the Cuneo constituency. The constituency included the commune of Peveragno, where Giolitti received all the votes cast. Here is his explanation for this singular phenomenon:

In San Damiano my grandfather, who was an extremely popular man, kept open house to everyone, and people passing through would lodge with him. The father of the mayor of Peveragno once spent a night there with his pregnant wife, who had gone into labor, given birth, and remained there as a guest for more than a month, until she had recovered. The mayor remembered that he had been born in my family’s house, and wanted to thank me for that hospitality long ago by getting everyone to vote for me.⁸

Leadership in the management of universal suffrage was in any case a peculiar outcome, a specialty, of the Bonapartist way of running the electoral system and managing consensus. This was all the more admirable if we consider that the president-prince (and “emperor” from November 1852)

had to tame a country that was far more politicized and prone to rebellion – France, which for decades had been filled with unprecedented political and social tension, and was far more accustomed to suffrage than any other nation, let alone the extremely backward Kingdom of Italy, which had a 30 percent illiteracy rate in 1871.

At the time of Napoleon III the legislature was a true parliamentary assembly resulting from true elections – not a collection of “silent” notables like the phantom parliament of Napoleon I. The new emperor exercised his dominance by preventing hostile political forces from using universal suffrage to regain power through parliament even though, certainly, the latter’s powers were greatly reduced because now the executive answered only to the head of state.⁹

The basis of “consensus-building” was that the people had brought the regime into being through their unanimous approval of the questions progressively put to them – hence the order given to prefects that they should openly wield their political influence. “Act openly, and allow the people to discern who are the friends and who are the enemies *of the government they have founded.*” Newspapers were closely controlled, and many political dailies did not survive an especially severe censorship law. Public premises were a source of propaganda and posed the danger that they might become clubs: hence the harsh and vigilantly applied legislation governing the authorization and opening of commercial premises, and so forth. The interior minister wrote to his immediate subordinates:

Mr Prefect, take all the necessary measures to communicate to voters in your department’s constituencies, via your administration’s employees and by all the means you consider appropriate to the characteristics of individual districts, which candidate the government of Louis Napoleon judges most suitable to help him in his work of reconstruction... The government is not concerned with the political background of candidates who openly accept the new state of affairs; but at the same time it asks you to have no hesitation in warning the population against those whose well-known tendencies, whatever their titles, are not in the spirit of the new institutions.

Consensus-building was both vertical and all-pervading. Here is what a mayor – carefully forewarned and instructed by his prefect – wrote to his electors:

Voters! You will not forget all the benefits with which the Emperor has filled our commune on his many visits: help for the poor, help for the church, the gift of the pump for fighting fires. Voters! You will show your gratitude to the Emperor by giving your votes to the honorable Clary, who is recommended by the government, and on account of the services he has rendered to our

department. You will not forget that he is about to come to the aid of our commune once again, by obtaining for us the sum of 2,000 francs for the church whose expenses we cannot afford to pay ourselves. Voters! Unite in giving your votes to Clary. He alone represents the thoughts of the Emperor, your august benefactor.¹⁰

A few decades later, the liberal Giolitti directed voting in the same way, especially after the great step forward of the 1912 reform. In southern Italy, however, he introduced a variant, with the friendly collaboration of organized crime linked to landowners and notables: the notorious *mazzieri* [mace-bearers]. Gaetano Salvemini, a great Italian historian of southern origin who directly experienced Giolitti's election campaigns, was harsh but justified when, in a celebrated pamphlet, he described the apparently Olympian Piedmontese premier, so much admired by Croce, as "the minister for organized crime."

Parties, in the modern, twentieth-century sense, were absent. Indeed, in Palmiro Togliatti's famous description, parties represent "the organization of democracy." The Bonapartist party, however, was such a one, and was quickly able to make use of the apparatus of the state; gradually, spurred on by the International, the socialist parties became modern parties too. The other parties were liberal, that is, in political society, the "natural order of things" (with variations in terminology depending on the country and the period). They did not need to be parties proper: their members *directly* constituted the ruling class. However, we should not ignore the importance of the new Bonaparte's experience as a source of inspiration, and sometimes as a direct model. The strong leader supported by consensus was a model that fascinated Bismarck, but also Crispi; neither did it lack resonance for English conservatives. The plebiscite as the prime instrument of the guided "will of the people" was also to prove itself in Italy: the entire operation that brought about Italian unity over very few years (1858–61) was accomplished by means of this typically Bonapartist device. Even when, under the secret agreements of 1859 between the French empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia, the latter ceded Nice to France in "exchange" for Lombardy, Napoleon III organized a farcical plebiscite in Nice to endorse the handover to France "democratically" (the city was already occupied by the French). Laurence Oliphant, a *Times* journalist who was also an English agent charged with keeping an eye on Garibaldi, tried in vain to derail the plebiscite by, among other things, taking advantage of the Nice-born Garibaldi's resentment of the operation set in train by Cavour. Having failed, Oliphant unleashed against the emperor a pamphlet entitled *Universal Suffrage and Napoleon the Third* (1860). Soon afterwards the Piedmontese

government employed the same procedure used in Nice to legalize its annexation of the new central and southern provinces (1861). The second emperor of the French taught bourgeois Europe not to fear universal suffrage but to "tame" it – as long as it was "corrected," of course, by the infallible "moderating" device of the single-member constituency.

Thanks to the political and social origins of his class-inclusive movement, Napoleon III had built an almost perfect "machine." He had been able to sit on the Mountain's benches in the constituent assembly, maintain solid links with the Catholic clergy, and not lose touch with certain socialist leaders, while firmly continuing to support the existing social order. He thus found himself for a long time – almost 20 years – far better placed than the English government was after the events of 1848 in Europe.

The history of the very slow progress of universal suffrage in England is a particularly instructive one. It helps us rid ourselves of the recurrent Anglo-centric rhetoric that paints England as the geometric center and natural home of a perpetual freedom, continuously existing in this blessed country from the Magna Carta of 1215 until the present day. This freedom supposedly endured undisturbed (despite two revolutions, the beheading of a king, and a lengthy interlude of republican dictatorship) while the rest of the continent was gripped by madness, especially after the French Revolution. Burke's *Reflections* on the events in France and, in literature, Dickens's regrettable novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) have contributed to keeping this cliché alive.

It should not pass unnoticed that the country's second step forward towards "equal" suffrage was anything but smooth, and met with fierce resistance. Renewed unrest was triggered by revolution in Europe, but the second Reform Bill was passed in 1867: it took almost 20 years of battles in parliament to remove from another 40 or so "rotten boroughs" their two seats each in the Commons and assign them to certain large cities, which the system still penalized. It is worth noting that at that time London still had only four Members of Parliament. The other laboriously achieved innovation was the lowering of the level of wealth required to be granted the right to vote. To this was added another "radical" measure: the inclusion on the electoral roll of new categories of rent-payers – "inhabitant occupiers" and "lodgers" – that had hitherto been excluded. Secret ballots were introduced only with the Ballot Act of 1872, and only in 1895 was near-universal suffrage achieved: all adults *with their own lodgings* (whether rented or owned) and all owners of property yielding rent of £10 were at last admitted to the electorate. Various limitations remained regarding the *length of time* the lodgings had been occupied, and it went without saying that citizens who did not support themselves financially were excluded. This "revolutionary"

innovation was brought in by W. E. Gladstone, who was also responsible for the final abolition of the archaic constituencies. London was finally granted representation appropriate to its enormous size: 59 (naturally single-member) constituencies. What is less widely known is that as late as 1918, immediately after the First World War, some voters – despite the existence of “universal” suffrage – had the right to vote twice,¹¹ and women (as long as they were aged 30 or above, naturally) had the right to vote on condition that they owned property or were married to property-owners.

All this stubborn, complex limitation of political freedom produced a highly significant phenomenon: the political representation of social demands passed into the hands of the Liberal Party, the historical antagonists of the Tories (the Labour Party was founded only in 1900, under the modest banner of “Labour Representation Committee”). Within the limits of an electoral system that centered on penalizing minorities (thanks to the system of single-member constituencies) the Labour Party was for a long time a minority group that succeeded in getting members elected to the Commons only by making electoral pacts with the Liberals. In 1906 it won 30 seats, an apparent success; but these members represented almost the entire working class whose numbers, thanks to the development of industry, were vast.

The single-member, majority electoral system ensured the strength and indefinite survival of the Tories. Under a different electoral system they would inevitably have disappeared, replaced by more modern conservative parties, and this would have led to the modernization of the whole of British society. Instead, that society continued to be weighed down by a conservative organization intrinsically hostile to democracy, which was seen as tantamount to communism, judging by George Cornewall Lewis’s dialogue *Which is the Best Form of Government?* (1863). In it the character Aristocraticus asserts: “But the attempt to attain to perfect equality in the distribution of the powers of government seems to me as absurd as the attempt to attain to perfect equality in the distribution of property. Pure democracy is, in my judgment, as unsound in theory, and as mischievous in practice, as communism.” (p. 65). Raimon Panikkar observes, at the beginning of his essay *The Foundations of Democracy* (1997), that the word “democracy” itself “retained a pejorative meaning in the British Isles until the end of the nineteenth century.”¹² In England “the capitalist economy had *inserted itself inside the traditional social order*, and had changed the content though not the form of that order.”¹³ This clearly explains why political struggles in England more often than not involved direct confrontation between the unions (which the party of “labor” supported only after a certain date) and the solid forces of conservatism, perfectly embodied by the

Tories. Thanks to the electoral system the latter did not need the help of third parties; and such was their dominance in society that they were able to win battles over wage claims lasting many months.

Consider too that when England, an ally of the tsar, entered the war against Germany and Austria, suffrage in British elections was anything but universal, whereas in Germany it had been since 1871 and in Austria since 1907. Despite this, the war was presented as a battle between "democracies" and the "autocracies" of the central European empires. We can only marvel at the pervasive power of rhetoric.

In fact, on the eve of the First World War it was in Germany that organized labor (social democrats and unions) was most strongly represented in parliament, and carried the highest prestige; it also had the best organizational model, backed up by leaders of high intellectual caliber. However, this was only one side of the story. The other is that there was a power bloc – consisting of Junkers, large-scale industry, and the army – which had decided to challenge England's supremacy in the world. Thus 1914 was to be, in every sense, the trial by fire of the European labor movement, caught in the vice of the conflict between these two versions of imperialism.

As we approach this epochal date, let us go back in time a little, to try to understand the early symptoms and development of the crisis that produced, in the final analysis, today's world.

From the Slaughter of the Communards to the “Sacred Unions”

There is one year in this series of events that is at least as important as 1848: the year 1871. Following the collapse of the French second empire, 1871 saw the eruption, desperate life, and end of the Paris Commune, Prussia’s military victory, the birth of the German empire, and the shift of the strategic epicenter of the European labor movement from France to Germany. During the 40 years that followed – the so-called “40 years of peace” – the germs of the crises and transformations in whose wake we are still living came to fruition: from the Russian revolutions to the First World War, the centrality of America, and the reawakening of Asia. All this began, however, in 1871, which appeared only to superficial observers to usher in a long “era of peace.”

Engels broadly outlines the events of the century’s closing decades in that remarkable testament, his preface to the 1895 reprint of *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, Marx’s account of the events of 1848 in France. Among other things, Engels writes: “As Marx had predicted, the war of 1870–71 and the defeat of the Commune had temporarily shifted the labor movement’s center of gravity from France to Germany.”

In fact Marx, moving on from what he wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, had made a prediction that went in a totally different direction: with the parliamentary cabal defeated by Bonaparte, all that remained was to defeat the seat of power, reduced to the figure of the isolated “Caesar,” at which point victory would be complete and the “old mole” would have completed his work. Instead, at Sedan it was the Caesar who had crumpled, and the workers of various socialist tendencies had taken power in Paris; but the “proletarian” government was defeated amid the

general slaughter of its supporters. Thus the observation that the center of gravity (*Schwerpunkt*) would shift from France to Germany, which seems so "prophetic" to Engels, is rather superficial. A whole plan, a project, a great investment of energy was being shattered, and far from painlessly. The end of the Commune was much more than the shifting of a "center of gravity".

The Commune had been the result of defeat, of the ineptitude of Thiers's provisional government in Versailles, and of the uncertainty of the victorious Prussians, camped at the gates of Paris and confronted with two French governments at war with each other. The Commune was a spontaneous movement that revived the mass enlistment and "people's army" drawn from the archetypes of the year II. It was led by a Blanquist majority and Proudhonist minority, linked to the International Workingmen's Association (the so-called "First International"). In order to crush it, Thiers obtained from the Prussian victors and occupiers the release of the French troops held prisoner at Sedan and Metz. Strengthened with these forces, Thiers crushed the Commune and massacred its militants. The great hope was extinguished in a few days, between March 18 and early May, 1871.

Marx wrote a long address to the International on this episode, entitled *The Civil War in France*, published as a pamphlet the same year. He does not spare his criticism, the chief one being that "the working class cannot be content simply to take control of the machine of state as it stands and use it to achieve its own ends" (chapter III).

This work had a direct political importance and long-lasting consequences, which should be recalled here because they are relevant to developments that will be discussed later. According to Arthur Rosenberg in his *History of Bolshevism*, with this work

Marx thus took a fateful step. It was thus – and thus only – that he acquired for Communism a real revolutionary tradition. It was then that Communism became for the first time the creed of all revolutionary workers throughout the world. This great success was bought at a price: the immediate dissolution of the centralized State authority became the classical model for a working-class revolution.¹

How the accomplishment of a great European workers' revolution would later adapt itself to this was a question Marx left to the future.

The collapse of the First International, between the 1880s and 1890s, and the beginning of German socialism's long march to elections following the failure of Bismarck's anti-socialist legislation, marked the start of a completely different era. This was characterized by parliamentary systems

founded on the powerful force of a state dominated by a bourgeoisie that was ready to take on electoral challenges. It was a world for which Marx, who died in 1883, left extremely vague prescriptions for action or, perhaps intentionally, none at all.

Twenty years later, in a preface to *The Civil War in France*, Engels takes the criticism further:

The Commune had to recognize from the start that the working class, once in power, could not continue to govern using the old apparatus of state; . . . in order not to lose the power it had just seized it needed to eliminate all the old repressive apparatus hitherto used against it, and at the same time take precautions against its own representatives and officials by declaring that they could be dismissed, without exception, at any time.

These criticisms do not seem realistic. Unfortunately, they have the tiresome tone of a lesson imparted by someone who assumes they always see things correctly and in greater depth than others. It is obvious that the existing power relations could not allow the Communards – who were given to rather ineffective measures such as banning bakers from working at night and removing religious symbols from school classrooms – the time and space to win an impossible contest. Engels’s sarcastic reproach in the same piece of writing is not kindly but entirely pertinent: “The most difficult thing to understand [in the actions of the Commune’s leaders] is the sacred respect which caused them to halt at the doors of the Bank of France. This was a serious political error. The bank in the Commune’s hands would have been worth more than ten thousand hostages.” It seems certain that Lenin kept these pages in mind as his guiding manual when he took power in Russia in November 1917.

In the first part of his introduction Engels returns again to the events of 1848, the June defeat, and the victory of Louis Bonaparte whom he nevertheless credits, taking his cue from Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, with having “blown up” the last bastion of the bourgeoisie, the National Assembly, with his coup d’état of December 2, 1851. However, he better conveys the nature of Bonaparte’s power when he writes: “he deprived the capitalists of political power with the pretext of protecting them from the workers, and in turn of protecting the workers from the bourgeoisie . . . but in return he favoured the rise and great financial gain of the whole of the bourgeoisie, to a previously unthinkable level.” Gone is the scenario of the “old mole” and his triumphant “second period”; in its place is a diagnosis that seems to fit the actions and defining characteristics of typically twentieth-century phenomena such as fascism.

There is one point to which Engels returns several times in this piece, written in 1891. Referring both to June 1848 and to the way the Communards were all *physically* and individually annihilated, he highlights the ferocious savagery of the bourgeois-republican government, blinded by its hatred for the rebellious proletariat. This too is a glance – perhaps unintentional, or prophetic – to the future. This too was a “lesson” that Lenin drew from this book, which was to guide his actions a few years later.

It is nevertheless entirely true that the “center of gravity” had shifted to Germany “thanks to the intelligence with which the German workers made use of universal suffrage, which was introduced in 1866,” Engels wrote in 1895. It is worth looking closely at this judgment, which is part of a broader *reflection on the state of health of this weapon in the struggle*. On the same page, the following observation stands out: “revolutionary workers in the Latin countries [*sic*] had come to regard the vote as a trap, as a tool the government used to hoodwink them. In Germany, it was anything but this. Already the *Communist Manifesto* had proclaimed the conquest of universal suffrage, of democracy, as one of the first and most important tasks etc.” This is a strange assertion, which seems to say that the exhortation in the *Manifesto* was aimed at *German* militants, whereas it applies in a *general* sense.

On the one hand, therefore, there were the Latin countries (France, now fed up with Bonapartist plebiscites, and Spain, accustomed to a high level of abstention in elections); on the other was the German socialist party with its growing, unstoppable momentum towards ever more resounding electoral successes. Engels presents these here as confirmation of, among other things, the German party’s capacity to increase its share of the vote even in the face of anti-socialist legislation. A little later he returns to Marx, without quoting him directly, apropos of the “program” of the French workers’ party, founded at Le Havre in 1880, whose preamble he wrote and which states that the party’s militants had been able to transform universal suffrage “from a deception, which it has been hitherto, into an instrument of emancipation” (“de duperie qu’il a été jusqu’ici, en instrument d’émancipation”).

These words are carefully weighed. Engels is standing before a turning point in history. He must take note of the overwhelming effects of “modernity” while not throwing overboard a tradition which has its own strategic implications. He writes: “Let us not be under any illusions: a true victory of rebels over the army in street battles, as if two armies were fighting, *is one of the rarest occurrences*.” He does not say it is impossible, but comes very close to doing so – conscious, obviously, that all the rebellions of the last half-century have been either perverted or crushed. It would be irresponsible not to make such an assessment. But it is a difficult one to make, and he does not

want to reach the conclusion that the electoral battle is the only possible one; certainly, he praises the German party, which is working miracles in elections. This is significant in itself. We know that some phrases and passages of this work, foreshadowed in *Vorwärts*, were used to lay claim to the great authority of the patriarch Engels by those who maintained that such a conclusion was drawn explicitly from the party itself. Engels protested. However, this work readily lends itself to such a reading.

His "escape clause" is the famous wording which may appear reticent but is also rich in political truths:

Even if universal suffrage had brought no other advantage than that of allowing us to count ourselves every three years, of having – thanks to the regular evidence of the rapid and unexpected growth in the number of votes – increased the workers' faith in victory and their adversaries' fear in equal measure, thus becoming our best instrument of propaganda, of giving us a precise idea of our strength, thus providing us with a criterion superior to any other for gauging our action, saving us from inappropriate timidity as much as from untimely recklessness: if this was the only advantage gained from the right to vote, it would be more than enough!

However, Engels adds, the right to vote "has done much more: in the turmoil of elections it has given us an unparalleled means to make contact with the masses where they are still distant from us, and to force all parties to defend themselves from our attacks before all the people." Moreover "it has offered a platform to our representatives in the Reichstag" from which we have spoken not only to parliament but to the country "with far greater authority and freedom than in the press or in rallies." A little later he observes that barricades – which were useful until 1848 – are now "outmoded."

There could be no clearer description of what was practically possible in the parliamentary struggle under the German empire. Yet the author cannot be suspected of Bismarckian or Wilhelmist sympathies! To Engels's observations can be added a technical detail that is far from insignificant. While in England, Italy, and France the electoral system was still based on the single-member constituency, in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland demands were growing for a system of proportional representation, as the only one that could ensure adequate representation for the minority (and for minorities).

There was a substantial caveat, however. The German empire had been built by the genius of Bismarck, founded on a duality that became unity on the basis of a recognized and accepted power relationship. This duality consisted of the Kingdom of Prussia on the one hand, and the empire on the other. Naturally, there were also Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria – but

the two fundamental entities were the Kingdom of Prussia (which *created* the empire) and the empire. These two were fused in the person of the kaiser, who was also king of Prussia. On a parliamentary level, however, they were separate. The Prussian chamber continued to be elected on the basis of quotas assigned to the three "classes" (the *Dreiklassensystem*: how wonderful to see the reactionaries themselves speak calmly of "classes" and not beat about the bush in defending their "class" privileges!). The Reichstag, which was the parliament of the whole empire, was elected by universal suffrage (with none of the restrictions that survived in France, or the ridiculous English contrivances that tied the right to vote to the status of the head of a family, or to the ownership or occupation of a house). The Prussian voting system guaranteed total domination by the powerful classes (Junkers and the military caste), which had made sure in advance that they would gain a great majority of parliamentary seats. In the imperial parliament, however, representation was not blocked but adjusted by the single-member constituency system. This clearly penalized the only party that created problems for the dominant classes – the socialist party, which alone remained always, or almost always, isolated at the second round of voting, because other parties formed electoral pacts with each other but not with the socialists. The socialists won seats only where they secured an absolute majority of the votes in a constituency. Still, demands for a change to the fairer system endured. These were locally successful: proportional representation was adopted for the Württemberg regional parliament and for the six Stuttgart representatives with the reform of 1906.

However, the essential point was the relationship between the emperor-king, the chancellor, the Prussian chamber, and the imperial parliament. The sovereign's dual role gave the Prussian chamber immense weight in practice. In order to avoid risks or misunderstandings in the two policy areas crucial to a power that was struggling to attain world domination – foreign policy and war (that is, military policy) – the imperial parliament *had no say in these*. The Prussian military caste – which, with heavy industry, was the force behind the drive for world domination in competition with England – was safeguarded: its decisions, made through the Prussian chamber, went straight to the emperor-king, and the chancellor was in any case answerable to him, not to the imperial parliament.

The latter became a great platform for disseminating propaganda, as Engels eloquently puts it: "a rostrum from which our representatives have been able to speak with far greater authority." Moreover, it was in parliament that the battles over social policy (in all its aspects, such as workers' rights, education, and so forth) were fought. Thus, though its area of operation was limited, the imperial parliament was not merely a platform

for political rallies; and the presence of the socialists, backed by a growing electoral consensus, was decisive. Also, the political struggle itself afforded a space for debate. Thus even the taboo issues of war and foreign policy were subjected to the "agitation" that could be whipped up to a greater or lesser extent in parliament.

This is why it was important to secure a change in the electoral law in favor of proportional representation: it was the only way to make universal suffrage effective and to give the large minority represented by the socialist party its due weight in parliament. Agitation to this end also occurred in other countries with parliamentary government. In England, the Proportional Representation Society was founded in 1885, soon followed by the French Société pour l'Étude de la Représentation Proportionnelle and the Belgian Association Réformiste. Proportional representation began to be established with its adoption by Austria in 1906. In Switzerland, political agitation led to its adoption in Neuenburg, Geneva, and the Ticino. Denmark approved it for elections to its upper chamber. Significantly, Italy did not adopt proportional representation until after the war, in its election of 1919. This was the first to be held under universal suffrage for men without the restrictions of the Giolitti law, and took place in a climate of rebellion by the masses that rewarded socialists and people's parties. However, the Mussolini government abolished proportional representation (under the Acerbo law) for the 1924 election.²

It is possible to look at Germany under Bismarck and Wilhelm from a different perspective, not antithetical but rather complementary to Engels's extraordinary writings (which in any case aimed to offer guidance to his party and put it on its guard against veering irreparably off course). This is Karl Liebknecht's description of the far-reaching effects of the servitude the Prussian ruling classes imposed on each citizen through the vast machine of military service. Here too it is important to specify "Prussian," because Bavaria certainly displayed different features and a different climate; it is clear that here Prussia was the deciding factor, the model for the empire. It is no coincidence that, when the war began to go against Germany and put its empire in crisis, the issue at stake in the domestic political struggle was the smashing of the Prussian power bloc. Political agitation in favor of this involved figures such as Max Weber as well as opposition parties that wanted to abolish the "Prussian electoral law."

The description is in Liebknecht's work entitled *Militarism and Antimilitarism with Special Regard to the International Young Socialist Movement*, written in 1907. It is the only work by this brave young deputy that is not a casual piece of writing but is wide-ranging and systematic. For having

circulated this pamphlet he was arrested and imprisoned for a year and half. This did not prevent him, however, from resuming the political struggle on his release, even more bravely than before. It cost him his life. He paints a realistic, truthful picture of Prussian “militarism” as an instrument of class domination within the framework of a parliamentary system.

Hard drilling and the discipline of the barracks, the canonization of the uniform of the officers and non-commissioned officers, which in many fields really seems to be *legibus solutus* and sacrosanct – in short, the discipline and control which clasp the soldier in an iron bond in everything he does or thinks, on or off duty – serve to produce the necessary flexibility and obedience of will. Each individual is so ruthlessly bent, pulled and twisted that the strongest spine is in danger of breaking, and either bends or breaks . . . There is an attempt to tame men in the way in which beasts are tamed. Recruits are drugged, confused, flattered, bribed, pressed, locked up, disciplined and beaten. Thus grain upon grain is mixed and kneaded to serve as mortar for the great edifice of the army, stone added to stone, calculated to form a fortress against revolution.³

This was the army-machine, as described at length by Arthur Rosenberg in the first chapter (entitled “Social Forces under Bismarck”) of what is perhaps his best book, *The Birth of the German Republic* (1928). It had its origin in the Potsdam of Frederick the Great, but the new militarism was forged as part of the plan for world domination, which would inevitably have led to a war between empires whose consequences could not have been foreseen. Besides the denunciation, crucially important in itself, Liebknecht’s description contains a precise reference point. Once again, it is the teaching and instructions that the great patriarch Engels gave to his party, the German party – the master and exemplar for all socialism in Europe. This is the essay entitled *Socialism in Germany (Der Sozialismus in Deutschland)*, which Engels wrote for the *Almanach du Parti Ouvrier* of December 1891 at the request of Laura Lafargue, Marx’s daughter and wife of the founder of the French workers’ party. This essay was widely circulated, from *Neue Zeit* to *Critica Sociale*, and *Przedswit* in Poland, and has points in common with the 1895 essay referred to several times above. As well as highlighting the German socialist party’s great and continuing electoral success, Engels develops an idea: that the power of German social democracy was not limited to its successes in elections; in parallel with these, a growing proportion of the army was socialist. This is obvious, but warrants examination because of its implications. He writes:

The minimum age for voting is 25, and for becoming a soldier 20. However, precisely because we recruit our new members above all among the young, we

may already have one soldier in five now, but soon we will have one soldier in three. Around 1900 the army – which used to be one of the typically “Prussian” elements of our country – will contain a majority of socialists. The government is aware of this too, but can do nothing about it.⁴

Liebknecht disputes the older man’s exaggerated optimism, though he does not quote him directly. “Certainly a large part of the army is ‘red’ already,” he writes, but immediately corrects the figures, explaining that between the ages of 20 and 22 young soldiers do not yet have the political experience they acquire later when, aged 25, they become voters. Above all, he sounds an alarm: it is not true that the government does not know what to do: on the contrary, it has introduced hours of teaching against social democracy as part of the training of recruits. As stated above, Liebknecht, who was already a city councillor in Berlin, was imprisoned for having written this book condemning the practices in the army. In short Liebknecht – still extremely young – was putting into sharp focus what had eluded the elder patriarch of European socialism: the radical changes in the structure of the adversary. It had by now become a “massive” power, to use an adjective dear to Gramsci, *with a firm grip on society*, founded on the centrality of the military caste. This new development was to yield unprecedented results during the decisive years of the First World War, and immediately afterwards.

Engels’s testament is naïve and optimistic. According to him, the party is growing “in a spontaneous, constant, irresistible way, but at the same time calmly, as through a natural process.” His forecasts are arbitrary: “at this rate, by the end of the century we will have conquered the greater part of the middle classes, the petits bourgeois and small farmers, and we will have become the decisive power in the country before which all other powers must bow.” However, all this is not only largely unfounded – for example, he neglects the people’s variant represented by the “Center party” (*Deutsche Zentrumspartei*) – but it leads up a strategic blind alley. Certainly, he forecasts that it will be “the parties of order” that will “smash the legality that has become so fatal to them,” but he gives no indication as to how the socialist party – increasingly successful in elections – would react to such a dramatic development. Certainly he addresses socialism’s adversaries in an imaginary dialogue, and forewarns them that, faced with illegal attack, social democracy would react. He cannot say how, though: instead, he dodges the question with an empty claim (“it takes good care not to tell you today what it will do then”). Engels concludes by taking refuge in a historical parallel that is dear to him (his essay *On the History of Early Christianity* dates from 1894) and became so to at least some left-wing

thinkers, from Isaac Deutscher to Arnold Toynbee: the suggestive and hopeful comparison with the "irresistible" victory of Christianity over the Roman empire. It is a weak device, whose analogical and strategic value is easily demolished. We need only consider that its underlying assumption is questionable, and that in any case Christianity's victory lay to a large extent in its adhesion to the empire's economic and social order. The comparison is thus scientifically flimsy and politically not very instructive.

The old patriarch belonged to another generation, which had already had its illusions and its defeats. Now he did not fully understand the world that was rapidly changing around him, hurtling towards the terrifying, unprincipled era of the struggle between different imperialisms, when political democracy would rapidly become a superfluous gadget.

A foretaste of what was to descend upon Europe and the rest of the world can be found in an important speech Winston Churchill gave to the Commons on May 13, 1901, in which he urged a drastic strengthening of the British navy:

In former days, when wars arose from individual causes, from the policy of a Minister or the passion of a King, when they were fought by small regular armies of professional soldiers, and when their course was retarded by the difficulties of communication and supply, and often suspended by the winter season, it was possible to limit the liabilities of the combatants. But now, when mighty populations are impelled on each other, each individual severally embittered and inflamed – when the resources of science and civilisation sweep away everything that might mitigate their fury, a European war can only end in the ruin of the vanquished and the scarcely less fatal commercial dislocation and exhaustion of the conquerors. (vol. 1, p. 82)

He ended this tirade, faintly reminiscent of Demosthenes,⁵ by observing: "Democracy is more vindictive than Cabinets. *The wars of peoples will be more terrible than those of kings.*" This is a curious use of the term "democracy," by someone who certainly had no love for it, to denote the mobilization of large numbers of people by government policies. It is a definition suited to an age – the age of warring imperialisms – in which the involvement of the masses in power politics took place through types of political organization whose chief function was to free the masses from socialism's influence. Indeed, this was one of the essential, and most dangerous, features of the new imperialisms.

In Germany – "modernized" at last, as much by Wilhelm II as by Bismarck – mass reactionary movements became established. These included the *Alldeutscher Verband*, an important and alarming forerunner of what at the height of the war and during the first years of the Republic

would become the *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*, a reactionary party with millions of members, ready to carry out a *putsch* given the chance, and closely linked to the higher ranks of the military (hence its leaders' essential immunity). The *Alldeutscher Verband* was the chief extra-parliamentary pressure group, and widely feared. Alongside it operated other, similar organizations, such as the *Flottenverein* and the *Ostmarkenverein* (the famous *Hakatisten*, so called from their three founders' initials), which advocated forced Germanization of the Polish provinces of Posen and Westpreussen. All were tinged with racism and anti-Semitism, though in this they were no worse than their French counterparts, which had shown their colors in the Dreyfus case, or their English ones (not to mention the genocide of the Sioux given a "democratic" blessing by Theodore Roosevelt).⁶

The chief means of winning over the masses to such policies – under universal suffrage and at a time when socialist organizations were bent on securing the biggest possible representation, if not a majority in parliament – was the creation of other mass parties. These needed to be as attractive as the socialist parties, able to counterbalance them, and above all capable of preventing their electoral parliamentary victory, which Engels had believed would be only a matter of time and preventable only by force. The French second empire had led the way in this. After the Commune, the radical party had asserted itself, following the dispersion of the workers' parties, as the classic party of the lay bourgeoisie and of small rural landowners. In Germany the Catholic party (*Zentrumspartei*) competed with the social democrats for the working-class vote, and until the war won between 20 percent and 25 percent of parliamentary seats. In Italy the problem was not a pressing one: even after the reform of 1912 voter apathy prevailed, and the electoral law preserved the liberals' large parliamentary majority intact. In a more general sense, it was the single-member constituency which, until the 1914–18 war, allowed socialist parties to be isolated and penalized electorally. After the war, with universal suffrage and proportional representation, the formation of mass anti-socialist parties became more difficult, as we shall see, but in the end it proved deadly. We need mention only in passing the decisive factor of the *economic hold* that capital had on the whole of society. In *The Crisis of Democracy* (1936) Otto Bauer writes: "Since the war we have seen how left-wing governments founded on large parliamentary majorities have had to capitulate before manoeuvres on the stock market and resign, despite their parliamentary majorities, handing power to the parties and the men whom the stock market trusted."⁷

A whole current of criticism of the way "parliamentary democracies" actually worked began to develop this argument, identifying the lasting, dominant presence of elites within political systems that were usually

described not only as "parliamentary" but also "democratic." It was also the argument used by the empire's leaders during the war to unmask – in the name of a "Germanic democracy" distinct from and opposite to the "Western" variety – allied propaganda. There was talk of the "ideas of 1914" as against those of 1889. The concept of "Germanic democracy" was a hazy one, essentially centered on the banal idea (distantly related to Tacitus and the ancient German *comitatus*) of the "spontaneous subordination to the leader," obviously now the kaiser. What was pertinent, however, was the criticism by these ideologues of the basis of the "Western" practice of democracy, where they saw all-powerful heavy industry, a subservient press, party systems dominated by a professional and self-referential political "class," and workers' involvement via unscrupulous trade unionism which had become an integral part of the system, as well as being shamelessly nationalist and imperialist (jingoism). By contrast the (idealized) image of Germanic democracy hinged on three elements: the army (which coincided with the people), the bureaucracy, and the sovereign. In January 1918, Wilamowitz wrote:

Our army is one and the same as that part of the people that is fit to bear arms, and the unconditional obedience of the soldier arouses, in the free German man, the loyalty typical of the ancient, Germanic spirit of subordination... The loyalty of the Prussians to their sovereign is the cornerstone of German power. Our monarchy is the Palladio of our liberty. It is our monarchy that protects us from tyranny: let anyone who prefers the latter go to America! Under Wilson, they shall find it. But there is also a tyranny of money, of the parliamentary clique, of party politics that is mitigated only by the periodic changes in the individuals who profit by it.⁸

The "classic" charge is clearly that parliaments were corrupt in the "Western" countries where – precisely – parliamentary systems were unchecked in their relations and intrigues with economic potentates, with no "external" and overriding power (which in "Germanic democracy" would be the kaiser). Eduard Meyer, the great Berlin historian, wrote in 1916 that "Western" (*westliche*) democracy contradicted its own principles, not only because parliamentary mediation was delegation but because behind the façade lay powerful economic forces and corporations, as well as union mandarins, who in fact governed the country. Politicians were recruited through a process of selection in reverse. Meyer drew on his vast experience of American society, which he studied directly a few years earlier. In a remarkably eloquent passage he paints a picture of the recruitment of the political class in the US, from politicians to bosses to party fixers. Democracy has entered a blind alley: anyone who wants to reassert its principles

consistently must "end up taking the same road as Robespierre."⁹ In his 1891 preface to Marx's *The Civil War in France*, written 20 years earlier and dealing with the Commune, Engels also tellingly portrays political corruption as inherent in American "democracy":

In no other country do *politicians* constitute an isolated, powerful clan as much in North America. Here, each of the two large parties that alternately take power is run by people who turn politics into a business, who speculate on seats . . . they live off political agitation for their party, and after it has won they are repaid with seats . . . Here there is no dynasty, nobility, or army (apart from a small body of soldiers entrusted with keeping watch over the Indian population), nor bureaucracy with secure jobs and pension rights. There are two great rackets of political speculators who collaborate to take control of state power alternately and exploit it by the most corrupt means and to the most repugnant ends. The nation is powerless before these two great cartels of politicians who claim they are serving it but in fact subjugate and plunder it.¹⁰

The other regime targeted by this blistering denunciation of the intertwining of corruption and politics is, as we know, the Third Republic in France, notorious for scandals such as "l'affaire des décorations," which led to the resignation of President Grévy, "l'affaire des fiches," and later, in the 1930s, financial scandals, most famously "l'affaire Stavisky," which ruined several politicians' careers. Italy too had its fair share, in the Banca Romana scandal which swept away Crispi. Thomas Mann powerfully expresses his contempt for all this in a passage of his torrential war book *Observations of an Unpolitical Man* (1918) in which, among other things, he invents an apt term for the champion of Western so-called "democracy": the "rhetor-bourgeois."

The process by which "democratic" politics was tamed by the dominant economic powers is described penetratingly and comprehensively in Otto Bauer's *Crisis of Democracy*, which embraces European history from 1848 until after the war:

Democracy is born of class struggles in capitalist society. It is born in the context of the capitalist social order. In this society, capitalism endures; private ownership of the means of production remains concentrated in the hands of capitalists; therefore the capitalists' domination of the workers endures. The state, however, abolishes suffrage based on wealth, which guaranteed the capitalists' political hegemony: workers, peasants, and petits bourgeois become citizens with full rights, and the number of their votes dominates the state. Marx writes: "The contradiction running through this entire system, however, is that the classes whose social servitude it is intended to perpetuate – proletariat, peasants, and petits bourgeois – are given political power by

universal suffrage, whereas the class whose ancient power the system sanctions – the bourgeoisie – is deprived of the political guarantees of that power. The bourgeoisie is forced to dominate politically in democratic conditions that favour the victory of its enemy classes at any time, and that call into question the very foundations of bourgeois society.” However this contradiction, exacerbated in periods of severe social unrest, has been resolved quickly and painlessly in the day-to-day practices of capitalism’s ascending development. *The capitalist class has succeeded in transforming even democracy’s institutions into instruments of its own class domination.*¹¹

Confirmation of the dominance achieved not only over the entire political system but even, significantly, over the socialist parties themselves (apart from dissenting minorities) came in the summer of 1914, when these parties joined the “patriotic” front, pompously and rather comically known as the *union sacrée* in France. Edmond Vermeil wrote, referring to Germany: “Very few writers or artists were able to resist the delirium caused by the general enthusiasm and the sacred union.”¹² The same could be said of all the other countries at war. It is usual – rightly – to highlight the “winning of hearts and minds,” the capacity of militaristic propaganda to inveigle everyone and to exploit intellectuals. It is also common, and correct, to emphasize how various socialist parties slid into their respective countries’ imperialist or sub-imperialist policies – a theme to which we shall return shortly. What is not always underlined so clearly is the chief phenomenon that the First World War produced in the development of parliamentary “democracy” in Europe. This was the crisis in that institution: the most serious it was to suffer before the arrival of fascism, and which indeed made way for authoritarian political solutions – first and foremost, Italian fascism. In Italy, in particular, entry into the war was imposed on the country in May 1915 by means of a sort of royal coup d’état. After this, obviously, parliamentary activity was stopped, and parliaments elected before the conflict were “sent into hibernation.” However, their grip on public affairs, first and foremost the most important of these – the war – was gradually being diminished in *all* the countries at war, whether these were the “democracies” allied with the tsar or the brutal (according to allied propaganda) “autocracies” of Central Europe. The power of the military caste grew enormously: during the last year of the war Germany was under what was in effect a dictatorship of General Ludendorff (future leader of Hitler’s early “adventures”). Almost everywhere, a general experiment in “doing without” parliamentary government was under way. This move towards authoritarian government was to have far-reaching consequences long after the war had ended; entrapment of the socialists was one stage, and an important part, of that process.

Afterwards, when sanity returned, they were known contemptuously as "social-patriots." At first, though, only small minority groups dissociated themselves. Italians and Russians belonging to the "Bolshevist" faction led by Lenin stayed out of the general patriotic warmongering drift. Jean Jaurès, a man of moral stature and an intelligent politician and historiographer, fought for peace to the end: he was assassinated on July 31, 1914, by a right-wing fanatic. By the time his funeral took place on August 4, the "sacred unions" had taken shape everywhere – despite the last-minute efforts of union leaders, and the meeting of the French and German socialists on August 1, which had ended in agreement to abstain over the issue of war credits. Each party toed the government line, bowing to the general mobilization. Anyone who continued to dissent was treated as an enemy agent.

This was the nadir: an abyss, just two years after the zenith of 1912, when the SPD won some 4,250,000 votes out of 12,000,000 in the German elections, and Europe seemed, as Fernand Braudel wrote, "on the edge of socialism." It is too easy, however, to judge those decisions clearly with hindsight, and this should not overshadow our understanding of the *mechanism* that had led to such a disastrous outcome. That mechanism was the inevitable, progressive *integration* that accompanies the process of becoming part of the system. It was easier for the Russian social democrats (of the "majority" faction) to escape the momentum that dragged along all the others, for their status as an outlaw party in direct opposition to autocracy protected them from patriotic tendencies. The Italians, too, were in a different situation: not by chance had Engels repeatedly pointed out, in his "testament" of 1895, that the "Latin" parties were at bottom still extremists and not committed to the electoral parliamentary struggle. The fact is that – though they were divided, crushed, and blackmailed after Caporetto – the Italian socialists were better able to withstand the rising tide of the patriotic orgy.

This did not happen overnight. War had threatened in Europe during previous years too, for the clash of imperialisms had been in the air for some time. Wilhelm II had made no secret of his intentions. France had an ample reserve of revanchist grievances at the ready. England could not tolerate that Germany, whose fleet was growing daily, should undermine its world empire: it was prepared to use all means to secure an alliance with Russia to unleash that giant on the Reich's eastern borders. This was the overall picture. A letter written by Engels in October 1891 is striking for the tone in which – faced with the risks of a war against an alliance of France with Russia – the old patriarch goes so far as to say: "If Russia wins, we shall be oppressed. Forward then, if Russia starts a war, forward against the

Russians and their allies, whoever they may be!... We have not forgotten the glorious example set by the French in 1793; if pressed, we may yet celebrate the centenary of 1793 by showing that the German workers of 1893 are worthy of the sans-culottes of that year."¹³ In a letter written the following year he even says that in Germany "the revolution cannot but start with the army." In short, the embracing of the government in the name of the fatherland, by Scheidemann and those like him, had a long history.

It also found support – and this shows how the German case is special – in the inter-class solidarity which government and intellectuals were loudly proclaiming in the name of "Germanic" and "organicistic democracy" in those months of collective delirium during the summer of 1914. Wilamowitz, a luminary of the University of Berlin, writes in his *Reflections in Time of War*: "There must be no class or religious conflict between superiors and subordinates, between the educated and the uneducated. Unity is the sign of our people's vigour. The blood of a prince's son, the blood of a noble socialist leader, have bound it firmly together. Cursed be he who tries to undermine it!" (An example was Rosa Luxemburg, the Jew who explained, at her peril, that "the main enemy" was in one's own country.)¹⁴ During this period Wilamowitz also wrote:

No one in Germany need feel alone, *unless it be through their own fault* [this almost sounds like a threat]. Never has the individual counted for so much in the state's eyes, and never have the authorities interfered so deeply in the life of the individual by injunctions and prohibitions. Never have they been obeyed so spontaneously. This is the blessing of our military education: it inculcates the sense of responsibility in those who are in command, and the idea that obedience is necessary in those who obey.¹⁵

The young Liebknecht had been right in pointing to the army as the place where consensus was forged.

The Third Republic

One episode set the scene for the French Third Republic: the mass shooting of *tens of thousands* of Communards. Two men share the credit equally for this operation: Edmé Mac-Mahon, the marshal who led the operation and endorsed the “week of blood,” and Gallifet, the general who after directing the massacres “nobly” refused promotion because he had “triumphed over Frenchmen.” Mac-Mahon later even became president of the republic (1873–9), immediately after Thiers (1871–3). Mac-Mahon put the number of those “shot on the spot” at about 15,000; General Appert counted 17,000; and Georges Bourgin, though aiming low, endorsed a figure of 20,000.¹ However, the total now accepted by most authorities, from Albertini to Bonnefous, is of at least 30,000 shot dead.² This figure relates only to “immediate” executions. To this “first” wave of savage repression must be added the endless series of trials of the 40,000 people arrested, of whom 10,137 were sentenced to various punishments, including the harshest. Finally, to these figures must be added the hundreds who were shot when the barricades were breached and the *fédérés* still under arms surrendered. In his monumental *Les Convulsions de Paris* (1878/9) Maxime du Camp writes: “The population was basely cruel. After two months of the enforcement of the Commune, it did not even try to contain its fury; on the contrary, it multiplied it one hundredfold and rendered it hateful.” There is thus a second element to this opening scene: the furious hostility of the *majority*, and the denunciation of people who were only vaguely suspicious.

Rarely, even in our bloody twentieth century, have so many people been shot dead at one time. This event left an indelible mark. The victors chose to annihilate their class enemies *en bloc*: to kill *all the active protagonists in a*

failed attempt to change the political and social order. This was a fine example of a class massacre in the heart of “civilized” Europe – indeed, in its acknowledged capital. The bourgeoisie wanted to show that it knew how to use the “methods of ’93” even against the proletariat. In trying to establish “who started” the civil war that lasted throughout the twentieth century – a quest that is still continuing – this is an important precedent to bear in mind.

This terrible birth was pushed into the background, and then forgotten, because of the convulsions that followed it: the difficult beginnings of a “republic” in which “republicans” were certainly not in the majority, the risk of a restoration of the monarchy (which failed thanks to the comical stubbornness of the count of Chambord, “legitimate” heir and a potential Henry V, in rejecting the tricolor and insisting on lilies on a white background), the party alliances between Orléanists and Bonapartists with their eye on electoral victory by the new monarchy, and the failed coups d’état. For many years after that “class genocide,” socialism was weak in France; perhaps this is the dominant feature of the Third Republic, at least until the war. The first cause the left attempted to fight for in parliament was that of amnesty for those sentenced after the Commune. This met with intense hostility in the “republican” ranks (the term essentially denoted the non-monarchist “centre”). The repression ordered by Thiers, it was pointed out, “had served to gain acceptance for the Republic in the provinces.”³ Unfortunately, the massacred Communards were in no position to appreciate having been sacrificed for the Republic, nor could they have suspected that the victorious “majority” would require human sacrifices in the manner of certain primitive deities.

A further aspect of the defeat of democracy from which the Third Republic rose was – as might be expected, and as has happened each time democracy suffered a reverse – voter apathy. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century, the anonymous author of the *Suffrage* entry in *La Grande Encyclopédie* – the work of its kind most typical of the “ruling spirit” of the Third Republic – states with polite cynicism:

Universal suffrage, with all its advantages and considerable faults, nevertheless seems such an essential institution that even the count of Paris has been obliged to accept it as part of his program for restoring the monarchy.⁴ The real problem [he adds] is a different one: to see how it works in practice. In theory it should represent *government by numerical principles* but in reality, thanks to the high level of voter abstentions (between 20 and 30 percent) and to the formation of minorities that are sometimes very strong, the result is that more than half of voters have no direct representation in parliamentary assemblies.

This warrants comment. The author means that the single-member constituency system *excludes* minorities from parliamentary representation. This is well known: minorities and minority parties either steer their voters towards other parties' candidates (if they can) or "waste" the votes they receive (as the elegant expression goes) because these do not result in anyone being elected. When minorities are large, but still "isolated" in the party game, a very high proportion of *votes cast* remains unrepresented. This, combined with a high level of abstentions, produces the result that the anonymous author condemns: the majority of those who have the right to vote are excluded from representation.

The entry goes on to an interesting comparison of voting statistics from the elections of 1881, 1885, and 1893:

	<i>votes cast</i>	<i>abstentions</i>
1881	6,944,531	3,180,000
1885	7,896,062	2,433,948
1893	7,427,354	3,018,894

On average, for every two people who voted, one abstained. But in 1848, 1851, and 1857 (Second Republic and Second Empire) the abstention trend was as follows:

	<i>votes cast</i>	<i>abstentions</i>
1848	6,867,072	1,453,592
1851 (plebiscite)	8,140,660	1,698,416
1857 (legislative body)	6,222,083	3,268,123

There is a clear upsurge in the number of abstentions once the Bonapartist system, though triumphantly victorious at the beginning, had become a regime, within the somnolent framework of the Empire. During the Third Republic abstentions were at the same level as during the less politicized imperial period.

The conclusion drawn by the author (who presents the figures for 1848–57 in a less clear fashion because he wants to present the phenomenon as stable and "organic")⁵ is that "in *almost* all cases the number of votes that elect parliamentary representatives do not equal even half the number of voters." This is a significant detail in French electoral practice, and pertains to the methods used to "control" voting, which was done at polling station

level. Only in 1913, and after protracted resistance from the senate, were polling booths introduced, together with envelopes in which to seal voting slips (handed out to voters “officially” by the polling station supervisors) thus guaranteeing secret ballots. It is easy to see how voting could be controlled, especially in “deepest” provincial France, under a system as open to interference as that in place until 1913 – all the more so given the central role mayors had in elections. Significantly, it was Knupfer who resentfully denounced this astonishing phenomenon, in the *Staatslexikon* of the Catholic Görresgesellschaft (II, 1926⁵, p. 138). Coming from the heart of the most distinguished German Catholic historiography, the comment has a special flavor given that France under the Third Republic, after the *séparation* of 9 December 1905 (the unilateral rejection of the Concordat dating from the time of Napoleon) had become the symbolic home of bourgeois anticlericalism.⁶

At the end of 1920 James Bryce – a former British ambassador to Washington and author of two studies of empire, *The Holy Roman Empire* and *The American Commonwealth* – wrote a study on modern democracies, with a brief preface on Greece. It was precisely with reference to the French Third Republic that he dealt with the “profession” of member of parliament. With considerable irony, he writes: “Deputies will abuse one another in the Chamber and forthwith fraternize in the corridors, profuse in compliments on one another’s eloquence. The atmosphere is one of a friendly *camaraderie*, which condemns acridity or vindictiveness.” He then moves on to a subject that is always delicate and often avoided: the economic self-advancement that makes elected representatives into a class. “A deputy receives a salary of 27,000 francs a year. The sum used to be 9,000 francs, but in 1906 the deputies voted themselves an increase up to the present figure, rather to the displeasure of the country.” Here he asks: “Are they then fairly described as professional politicians?” and replies: “Comparatively few have entered the Chamber merely to make a living, though there are many whose effort to remain there is more active because they have abandoned their former means of livelihood.”

Bryce is aware that the central point is not their greed as a class, though this obviously exists, but the members’ links with the big centers of economic power:

It is customary for a deputy to appear before his constituents at least once a year, as in England, and to give a review of the political situation, which furnishes an opportunity for questioning him on his conduct. It is not,

however, by his action in the *grande politique* of the Chamber that a deputy (other than a Socialist) usually stands or falls.

This means that the relationship between voters and elected representatives presented a façade of being based on *choice of party*, but was in fact based on specific, “private” interests which the representative offered (or was asked) to safeguard for the voter. This was the reason for the fluid, fluctuating nature of party representation in parliament (socialists aside). Bryce himself notes, elsewhere in his study, that after the 1920 elections there were more than 20 elected deputies with no party affiliations whatsoever. So far, we are dealing merely with normal parliamentary routine – the personal safeguard of interests in exchange for votes. What is more important is that “Those few who are supposed to represent great financial or commercial interests need not greatly fear the attacks of extreme partisans in their districts, for they are likely to have the means provided them of securing by various influences the fidelity of the bulk of their constituents.” This amounts to saying that, since they were in the service of economic potentates, they could buy all the votes they wanted.

Bryce observes therefore: “The chief differences between the professional politician of France and him of America is that the latter depends even more on his party organization than on what he secures for his constituents, that he can seldom count on a long tenure of his seat or of an administrative post, and that he can more easily find a business berth if he is sent back to private life.” In both cases “business” ends up by being the main activity, as well as the main goal, of entry into the political class.⁷

Another element in the picture is the special nature of the “upper” chamber – the senate – an institution given the role of being highly representative on a personal level, and acting as a balancing force on an operational one.

It consisted of 314 members (initially 300) elected for a nine-year term, a third of the seats coming up for re-election every three years. Its composition was the result of a complex “second tier” electoral procedure. It was elected by certain “electors by right” (the deputies, general councillors, and district councillors in each department) and “senatorial delegates” (elected by department local councils one month before the election of the senators themselves). It was thus a perfectly conservative legislative body, a distillation and the quintessence of the establishment, which explains why it was here that resistance was strongest to the abolition of an electoral system that allowed local notables to exercise direct control over how their own electorate voted.

The most striking thing about French elections until the end of the Third Republic (despite the interlude of the electoral victory of the “Popular Front” in 1936) was the fluctuating size of majorities, which ranged from the precar-

ious to the vast and were made up of groups mostly described as republicans or radicals. A glance at these groups helps to explain the reasons for this.

The right-wing parties, which were chiefly monarchists of various tendencies, had been in the majority until early in the Mac-Mahon presidency (1876), when they lost it partly as a result of the constant splits between legitimists, Orléanists, and Bonapartists. They were soon reduced to a marginal fringe in parliament. The monarchists then concentrated on religious issues, and on opposing the anticlerical policies of “radical” governments, which at the time of the Combes ministry had led to the *séparation*. To combat this sort of French-style *Kulturkampf*, a group named “Action Libérale Populaire” was formed, which was especially strong in the Vendée and Brittany.

Once the monarchist threat had receded, the republicans split into moderates (Gambetta’s “opportunists”) and “radicals.” Further fragmentation at this end of the political spectrum produced groups that went under various names – “progressives,” led by Méline, “republicans of the left,” “democratic republicans,” and so forth. All were in fact on the center-right, and advocated rigidly conservative economic and social policies.

The dominant group, which could be described as center-left, were the radicals. They too were an agglomeration, formed from a merger of the “Gauche Radicale” and Georges Clemenceau’s “Groupe Républicain Radical-Socialiste” (who, early on, had vainly tried to mediate between the Commune and Thiers). Their ideology was strictly “retrospective” – a constant harking back to the values of the French Revolution (Congress of Nancy, 1907) – but also a firm rejection of the class struggle and “all forms of violence in politics” (which was slightly forgetful of how savage the Republic’s own birth had been). However, this position in the political and social battle was not an immutable one. Like their remote forerunners of 1793, the radicals needed to choose one direction or the other. Their secularism could not supply the answers to concrete problems and renewed conflicts; their democratic beliefs led them towards moderate forms of anti-monopolism, and to proclaim themselves the defenders of medium-sized and small property-owners against the industrial giants. Later, in 1935, their manifesto asserted that: “There will come a time when the law must firmly establish the principles of the distribution of wealth and worker participation in industry.” It continued: “This peaceful revolution will lead to the mingling of classes and to social justice.” Under the leadership of Edouard Herriot the radical party rapidly became the most powerful in France, winning 25 percent of the vote in the 1919 election and 35 percent in 1924. The figure fell to 19–20 percent in 1932, and in 1936 the radicals joined the “Popular Front”; this did not prevent them, though, from looking at first rather favorably on Pétain when disaster struck.

The other party that gradually occupied the stage was the small cluster of socialists, which had long been divided into orthodox socialists and “possibilists.” However, despite the able leadership of Jean Jaurès, they had no influence on the country’s political direction until 1914. Their adherence to the *union sacrée* following the murder of Jaurès further weakened them and exacerbated their internal divisions. In 1920, at the congress of Tours, they suffered the Communist split.

Bryce makes further observations that help to understand the workings of this republic. He writes that, apart from the socialist deputies:

He [a candidate] stands on his own account, just as candidates did in Britain in the middle of last century, before parties had begun to be locally organized. When he issues his address, it is accompanied by a list of his chief local supporters, who constitute a sort of general committee [...] Other candidates may come forward belonging to the same or a nearly allied section of the Republican party, each recommending himself less by the particular character of his views than by his personal merits and by the fervour of his promises to serve the material interests of the constituency [...] There is, however, no established practice [for the holding of second ballots], and an Advanced Radical may feel himself nearer to a Socialist than to a Republican of a less vivid hue, while some moderate Republicans differ but slightly from Conservatives.

Acute French observers distinguish two types of election. In one there is a more or less avowed coalition on the platform of anti-clericalism by the various groups of the Centre and the Left against the groups of the Right. The other type shows a sort of combination or co-operation of the Centre, or Moderate Republicans, with the Right on the platform of anti-Socialism and “social order” against the Socialists and more advanced Radicals. The election of 1906 belonged to the former type, the election of 1919 the latter.

What astonishes Bryce – accustomed as he is to the flexible electoral practices of English-speaking countries – is that local electoral committees have virtually no communication with the “party” leadership in Paris over political co-ordination.

The reason is that the bulk of the citizens are less definitely committed to any one party than they are in the English-speaking countries, and that the groupings in the Chamber are not generally represented by like groupings over the country at large. [He concludes] The local committees are rather what used to be called in Scotland “cliques” ... Sometimes there is in the clique a strong man who fills the place of the American Boss, but more frequently the deputy is himself a sort of Boss.⁸

This analysis, which goes to the heart of the workings of parliament, can usefully be read in conjunction with the book that has described perhaps better than any other the perpetuation, and enduring burden, of the bourgeoisie's "great dynasties" during the French Second Empire and Third Republic. Emmanuel Beau de Loménie began to write *Les Responsabilités des Dynasties Bourgeoises* when he was little more than 40 years old, as the Third Republic was dying beneath the blows of the German invasion. "The great French dynasties continue to wield power; indeed, amid the general collapse of institutions, they are more influential than ever," he writes in the introduction. Certainly, the most forceful part of this important book is the description of the "osmosis" (which goes as far as interchangeability) between political groupings.

Historians usually assert that in the senate the conservatives won, after all, a majority of only a few votes, whereas in the chamber the republicans had considerable success. In theory this is true, *if we look only at labels*. The senate minority that was described as republican included not only members recruited from the ranks of the Orléanists, voted into office in the election of life members, but also, among the members elected in the January poll... a Cunin-Gridaine, son of Louis Philippe's minister, and Waddington, former minister under Thiers [the pre-1848 Thiers].

This continuity of the bourgeois elite – that is, of money – and its firm grip on French society meant that there was no difference, in effect, between political groupings. A case that illustrates this is that of General Boulanger, would-be leader of a Bonapartist-style coup in 1886, who was courted by both political groups and was in any case originally a "creation" of Clemenceau.⁹

However, the figure that embodies parliamentary practice in the Third Republic is not Boulanger but Pierre Laval (born in 1883 and executed on October 15, 1945), especially because of his career trajectory and the various stages through which it passed. Initially he was mayor of Aubervilliers, and in 1914 was elected a socialist deputy in the Seine department. When war broke out he even appeared on "*carnet B*," the list of extremists who were to be arrested in the event of mobilization.¹⁰ After the war was over he left the socialist party, and in 1919 failed to be re-elected. He was returned in 1924, but as an "independent." He soon chose to transfer to the senate where, even more than in single-member constituencies, being elected depended on patronage and the influence of the establishment. He became a senator in 1927. He was subsequently minister of public works under Painlevé, a supreme exponent of radical socialism, and under-secretary at

the presidency and the foreign ministry under Aristide Briand (1925–6). Laval returned to power in 1930, as minister of labor in the cabinet of Tardieu, leader of the “republican center.” He was almost continuously in government from then until the “Popular Front” won in 1936, mostly as prime minister but often as foreign minister in all the center or center-right coalitions, alternating especially with Flandin, who was also involved in the Vichy adventure. He was a sly, unscrupulous specimen of a self-referential and unsinkable political caste, perfectly at ease in the type of “democracy” that the Third Republic was until its ignominious end. The “Vichyist” conclusion to his career was logical in a sense, if suicidal.

Two lives need to be compared if we are to understand the contradictions, idealistic assumptions, and mistakes summed up by the words “Third Republic”: they are Jean Jaurès and Georges Clemenceau. The first was leader of the socialists – indeed, the architect of their reunification at the Salle du Globe congress in Paris on April 25, 1905; the second was leader of the socialist-radicals, having made his début in politics as mayor of Montmartre at the height of the Commune’s turmoil. Their friendship and political closeness were broken when Clemenceau, having become minister for the first time in his life at the age of 65, in 1906, smashed the strikes of Lens and Denain with an iron fist. One was driven by a vision of the nation under arms, brought to victory by a band of leaders devoted to the “République”; the other was at first a gradualist and moderate, who never lost sight of the class origin of conflicts. Jaurès was assassinated on the eve of that fatal August of 1914, for having opposed the war and the resulting (predictable) disintegration of the socialists. Clemenceau enjoyed his most successful period as leader of the war government, beginning in 1917, when it seemed that the allies were losing. He believed he embodied a renewed patriotic-republican epic, a repetition of the unforeseen, overwhelming victories of 1793–4, while he did not disdain to grant political sanction to the repressive, murderous harshness of the French generals. The warning that the second time round is a farce never occurred to him, either. Indeed, he received a stinging disappointment in his postwar attempt to become president of the republic in 1920, and retired, outraged, from public life to write his memoirs. He wrote an over-excited book on Demosthenes (1926), in which the author’s own life, ample self-esteem, and final delusions were clearly apparent to everyone. Greek “democracy” – revisited, as always, like an oracle – was once again used as a mirror for modern times.

Between 1901 and 1904 Jaurès had produced the monumental *Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française*. Its most agonized chapter deals with the Terror and its tragic “inevitability,” the only means to ensure “the unity of the Revolution.”¹¹ For his part Clemenceau – who had also developed an

idea of the Revolution as a “bloc” from which nothing could be amputated and which, therefore, needed to be preserved *in toto*, Terror included – had also wanted to make a public gesture consistent with this. He asked to be present at Aulard’s opening lecture of March 12, 1886, when the first Sorbonne chair in History of the French Revolution – established at the behest of Millerand and occupied by Aulard himself – was solemnly inaugurated.

There was a misunderstanding lurking at the heart of this concordance of views. For Clemenceau the Terror was the extreme instrument used to achieve the patriotic victory against the invader. In this he agreed with Charles Maurras, champion of the Committee of Public Safety as a tool for effective “resistance against the foreigner.” The founder of Action Française wrote in *Le Soleil* of March 17, 1900: “Public safety: this formula has inspired all that is courageous, honourable, and patriotic in the French Revolution.” The following year, Léon de Montesquiou was to publish *Le Salut public*. For Jaurès, though, the Terror was also – perhaps above all – the atrociously summary instrument of a necessary justice. It was not the Danton who organized military revolt that was reviled by the “other France” which, not unexpectedly, emerged at Vichy. Rather, it was the radical, abolitionist Danton of the decree of 16 Pluviôse, and above all Robespierre, who was seen, rightly or wrongly, as the initiator of a class war within the nation itself. It was Jaurès who first published Robespierre’s comment, perhaps dating from September 1793: “When will the interests of the rich become one with those of the people? Never.”

When Vichy buried the Third Republic, it seemed for a long time that the “other France” had won the contest, which had lasted more than a century.

The Second Failure of Universal Suffrage

The tactic of the gradualist, unionized, electoral struggle was born of the crushing of the Commune as much as of Bismarck's "antisocialist laws." It was an approach authoritatively endorsed by Engels and his pupil Kautsky, and lies at the root of the actions of Germany's social democrats in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were the undisputed leaders of the new International – the "Second," launched at the Brussels congress of 1891, but formally established as the Bureau Socialiste International only in 1900 – and, despite much argument and division (in France there were two rival socialist parties until 1905), were the tactical masters of the entire movement. Germany's very centrality and its growing power obviously contributed to increasing the prestige of its "socialism" in Europe and throughout the world.

However, there was another giant European country where the tactics that had come to predominate seemed inopportune, and the "revolutionary" way to democracy still appeared the only practicable one: tsarist Russia. Not many years had passed since the serfs had been "freed" in 1861, and autocracy continued to oppress this vast country, especially since the assassination of Alexander II in 1881. He had promoted constitutional reforms, but these had been rendered ineffective by the obstructionism of the ruling classes. In any case, as early as 1863 the revolt of the Polish provinces, which had been brutally repressed with Prussian help, had dissipated the atmosphere of reform created two years earlier by the emancipation of the serfs (who, moreover, never received the land that had been promised to them in return for redemption payments). Under Alexander III (1881–94) reaction had become harsher hand in hand with the development of Nihilist terrorism

(those executed included Lenin's brother, in 1887). Pobedonostsev, head of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox church, and also the tsar's tutor, was the most committed and influential leader of this reactionary wave, which acted through the powerful secret police (Okhrana). Its aim was the forced Russification of the Polish, Baltic, and Finnish provinces, as well as the imposition of the Orthodox faith as a bond of obedience to the tsar, who was not only a political but also a "religious" leader.

Erich Brandenburg, the Pan-Germanist historian at the University of Berlin, was very close at the end of the First World War to the circles who were advocating military dictatorship.¹ He opens his chapter *On the Russian World Empire* in the Pflugk-Harttung *Universal History* with the following racism-tinged comparison: "Perhaps no two states are more different, among the peoples of Europe, than England and Russia. In the first there is the widest possible expression of liberty and individual conscience; in the second there is a vegetating, apathetic multitude, governed from above, to whom the tsar has long been sovereign, priest, and father." Here, "a wealthy and unscrupulous nobility possesses all the political influence" in contrast to "a wretched, uneducated population of peasants." The contrast is aggravated by the absence of an "aware, prosperous middle class" (VI, p. 439). This picture – half pitying, half contemptuous – implies that Russia is *foreign* to the rest of Europe. A little later Brandenburg writes: "Leaving aside frontier territories, there is no civilization [in Russia] except through the immediate proximity of the German race."

In fact, this vision of Russia as a world separate from (late nineteenth-century) Europe mirrors the attitudes of the Pan-Slavic movement, but also an idea that was gaining ground among Russian social democrats: that Russia's situation was special, and therefore they must take a different path from contemporary European socialism. The similarity ends there, of course, but is significant nevertheless.

Clearly the picture was far from being as simple as it might seem at first sight. First of all, Russia was becoming economically richer and politically more complex at the start of the new century, during the years leading up to the war with Japan (1904) and the 1905 revolution. What was more complex than Brandenburg and other Western observers such as Engels realized was the "backward" empire's social fabric itself. The peasant commune (*obshina*) was a special form of "democracy," or at least an important precursor of democracy, and perhaps of a different form of its development. The Russian populist movement emphasized its importance, convinced that Russia need not retrace, or be forced to retrace, the same path of development as the West. This scenario was not to the liking of orthodox Marxists, who were loath to acknowledge any sequence of events

that differed from those foreseen, or hinted at, in the predictions of the future scattered throughout Marx's works.

It is true, however, that during last decade of the nineteenth century Russia underwent capitalist development in the Western sense, and at the same time its rail network was expanded considerably. Therefore the efforts of Russian social democrats of both tendencies – “economists” and Lenin's followers – to foresee a possible (gradualist or revolutionary) scenario for emerging from tsarism in “Western” terms had some connection with new developments then under way.

However, before events came to a head and the empire was shaken by the 1905 revolution (which was much more than just the “opening movement” of the 1917 revolution), a debate had taken place among Russian and German social democrats on the question of “party” and “tactics.” Two famous works express the opposing conceptions: Lenin's *What is to Done?* (1902) and Trotsky's *Our Political Tasks* (1904), alongside which is Rosa Luxemburg's *Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy* of the same year. During the same period, the Russian workers' social democratic party held its second congress (July and August 1903), clandestinely in Brussels at first and then, after being expelled by the Belgian police, in London. At this congress Lenin succeeded in making his theories prevail. It was a short-lived success, but it gave his tendency a temporary majority – hence the name, which remained even when they were no longer in the majority, of Bolsheviks (from *bol'shoi* = great). The program that temporarily won approval – within a group that had been forced into secrecy – set out the “final” goals (socialist revolution) and “immediate” tasks aimed at achieving the imminent “bourgeois-democratic revolution.” The two stages that Marx had predicted – quite wrongly – for Germany in the last chapter of the *Manifesto* were thus back with a vengeance: the overthrow of autocratic government and its replacement with a republic, an eight-hour working day, suppression of what remained of serfdom, and the self-determination of nations. However, the most bitter struggle in the congress was over a question of organization: the party.

This was no theoretical discussion: it was the central point. The vision of a monolithic, close-knit party, committed to “democratic centralism” (still referred to as “bureaucratic” at this point – the words “democratic” and “centralism” were adopted by Russian social democrats only in 1906) was explicitly linked to the Jacobin model, reinterpreted in a more markedly organized, militant key. In another essay of the same period (*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*, May 1904) Lenin adopts the formula that was bitterly contested by his contradictors, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg:

“A Jacobin who maintains an inseparable bond with the *organization* of the proletariat, a proletariat *conscious* of its class interests, is a *revolutionary Social-Democrat*.”² The use is metaphorical, but is also the result of giving a positive meaning to a term that his adversaries (Axelrod, Plechanov, Trotsky, and so forth, as well as the great exponents of the German party) used in a *negative* sense. Thus in the same passage Lenin evokes the “hackneyed Bernsteinian refrain about Jacobinism, Blanquism, and so on.” Axelrod “shouts about the menace” of the new “Jacobins,” and Lenin *affirms* a typically Jacobin way of proceeding, while branding those who contradict him *Girondists*. He thus gives a positive meaning to a term that social democrats by now used in a negative sense. For Lenin, a contemporary Girondist is someone who “is afraid of the dictatorship of the proletariat” and is an “opportunist.” As elsewhere, Lenin’s detractors are seen as “orthodox” – we need only think of the harshness with which Marx judges the Jacobin political class in his writings on the revolution³ – whereas he sees himself as original, unorthodox, but determined to assert his own greater faithfulness to Marx. He refers directly to his idea of (temporary) “dictatorship of the proletariat,” thus skipping, so to speak, the progress made in the meantime by European and especially German socialism, precisely by resorting to the *metaphor* of Jacobinism. It cannot be ruled out that this may have been the very factor that led “Robespierrist” (French) historiography after 1917 to make a direct link between the two revolutions. However, the signs were already there in Jaurès’s interpretation both of the Terror and of Robespierre.

The point at issue, or the pretext for a split, was the wording of article 1 of the party statutes: “A Party member is one who accepts its program and who supports the Party both financially and by personal participation in one of the Party organizations” (Lenin’s wording) or alternatively “one who, accepting its program, works actively to carry out its aims under the control and direction of the organs [*sic!*] of the party” (p. 76). It seems a slight, abstract difference, but it was a vital question. Militants were banned by law and acted in secret, whereas the broader circle of their sympathizers remained in their jobs and were not forced into hiding or into a life as “professional revolutionaries.” In a Russia under the ubiquitous control of the tsarist secret police, Lenin could imagine only a party of “professional revolutionaries” – carefully chosen, proven and, above all, full-time. Trotsky’s response was a pedantic lecture: “Jacobinism was not a supra-social revolutionary category: it was a product of history. Jacobinism was the apogee of the tension in revolutionary energy at the height of the auto-emancipation of bourgeois society... The Jacobins were utopians... The Jacobins were pure idealists”⁴ and so forth.

Lenin's reply was biting and clear:

Comrade Trotsky has not understood the fundamental thought in my essay *What is to be Done?* when he asserts that the party is not an organisation of conspirators. Many have raised this objection. He has forgotten that the party must be only the vanguard and guide of the prodigious mass of the class . . . Trotsky has said here that if, as a result of the mass arrest of a multitude of people, all workers declared that they did not belong to the party, this would make us cut a strange figure. The opposite is true: it is Trotsky's argument that makes us cut a strange figure. He finds a cause for sadness something that any revolutionary endowed with some experience should find a cause for rejoicing. If thousands of arrested people declared that they did not belong to the party, this would only show how well organised we were!

"Our task" is described a little later, in the following terms: "to bring together *in a conspiracy* a fairly restricted group of leaders," and "to bring *into the movement* a vast mass of people." E. H. Carr sums up the disagreement as follows: "The one party conceived itself as an 'organization of workers', the other as an 'organization of revolutionaries'."⁵ The proof came with the 1905 revolution, a few months later. For Lenin, and for many others, it was confirmation that a "spontaneous" revolution was doomed to failure.

The revolution began with "Bloody Sunday," January 22, 1905. Led by the priest Gapon – an ambiguous figure and Okhrana member who was unmasked two years later as an *agent provocateur*, and killed by a group of social revolutionaries – lines of demonstrators converged on the Winter Palace, the tsar's residence. Gapon was escorted by police. The petition was an agglomeration of demands, combining patriarchal illusions with revolutionary outbursts, entreaties to the tsar, and democratic demands which, if enacted, would have meant the end of autocratic government. In particular, the demands were for a constituent assembly, political freedom, an eight-hour working day, and an amnesty. Where possible, Bolshevik groups mingled with groups of factory workers (the biggest plants represented were the Putilov factories of St. Petersburg, the heart of the revolt) to explain the madness of the tactic Gapon had embarked upon. Covertly, they launched an appeal: "Freedom cannot be bought for a price as low as a mere petition, even if it is presented by a priest." The lines of demonstrators were greeted by troops. More than 1,000 were machine-gunned down on the spot. The tsar, whom some have recently tried to describe as *the gentle* Nicholas II (and who, apparently, is to be canonized by the present Orthodox church),⁶ did not like to see a repetition of August 10, 1792 (a date that

strikes terror into the hearts of monarchs) and had organized a deadly welcome for the demonstrators. Many of these bore icons and portraits of the tsar. In his essay *The Beginning of the Revolution in Russia*, Lenin wrote: "The working class has received a great lesson in civil war. The education of the proletariat has made more progress in one day than it would have made in months or years of a uniform, resigned existence."

The revolt did not stop there, however. Already the following day groups of workers attacked shops and arms depots, and disarmed policemen. Barricades went up on Vasilievsky island. Strikes broke out all over the vast country, followed by bloody clashes with the police and army. Strikes continued throughout the year: despite the ferocious repression, the 1905 revolution was one of the longest-lasting rebellions in European history. Meanwhile, the increasingly damaging war against Japan continued until mediation by Theodore Roosevelt, the US president, led to the Treaty of Portsmouth which ended the conflict. This allowed the tsar to launch his proposed reforms, centered on the creation of a parliament at last: the Duma, set up on August 6, 1905. The electoral law was drawn up by the interior minister and reserved the majority of seats for landowners and the wealthier classes. The lower bourgeoisie and working classes were excluded from the right to vote because they were not sufficiently wealthy, and agricultural laborers were too, because they owned no land.

This electoral fraud produced a new wave of strikes. To calm these, the court issued the manifesto of October 17 (October 30 according to the Julian calendar), which conceded a legislative Duma and a series of political freedoms, but refused to grant the eight-hour working day. Nevertheless, this was a success for the main group involved in the struggle, the St Petersburg Soviet, in which Trotsky played an active part. The aim of the October 17 manifesto was clear: to split the liberal-bourgeois element – which indeed immediately responded with the formation of the "constitutional democratic" party, known as "KD" or "cadets" – from the workers, who continued their unrest. One result of the continuing social agitation was the type of electoral law enacted in December 1905, based on the acknowledgment of the principle of universal suffrage. Meanwhile, to placate international high finance, Count Witte, the finance minister, was appointed leader of the government, with the hitherto nonexistent title of president of the council of ministers.

This progress on the electoral front was counterbalanced, in essence, by a reaction carried out by means of behind-the-scenes violence and right-wing paramilitary terrorist groups. The best-known were the "Black Hundred," the "Union of the Russian People" which, besides assassinating individual militants (Bauman, Afanasyev, and others) was allowed to organize

pogroms unmolested. Trotsky, who had led the St Petersburg Soviet, was arrested in 1906 but managed to flee to Austria. As early as the second Duma (March–June 1907) the electoral law was changed to make it more restrictive, while persecution of social democrats resumed.

The 1905 revolution occupies an important place in the history of democracy, because it saw the confrontation – albeit an obviously unequal one, whose outcome is well known – between the Duma on the one hand and the *Soviet* on the other. *Thus another element of democracy took shape*: the council of striking workers, which was able, at times of conflict, even to take control of local administration. Its specifically Russian forerunners included the various basic organizational units: the *obshina*, the *mir*, and the *zemstvo*.

The other lesson of the revolution was that, once again, it demonstrated that “the most dangerous time for a bad government is the time it starts to reform.”⁷ Once the government had declared, and partly put into practice, its intention to reform, it developed political repression in parallel. “It promoted patriotic demonstrations on its own account and at the same time broke up opposition demonstrations by force. Peaceful demonstrators were fired upon, while others were allowed to set fire to the offices of a *zemstvo*.”⁸ The organizers of pogroms went unmolested, while those who tried to defend themselves against them were shot at.” Thus Trotsky paints the picture of the “switch to reform.”

A third feature that the historian cannot overlook is that the revolution was sparked off by a “general strike” – hence Lenin’s diagnosis in his *Lecture on the 1905 Revolution*: “The peculiarity of the Russian revolution is that it was a bourgeois-democratic revolution in its social content but a proletarian revolution in its methods of struggle.” This anomaly has many implications. In 1906 Lenin drew another lesson from the year “of madness,” as reactionaries described it: “The action in Moscow in December has demonstrated that the general strike, as the *independent and predominant* form of struggle, is an *outmoded* instrument. The movement is emerging with elemental strength from these narrow limits and bringing into being the higher form: insurrection.” The conclusion he draws is that “next time” it would be necessary to be armed.

Meanwhile, Witte was replaced by Stolypin (1906–11). With the return of the troops from the Far East, he was able to hold trials in a climate of martial law. More than 1,000 people were sentenced to death. He blocked the second Duma and its reformist aspirations, and held an election under restricted suffrage for a third Duma, which lasted from November 1907 to 1912. He passed an agricultural law that released wealthy peasants (*kulaki*) from village communes (*mir*) and strengthened their ties to the government

by establishing, in contrast to the “community” tradition, substantial private holdings.

Stolypin was assassinated in 1911, but he left a *social* legacy that was far more important than his parliamentary reforms or counter-reforms. This was the creation of a vast class of wealthy peasants, who numbered some 2,480,000 in 1916. As Fritz Epstein has observed, this had the effect of permanently exacerbating rural class antagonisms whose bloody consequences would be seen, after yet another civil war, in Soviet times.⁹

Meanwhile, the future seemed increasingly hazy – Lenin himself could see no other scenario in 1906 than a “democratic” revolution in Russia that would be a driving force in bringing socialism to the West¹⁰ – but the explosive development of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 swept away all predictions and “programs.” It soon brought the collapse of the International itself. It also offered Russia’s “marginal” social democrats an opportunity to take center stage that had so far been denied them, as well as a practical chance to put themselves to the test: the collapse of tsarism in February 1917.

For a time it seemed that Engels’s prediction – “it is necessary to overthrow tsarism in Russia . . . this will give the working class movement in the West a new momentum and better conditions in which to struggle” – was coming true. Certainly Engels had never imagined an event such as the Great War, but the course of events he describes really appeared to be realized during the months following the fall of the tsar and the formation of a republic in Russia dominated by the party that was certainly the most widely established in the country: the social revolutionaries under Kerensky (of populist origin). A “democratic” republic had risen in Russia, while in Germany social unrest and internal splits among the social democrats produced an open rupture in the great party and the birth of a new, more radical group, the independent socialist party (USPD). So, had the impetus that would jolt the West into revolution begun? Many thought it had, whether or not they remembered the old patriarch’s diagnosis. Rosa Luxemburg, who had been in prison for a year (from February 1915 to February 1916) for her active opposition to the war, and would be arrested again on July 16, wrote to her friend Louise Kausky about Russia or, as she put it, on the “sparks given off by Russia”: “It is our own cause that is winning and triumphing there; it is world history in person that fights her battles and dances the carmagnole, drunk with joy!”¹¹ The Spartacists, which Luxemburg founded in prison, immediately joined the USPD, while reserving their right to act autonomously.

To many in the uneasy socialist ranks, the socialists’ backing for the war – which had seemed possible because the war had been given a misleading image – appeared increasingly indefensible. This seemed even more the case

now that pressure from the “annexationist” right led to the dismissal of the “moderate” chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg (July 13, 1917) and to the growing “dictatorship” of the High Command. The USPD was founded on April 6–8, 1917, and was led by men such as Haase, who on August 4, 1914, had been in the front line in announcing the socialist vote in favor of war credits. Although the Russian revolution in February favored the crumbling of the eastern front (which drove the “annexationists” to ever greater arrogance), it was a “precedent” for European socialist parties on the very theme of the *anti-war* struggle – which had been “set aside” as a result of the sophistry of August 1914. They had come full circle.

Equilibrium was collapsing. The chancellor had fallen as a result of a near coup d'état,¹² and the right felt it could act with total impunity. The high command, intoxicated by its breakthrough on the eastern front, openly encroached on the political arena, confident that it could count on the friendship – or more – of the kaiser. In the center were the majority socialists and the *Zentrumspartei*, already prefiguring the Weimar coalition.

However, this was a future scenario, and unthinkable at that moment. In Russia the new revolution, in October, began a process that went beyond Russia's borders and sought to speak to the working-class masses of Europe, above all in Germany. It was a powerful call, and one that could not be ignored. Wartime austerity and hunger increasingly drove the masses to ask themselves the reasons for such privations, on top of the endless slaughter, and whether there was not a case for “doing as in Russia.” This question was being asked, for example, in Turin, Italy, where the defeat at Caporetto had driven the socialist party, unpopular from the start because of its “non-collaboration,” into a corner. In Germany there came a clear warning in the shape of the strike in munitions factories of January 1918 – an action unheard of in that country, and at the height of the war effort – followed by street violence.

These were warnings of revolution, even if revolution was not imminent. The mutiny of the sailors in Kiel, a few months later, seemed like a replica of the *Potemkin* in Russia in 1905. However, there were warnings of something quite different from the other side of the political spectrum. This was when the “legend of the stab in the back” (*Dolchstoßlegende*) began to take shape: the right's condemnation of protest against the war as criminal. It was reflected in the foundation of the *Fatherland Party*, the first “exemplar” of the mass right-wing parties that would undermine the Weimar Republic.

The picture was thus becoming more complex, and moving ever farther from the scenario Engels had imagined in 1894 and Lenin had revived after the 1905 revolution. It was in that crucially important country, Germany, while the war was still in progress, that the first mass “pre-fascist” political

groups appeared; they were a symptom that society was much more complex and reactive than “scientific socialism” had ever imagined. The situation was also being complicated by the appearance in Europe of an “external” factor: American involvement, which was not only the decisive element that led to the allies’ victory but also the chief factor in a new process of stabilization aimed at averting revolution. America entered the war not only with its fresh armed forces but with Wilson’s “Fourteen Points”: a plan for reordering the world (Europe first and foremost) and a nucleus for the future League of Nations, but above all a direct riposte to Lenin’s and Trotsky’s appeal to the people for an immediate peace. America was to guide Germany’s exit from the war, even influencing the composition of the last “war cabinet” under Prince Max, and setting the conditions for the kaiser’s abdication. That vacuum could only be filled by “majority” and anti-Bolshevik socialists. Their “painless” rise to power denied the revolution – which had by now erupted in Berlin – the opportunity of becoming the *government*. The government existed already: it consisted of “Scheidemann’s men” alongside the Catholic center. Neither Engels nor Lenin had foreseen this, and perhaps Lenin did not even understand, at first, the epochal significance of what had happened

In Lenin’s essay on imperialism, written in the spring of 1915 when war had only just begun, the United States are merely one empire among several. Lenin could not have imagined that they would have “burst into” Europe in parallel with the Russian revolution, with the aim of neutralizing its influence and preventing its possible spread. He could not have foreseen that, faced with the combined decline of the various European empires that had butchered each other for four years, a powerful counterweight would appear in the shape of America’s decision to take on tasks of “salvation,” counting on its intact resources and a world economic empire that was also intact. This was apparent already in the early 1920s, when the Dawes plan (1923) saved Germany and inaugurated the “Stresemann era.”

A world totally different from the one that had destroyed itself with the war was taking shape. “Scientific” predictions were therefore crumbling.

On a political level too, American interventionism should have given pause for thought. Even before the war had ended, the United States had “brought democracy” (as it is described today) to Germany – or, more accurately, helped to prop up the parliamentary regime even as the Reich collapsed. This too was a significant development, for thus Europe ceased to be just Europe and became, *also politically*, part of a broader “West.”

Decades of gradualism (that is, acceptance of the existing political and institutional setup) could not be erased at a stroke: they bore fruit. In the

final chapter of *The Birth of the German Republic*, Rosenberg describes and comments on the “thirteen points” issued by the mutinous sailors of Germany’s powerful warship fleet, moored at Kiel, in early November 1918. The most “extremist” was the demand for the release of the crewmen of the battleships *Thüringen* and *Helgoland* – some 600 men arrested on October 30 because they had refused to obey the order to attack. Another demand was that the men arrested the previous year be exempt from punishment. The demand was phrased thus: “No note must be written in their military records.” Rosenberg comments ironically: “So, the revolutionaries did not want their participation in the revolution to be added to their records.” The first of the thirteen points regarded the different rations fed to crew and officers, and the election of new committees to run the mess and deal with any “complaints” on the part of the crew. It was also demanded that these committees be present during the proceedings held against sailors, that they be given the right to protest against the sentences handed out, and that saluting officers when off duty cease to be compulsory. “Point 9 is priceless: *The expression ‘captain’ must be used only at the beginning of a sentence; thereafter it must be omitted, and superiors addressed using the polite form.*”

The situation was verging on the paradoxical:

1,000,000 sailors had mutinied. All the guns were in their hands. The lives of their officers were at their mercy. The German Empire was breaking up under their action. And these same revolutionaries were concerned with the question as to whether they should say ‘you’ instead of ‘Sir’ to their officers . . . At the beginning of November 1918 the sailors thought neither of a Republic nor of overthrowing the Government, nor even of the introduction of Socialism. What they wanted was to defend peace against the destructive influence of the Pan-Germans, and such modification of Prussian discipline as would give them back their human self-respect.¹³

The USPD and Spartacists had a certain amount of influence over them. The government sent the socialist deputy Noske to Kiel (he was later to accomplish some memorable feats). He easily controlled the situation, whereas Haase, the USPD leader, made little impression.

Despite all this, the situation *remained one of revolution*. The military strike spread to Hamburg, and in a few days reached Bavaria. On November 7 Bavarian peasant-soldiers proclaimed the Bavarian Republic – they were strongly influenced by Kurt Eisner, head of the Bavarian USPD, who was later assassinated by a right-wing hired killer – thus leapfrogging the situation in Berlin where Scheidemann, though powerful in the government,

had remained loyal to the institutional framework of the monarchy. Only when the revolution reached Berlin, and the kaiser had fled to the Netherlands, did Scheidemann, by now leader of the government, declare the Republic.

The “November revolution” thus brought into a being a republic when the sovereign had already gone, and the government (now known as the People’s Commissars, on the Soviet model) was led by Scheidemann, who had played an influential part in the government of Max von Baden imposed by the now victorious allies. The revolution did not happen. Instead, there was a commitment to elect a new constituent assembly immediately, in January 1919.

Certainly, the change from Max von Baden to Ebert marked a shift of the political and parliamentary balance towards the left. Prince Max, in his *Memoirs*, has left an account of his last conversation with Ebert, before the formal handover:

Ebert said to me: “I appeal to you urgently to stay.”

I asked: “To what end?”

Ebert: “I would want you to remain as regent of the Reich.”

My former colleagues had repeated this entreaty to me many times over the last few hours.

I replied: “I know you are on the verge of making an agreement with the independents (USPD), and I cannot collaborate with the independents.”¹⁴

Max dates this conversation as taking place on November 9, between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. Ebert’s request that he stay on as “regent” is horrifying in itself. The socialist leader was, in effect, demanding the continuation of the monarchical regime, now of course fully “constitutional” (and, it is to be hoped, without the “Prussian electoral law”). The function of regent was indeed enshrined in the imperial legislation, and came into effect in the event of the sovereign being unable to rule. Wilhelm had just abdicated, but no regent had been appointed! Thus on the one hand Ebert was asking that the regent be appointed while Max von Baden, though not regent, was behaving like one when he was formally assigning the “chancellorship” to Ebert.

The pretence lasted two days. Already on November 10 the “workers’ and soldiers’ councils” (a name modelled on the soviets) demanded the republic and a new government of “people’s commissars.” Here too, continuity was saved by means of a legal pretence. The “councils” gathered in the Busch Circus in Berlin were considered “representatives of the whole of

the German people” and, on this assumption, empowered to press for constitutional change. The “soldiers’ councils” put their resources – in effect the power of the army – at the disposal of the social democratic party. With this, the USPD and the Spartacists were out of contention – if indeed they had ever thought that, in this difficult institutional transition, or rather “power vacuum,” they could really come to power at the expense of the old social democratic party. (No elections had been held since 1912, and no one could gauge the true electoral climate, or how much of a following the groups in the political arena had in the country.) Thus they failed to seize the (potentially) favorable moment. The “council of the people’s commissars” (this concession to Leninist terminology was painless, on the whole) was chaired by Ebert, with at his side Scheidemann, of 1914 fame. Thus a USPD representative entered the government, as did the *Zentrumspartei* and the liberals: in essence, it was the old majority that had held up Max von Baden for more than a month. The Reichstag that had been elected in 1912 remained in office. The only change lay in the calling of elections for the constituent assembly: but once the Republic had been proclaimed, this “leap” at least could not be overlooked. However, more than any other detail, what should have enlightened the observer as to the true nature of the changes under way was a step taken by the supreme military leadership: Hindenburg readily declared that he accepted the new order. By contrast, neither Karl Liebknecht nor Rosa Luxemburg was elected to the congress of “councils.”

The republic’s raw material was the millions of soldiers who, organized into “councils,” had put their trust in Ebert rather than Liebknecht. Thus Engels’s prophecy – that socialism would be achieved through the progressive conquest of the army – came only half true.

On January 19, 1919, the elections for the National Constituent Assembly (which was to act also as a parliament) produced the following results: the socialists (even if the SPD and USPD are added together) lost the election, or rather did not gain an absolute majority of votes. The SPD gained 37.9 percent of the vote (163 deputies) and the USPD 7.6 percent (22 deputies), which gave them 185 deputies out of a total of 421. It is typical of political-parliamentary systems in socially complex, “advanced” countries that no single party ever (or almost never) wins an absolute majority of the *votes* – no matter what electoral system is in place. Nevertheless, this was a bitter disappointment, if only because of the exceptional situation in which the elections took place, which in theory should have been highly favorable to the socialists.

The Center Party won 20 percent of the vote, securing 91 deputies; the two right-wing parties (Germans and German nationalists) won 15 percent

between them, securing 63. The heart of the *Democratic Party* lay on the left, but it differed from the socialists over many issues, and was destined to decline rapidly. Its great exponents were Max Weber, Walter Rathenau, and Hugo Preuss. Incredibly, it won more than 18 percent of the vote and secured 75 deputies – an electoral performance on a par with that of a historic party with popular support such as the Centre party.

An agreement between SPD and USPD was unthinkable, given that a few days before the election Noske, people's commissar to the army (and a prominent socialist exponent) had tamed, *manu militari*, the Spartacist revolt in a district of Berlin, personally taking part in the storming of the occupied *Vorwärts* offices, and given that the *Freikorps* had murdered Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg with impunity on January 15, four days before the election. However, there was a ready-made parliamentary solution: the center left. The first government of the republic born of the "November revolution" was made up of the SPD, the Center Party, and the Democratic Party, under the leadership of Scheidemann, while Ebert had already been elected president of the republic by the newly constituted assembly.

There has been much speculation over how much the hurried and impotent Spartacist rising of that crucial January of 1919 influenced political events. Orthodox social democracy devoted all its energy to defending Noske, to absolve him of responsibility for the murder of Liebknecht and Luxemburg. This was futile, given that the issue was not who had been behind the killers affiliated to the *Freikorps*; the problem was that the newborn German "democracy" tolerated, out of a sense of legalism, the existence of the *Freikorps*, revanchist paramilitary groups which gave vent to their revanchism, for the moment, through violence against left-wing militants. Their contribution to the birth of the Nazi movement is well known. However, Noske earned some gratitude from the far right by his action; he was minister for the army and navy, and should have disbanded the *Freikorps* and destroyed them with far more violence than he used in storming the *Vorwärts* offices. This gratitude proved shameful: when the Nazi party won the election of November 1933, Noske was "Oberpräsident" of the province of Hannover, and it was Hermann Goering, Hitler's number two, who asked him (in vain) to remain in office.¹⁵

At all events, the theory that the Spartacist rising shifted public opinion to the right in the final days of the electoral campaign is tenuous. The Ebert–Scheidemann–Noske government did its utmost to show the frightened bourgeoisie that the social democrats were able to crush the "anti-democratic" threat from the left. The abundant quantities of blood that were shed demonstrated the "democratic credentials" of the social democrat

leadership. If anything, in the election it redounded on the USPD which – in a polemic simplification most convenient in an electoral campaign – was directly identified with the Spartacists in the propaganda of all parties except the Democratic Party.

In short, it was a stinging electoral defeat for the social democrats; yet this disappointing result was to remain their *best* in any election during the Weimar Republic. Already the following year, in the elections for the republic's first Reichstag on June 6, 1920, the SPD's share of the vote collapsed to 21 percent and the USPD's rose to 18 percent, while the newly founded communist party secured a 2 percent share. The SPD recovered enough to touch 30 percent in the election of May 1928 (when the communists reached 10 percent), while the right-wing bloc also touched 30 percent and the center secured 12 percent.

Electoral arithmetic can seem an abstract, formal game. In the meantime, crises were brewing that were capable of destroying a balance less precarious than that of the Weimar Republic. These ranged from the French chauvinist madness that culminated in the punitive occupation of the Ruhr (a gift to right-wing parties which the communists also tried desperately to exploit) to the economic crisis, worsened by oppressive "reparations," which the Dawes and Young plans tried to remedy – for the USA, which did not recognize the Treaty of Versailles, could not bear to see the republic slip to the left in the grip of the century's worst economic crisis, and there were as yet no Nazis prepared to exploit it – to uprisings such as Hitler's Munich *putsch*. Nevertheless, electoral arithmetic remains an important indicator in that convulsed period of parliamentary government, which saw eight Reichstag elections. It gives a measure of the left's disappointment with universal suffrage, and of the "resistible rise" of the national socialist party from a 2 percent share of the vote in May 1928 to 44 percent in March 1933. Not even the Nazis, of course, secured an absolute majority, even though they had both illegal and state violence on their side. However, Hitler had become chancellor, thanks to von Papen's plotting and the complicity of Hindenburg (president of the Reich from 1925), well before this "triumphal" victory. Nevertheless, it was still an undeniably effective electoral success.

Germany and Italy both offer prime examples of "manufactured" electoral victories.

A recent study by the Yale University historian Henry Ashby Turner Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power* (London, 1996),¹⁶ produces convincing documentary evidence to support an anti-deterministic historiographic assessment of Hitler's rise to power. The Nazi party had suffered a severe

reverse in the election of November 1932, losing 35 seats and almost 5 percent of its votes. It certainly held a relative majority, with 33 percent, but isolation in parliament could prove fatal to it, especially in combination with an acute internal crisis. Franz von Papen, the center deputy who was tightly bound to Hitler, put intense pressure on Hindenburg, the almost 90-year-old president of the republic. It was thanks to this that, after a lengthy and obscure crisis, against all expectations, and in defiance of parliamentary arithmetic, Hitler was appointed chancellor on January 30, 1933. Contrary to what is usually asserted, the president had wide powers under the Weimar Republic constitution – far wider than those of the monarchs who remained on the throne after so many crowned heads had rolled after the First World War. He was the effective head of the armed forces; he could reduce civil rights at his discretion (if he deemed it appropriate); he could promulgate laws by decree; and although the government was responsible to parliament, the president could dismiss it, if necessary, by immediately dissolving parliament itself. In short, Hitler's un hoped-for appointment as chancellor at the end of January 1933 (and the immediate calling of new elections) allowed him to build the great election victory of March 5, 1933. He did this with the complicity of heavy industry (we need think only of the family links between Goebbels and the supremely powerful Quandt industrial dynasty, and the support of Hugenberg)¹⁷ and of the legal and semi-legal military apparatus, and thanks to the systematic violence of the Brown Shirts, protected by the state. The 44 percent of the votes won allowed Hitler to govern surrounded by centrists and liberals, and with von Papen as vice-chancellor,¹⁸ until the republic had been completely transformed into a *Führerstaat*. His decade-long march to power had begun with the feeble Munich *putsch*, 10 years earlier. On March 6, 1933, the day after the election "triumph," Hitler received the congratulations of Wilhelm II, the former emperor, who was "exiled" in Doorn, in the Netherlands.¹⁹ The gesture perfectly symbolized the continuity between *allddeutsch* imperialism and Nazism.

In Italy the equivalent operation took place over a much shorter timescale. Mussolini's republican, anarchist-like movement, founded in 1919, stagnated in electoral terms until the election of 1921, when it acquired 30 deputies, who were part of the "national blocs" conglomeration. However, already at the end of October 1922 King Victor Emmanuel III entrusted Mussolini with the formation of a government, which took the form of a coalition with the popular party and the liberals. Certainly this member of the house of Savoy was a modest villain compared with the old Junker, and it did not take 30 days of plotting, pressure, and blackmail to convince him. Hysterical with fear at the decimation of crowned heads, and completely

unconvinced that parliamentary government could survive the revolutionary wave whipped up in 1917, which was still continuing (though his reactionary viewpoint magnified it to gigantic proportions), he went so far as to bypass the government and carry out a “silent coup d’état” of his own. At the time of the demonstration pompously described as the “march on Rome” the majority of the government, led by Luigi Facta, was in favor of proclaiming a state of siege. The king refused, and summoned Mussolini to the Quirinal Palace to entrust him with the task of forming a government. This was duly formed and, two years later, won a resounding victory in the elections of 1924, thanks to an extreme form of majority system, to the violence of the *squadristi*, supported and protected by the “forces of law and order,” and to funding from large sections of the higher agrarian, industrial, and financial bourgeoisie.

In Italy’s case too, it is interesting to trace the course of the elections, and how the fortunes of the parties were intertwined with progressive or retrogressive electoral laws. The law of December 16, 1918, finally established unlimited universal suffrage (for men), and replaced the discredited single-member constituency majority system with proportional representation by list voting. The socialists tripled the number of their members to 156, and the popular party’s total leapt to 100 seats. This was the majority of the chamber’s 508 seats. The liberals, who had been ubiquitous and all-triumphant under the old system, collapsed from 300 seats to 200. This was a victory for the democratic movements, *but not the triumph that had been expected*. In the election of May 1921 a meagre contingent of 15 communist deputies made an appearance; the socialists fell back, and the popular party increased by about 10 seats. The “national blocs” (which included the fascists) “held firm,” drawing their support from the old pockets of liberal consensus. The chamber with no clear majority elected in 1921, after the king’s coup and the appointment of Mussolini as prime minister, was to approve the new electoral law that brought in an extreme form of the majority system. This was the notorious Acerbo law, the result of a feverish fascist campaign for a majority system,²⁰ begun immediately after the “march on Rome.” It produced the conditions that enabled the fascist *listone* (“big list”) – which was stuffed with liberal notables – to triumph in the 1924 election.²¹ In short, the outcome was, in both cases, unambiguous and the same. Thanks above all to proportional representation, socialist parties achieved results that reflected their immense following in society; but these were never majorities even when conditions were at their most “favourable,” because they were not backed by the state – let alone by big business. Fascist parties, even when in the minority, were put by the powers of the state into a position where they could control and win elections.

The fascists had reservations about universal suffrage *on principle*. As late as 1940 the *Dizionario di Politica* – published by the *Enciclopedia Italiana* under the control of the National Fascist Party, and edited by the party secretary – warns in its entry on suffrage: “although the system of universal suffrage reflects, in a certain way, a principle of justice . . . on the other hand it does not take into account a much greater necessity, which is that the granting of the right to vote to citizens must be adapted to the level of preparation and political education of the masses.” Otherwise, there is “the risk of entrusting the constitution of public institutions to an elected body that is not suited to the task, with naturally detrimental effects on the desired process of organization itself.” The author, the jurist Giuseppe Menotti de Francesco, who after the war became a monarchist deputy in the Italian parliament, goes on to say that the risk “is inherent in the system of universal suffrage”; “legal scholars and positive legislation have endeavored to find ways of restraining this principle so that, even while it is applied, the dangers the system involves are attenuated.” There are various ways, the jurist notes, to reduce the damage done by universal suffrage; one of the most common is to adopt an “indirect or two-stage” election system, as for example “in the election of the president of the republic of the United States of America” or in France [Third Republic] for the election of the senate. However, the best way to correct the problem, de Francesco suggests, would be restricted suffrage: “but this cannot be implemented, in the present phase of the constitution’s development, except in a broad sense.” Thus the solution adopted by the fascists – “corporative suffrage” – is strongly recommended: it is “a particular and original form of restricted suffrage” that “confers the right to vote on citizens that pay union contributions.” It is by using this criterion, he concludes, that “the electorate” is constituted within the legal framework created by fascism; naturally, that electorate now “has in any case a much more restricted field of operation than in the past.”²²

A few marginal notes come to mind. Hitler, appointed chancellor at the end of January 1933, did not change the electoral system. He manufactured his election victory but did not achieve a majority. To achieve “total victory” he had to stage-manage the Reichstag fire, have the communist deputies expelled, and await Hindenburg’s death (August 1934) to be able to merge the roles of president and chancellor. Mussolini, on the other hand, was the leader of a band of barely 30 deputies; but he had been made prime minister by the king and, thanks to the Acerbo law, won a devastating victory and a huge majority, which was swelled precisely by the fraud of the majority system. A “consensus” had grown up around Hitler (one voter in three in

1932) – or rather, he had strongly-rooted support, growing like a noxious plant within the crisis of the Weimar Republic. Around Mussolini there was no consensus at all at the time of the royal coup that entrusted him with the reins of government. He built his support *afterwards* – and certainly the endorsement of the king and the Catholic church (well before the Concordat)²³ helped considerably. Over the succeeding two years (1924–6) he took the next step: the formation of a “regime.” This consisted of the exceptional laws passed in November 1926, the arrest of communist deputies, the invention of the communist “conspiracy” that was the basis for the “great trial” of the captured leaders, and the dissolution of other political parties. However, even getting to the point of the November 1926 laws and their immediate implementation required more time, and recourse to state violence (the murder of Matteotti was another occasion when the crown saved fascism from circumstances that could have proved fatal to it), provocation, and acts of violence of murky origins. By this time, however, Italy’s ruling class had switched its allegiance to fascism. Even a figure such as Croce – who during the 1930s and until Mussolini’s first fall was to be the intellectual symbol of anti-fascism – entered the senate the day after Matteotti’s killing and voted in favor of confidence in the Mussolini government. In an interview in the *Giornale d’Italia*, in July 1924, he described this action as “prudent and patriotic.”²⁴

The question that many asked, at the time and afterwards, was: what had become of the people, and why did they not react? Most disappointed of all at seeing “the people” accept fascism were believers in the innate “soundness” of the “masses” – a fallacy rooted in sentimental democratic ideals. The creation of consensus around fascist regimes was analyzed as it took place by critical minds – Rosenberg in Germany, and Togliatti, exiled from Italy. Their analysis shattered a romantic illusion, and with it the paralyzing fallacy that securing consensus is, in itself, proof that a given policy is valid.

The first postwar elections for a constituent assembly were held in Russia on November 25, 1917, some three weeks *after* the revolution or, to put them in a clearer context, after the royal palaces in St. Petersburg had been taken by soldiers under Bolshevik command, and after Kerensky had fled. This upheaval in the country’s leadership had taken place on November 7 (October 25 according to the old calendar); during the same day, the stormy “Pan-Russian soviet congress” held in St. Petersburg had followed the course of events. The congress was presented with the burning question of whether to approve the expulsion of Kerensky, which divided the social revolutionary party in two: one section, loyal to Kerensky, left the chamber while the other, close to the Bolsheviks, remained. The assembly gave its

approval to what had happened, and laid the foundations for the immediate formation of the first government of people's commissars, consisting of the Bolsheviks and the left wing of the social revolutionary party. These were mostly peasant delegates from the provinces. It is no coincidence that the two decisions taken by those who remained were (a) to make peace immediately and (b) the expropriation of landowners.

Then began a short period of "coalition government." It lasted until March 1918, when Russia accepted the extremely harsh terms of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the left-wing social revolutionaries, in bitter disagreement with this decision, left the coalition with the Bolsheviks. Before this crisis, however – during the period November 1917 to March 1918 – the government of Lenin and the commissars was a government *with* (the left wing of) *the social revolutionaries*. It was during this "coalition" phase that the two "electoral" events took place: the election of the constituent assembly on November 25, and its inauguration on January 19, 1918 – though it was to be short-lived.

The number of people who voted on November 25, 1917 was certainly significant: almost 42,000,000 votes were cast, out of a population that in 1920 was calculated to number 108,000,000. This is about 40 percent of the population – not a very high figure considering that women already had the right to vote. Nevertheless, it is a high turnout if we bear in mind that the country was still at war (though the call for an immediate armistice had gone out on November 8) and that chaos reigned, as it does in any radical change of regime when the problem is to assert authority over a large area – in Russia's case, a vast one.

The parties mounted their electoral campaigns and these persuaded voters to go to the polls. This much is certain, for otherwise such a remarkable turnout would not have been achieved. The Bolsheviks received almost 10,000,000 votes – a quarter of those cast – and the social revolutionaries no less than 22,000,000. They constituted the majority *on their own*. The Mensheviks (that is, the social democratic "minority") polled a mere 700,000 votes, and the remaining parties totalled some 5,000,000 votes between them.

Arthur Rosenberg offers an interesting interpretation of this result, which was certainly disappointing for the Bolsheviks but ambiguous as far as the social revolutionary party was concerned. "The great mass of peasants who had voted for the social revolutionaries had done so because they wanted to vote for the expropriation of landowners, not for Kerensky. However, the social revolutionaries' lists were almost everywhere headed by Kerensky supporters, who secured their seats in this way." As a result the Bolsheviks and social revolutionaries decided together *not* to recognize the new

assembly, because it had refused to recognize the new government. The social revolutionaries were the first to reject a result that penalized them above all in favor of their own party's other faction, from which they had split irrevocably.

Thus the constituent assembly was extremely short-lived; it might be true to say that even at its birth it did not reflect the country's political makeup. Rosenberg observes, or rather speculates: "If Lenin had ordered the holding of new elections, there can be no doubt that the Soviet Government would have obtained an overwhelming majority."²⁵ This conjecture is impossible to verify. Otto Bauer writes:

The revolutionary process that unfolded at a fevered pace after the October Revolution allowed the Bolsheviks to dissolve the Constituent Assembly – which had been elected a few weeks earlier under totally different circumstances and no longer reflected the new revolutionary situation – and to place all power in the hands of the soviets. Even at that point Bukharin was proposing the expulsion of the right-wing members from the Constituent Assembly – as Cromwell had once expelled the Presbyterians from Parliament or the Jacobins had excluded the Girondists from the Convention, sending them to the guillotine – and to hand power to the rest of the assembly, but considering it as a Convention. Lenin, however, preferred to dissolve the entire assembly.²⁶

Indeed, at that point the government of the Commissars, and Lenin first and foremost, opted for what had seemed since 1905 to be the new structure of a democracy that was no longer parliamentary but "conciliar" – a republic of *soviets*, in fact – an original and modern form of "direct" democracy, as it appeared then. This had not been contemplated since at least the fall of the Commune. In the final chapter of his *History of the Revolution*, Trotsky describes the soviet congress that was meeting in the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg that same day (October 25, according to the old calendar), through which the Bolsheviks were taking power by force, as "the most democratic parliament in the history of the world." In an exchange of views with Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg sharply criticized the dissolution of the assembly.²⁷ We should not overlook the fact that, when the constituent assembly was dissolved, the social revolutionaries still in the government agreed with the decision, which was to have important consequences. It was only some two months later, when the punitive peace treaty with Germany was signed, that they left the coalition government in total disagreement with the Bolsheviks, their relations irreparably broken off.

At that point, however, something far more alarming than any parliamentary session happened in this vast country. The allied powers, feeling that the separate peace treaty signed by Russia justified them in regarding its

new government as an *enemy*, openly intervened within the new republic's borders in support of the tsarist and "white" forces, who were waging a ferocious civil war. Russia's internal conflict was being compounded by the arrival of external elements. It was becoming a "European civil war."

The “European Civil War”

Everything I undertake is directed against Russia. If in the West they are too stupid and blind to understand it, I shall be obliged to reach an agreement with the Russians to defeat the West, thereafter to hurl all my force against the Soviet Union.

Hitler to Carl Burckhardt, League of Nations commissioner

It is not widely known that Churchill and De Gaulle, two central figures in twentieth-century Europe, born in 1874 and 1890 respectively, both played a prominent part in the allied attack on the Russian republic that followed the condemnation (at the London conference of March 18, 1918) of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Russia and the Central Powers. Their participation in that attack is symbolic. The London conference’s verdict was already an act of intervention. Russia had undergone a change of regime as a result of a revolutionary coup d’état. The new government was keeping at bay – with great difficulty, and at the cost of a civil war whose end was not in sight – the armed struggle by the rebel “white” troops in the four corners of the country, from the far north to the far east, the Polish border, and the Baltic. In terms of international law, rejection of the new government’s decision to make peace – considered a “betrayal” of the previous government’s military agreements – was even more serious than the Nazi government’s decision to invade Italy after the Badoglio government separately signed the armistice of September 8, 1943. This was a direct intervention in the civil war being waged in Russia. In 1871, after all, the Prussians camped near Paris had “stood by and watched” as the Thiers government and the Commune had fought their civil war between March and May. By 1918, however, times had changed for the worse in terms of “proprieties”: the war that had been in progress for years now (“pointless carnage” was the pope’s hubristic but impotent description) had exacerbated the criminal behavior of governments. The war was the origin of everything the century was to bring, from the bypassing of “democracy” to genocide.

Churchill, minister of war in Lloyd George's cabinet (which he entered as a "Liberal," not as a Conservative) organized the English expedition that in the summer of 1918 occupied Arkhangelsk and Murmansk to support the troops of the "white" General Kolchak. The pretext was that this was aimed at reopening an eastern war front with Germany. Naturally, not a shot was fired against the Germans, only against the "red" army. Proof of the English expedition's true intentions was the fact that in the summer of 1919 those troops were still there, even though by then it had been decided to withdraw (nine months after the end of the conflict!). Indeed, with his eager imagination for organizing, Churchill had put forward a plan, to be brokered by the allies, for transforming Russia into a federal state under a government trusted by the Western powers. This was eventually carried out, in 1991–2, with the Yeltsin government.

De Gaulle was younger than Churchill. He was a 30-year-old officer, recently released from imprisonment in Germany (1916–18), when he joined the expeditionary force commanded by General Weygand, sent in August 1920 to fight alongside the Poles under Pilsudski who were intent on reconquering the Baltic. They were supported by a British force. In a celebratory book, *La Troisième République* (published in Paris in 1939) he recalls their exploits with emotion: "Les officiers français [including the author] y prirent une part glorieuse" ["French officers played a glorious part in them."] (p. 255).

A third "allied" contingent distinguished themselves by driving deep into Russian territory as far as Ekaterinburg (July 1918): the Czechoslovaks, who had already been part of the tsarist army that had fought the Austrians, and had now sided with the "whites," supported by the Anglo-French forces, using every possible means. The anonymous author of the "Russia (history)" entry in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* is more balanced than the lyrical poet who penned *La Troisième République*. He observes that "foreign intervention helped in the victualling of the so-called white armies, but perhaps also contributed to discrediting them" (p. 308).

Why was there such heavy intervention? Why was the civil war within Russia expanded by the involvement of other European countries? Clearly, the prime mover was "the great fear" – fear of the revolution achieving propaganda success well beyond Russia's borders, fear that it might give an impetus to movements aiming to emulate it. It had been feared as long as the slaughter of the war continued, because Russia alone had been able to grant the request to make "peace immediately"; and it was feared now that the conflict was over, as social tensions increased after the war, because Russia was an example of a path that epitomized social justice. This path was

highly esteemed even by those who opposed the Bolsheviks in the arguments that now raged within all socialist parties. An example is Filippo Turati's speech to the socialist congress at Livorno in January 1921, where the communist split occurred. Turati clearly rejects the formula "dictatorship of the proletariat" as being the dictatorship of a minority, yet he insists he has *the same goals* as the communists. It is worth quoting his words to experience, albeit momentarily, the climate at that time:

Comrades! This Communism, which then also took the name Socialism, may have expelled me from the ranks of a Party, but it will never expel me from itself; because frankly, comrades (and you may attribute this to the sad privilege of age, not to any particular merit of ours) we learned this Socialism, this Communism, in our youth. Not only that, but in Italy for many long years we taught it to the masses and the progressive parties, when these were ignorant of it, feared it, and were suspicious of it. Thus it is that I, and very few others, at a time that younger people cannot remember, brought to the Italian proletariat struggle this supreme final goal: the conquest of power by the proletarian class, formed into a party that is independent of class. This conquest of power – which Terracini yesterday presented as a feature that distinguished his faction from ours, and the old program from the so-called new one, which he admitted is still being laboriously drawn up – is none other than the glorious program of the socialist party, as it has been for 30 years now, thanks to our efforts.¹

The mild Turati's words alarmed the king of Italy far more than the government in distant St. Petersburg. Reaction, which was bloody to a greater or lesser extent, was under way throughout Europe. Newspapers were filled with daily "civil war" reports from all corners of Europe. On January 15, 1921, *Avanti!* condemned "the frightful deeds of the white terror in Spain, and especially in ill-fated Catalonia." The newspaper continued: "Ferocious censorship prevents Europe being informed of the horrors that are taking place in the Iberian peninsula, horrors that now are in no way inferior to those for which Horthy's Hungary was famous." Horthy predated Mussolini by quite some time. By March 1, 1920, the Hungarian national assembly had conferred on him the powers of "regent" of the kingdom of Hungary, after the "soviet" republic of Béla Kun had been suppressed. This near-fascist power was recognized and protected by the French "socialist" president, Millerand, following the Treaty of Trianon (June 1920), for that sort of dictatorship caused no problems – quite the opposite.

Anti-communist repression in Yugoslavia was equally brutal. Shootings in the square in Vukovar were denounced in the same January 15, 1921, issue of *Avanti!* – and these are merely examples chosen at random.

The broadening of the idea of "communism" to represent a "universal" enemy is symptomatic. What is striking in the encyclical *On Atheistic Communism* issued by Pius XI on 19 March 1937 is the notion, taken for granted (in the paragraph on the "sorry effects"), that at that time there are two "communist" states in existence: Russia and Mexico. The terminology is schematic, but it helps to convey that the "civil war" scenario was not only a European one.

The invention of the phrase "European civil war" is usually attributed to the historiographic intuition of Ernst Nolte, a perceptive, dissentient scholar, in the well-known essay *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945, Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (published in Frankfurt am Main in 1987). It was not, however, coined by him: this interesting formulation was adopted and developed 20 years earlier by a great historian of the twentieth century, Isaac Deutscher, during the Trevelyan Lectures at Cambridge University (January–March 1967)² held on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian revolution.

In the fourth of these lectures, entitled "Stalemate in Class Struggle," Deutscher puts forward an interpretation of the Second World War, its early signs, and its consequences, as one stage in a great "European civil war."³ He blames Stalin's prudence and lack of internationalism for having held back the potential developments ensuing from this conflict ("It [Stalinism] fought the war as a 'Fatherland War', another 1812, not as a European civil war") and, in the same context, reasserts: "An international civil war, with tremendous social revolutionary potentialities, unfolded within the world war."

Nolte, who may not have been aware of this illustrious antecedent, goes back in time to define the chronological framework of this "civil war" (for which the term "European" is perhaps too limiting). He identifies its starting point as 1917, with the Bolsheviks' October revolution. From this premise he deduces that Nazism, with its unsurpassed horrors, was only the "reply" to the "first blow" in this war, struck by the Bolsheviks with their "class massacres," to which Nazism responded with "racial genocide." Almost none of Nolte's analysis holds water. Various observations come to mind: for example, Robespierre's Great Terror was also a class "massacre" of the French aristocracy, but it did not provoke any "racial" response – rather, massacres were perpetrated in the opposite direction by the white Terror. The implicit connection in Nolte's argument is gradually made explicit: many of the Bolshevik leaders were Jews, as were communist leaders in other countries, such as Germany and Poland. According to Nolte, this explains the reasoning behind Nazism's ghastly "reply" to the

communist revolution begun in 1917. This does not hold water either, though. Apart from anything else, the Nazis presented their program for exterminating the Jews (which was carried out mostly in the last phase of the war) as a fight against those who "made the people go hungry" – a rich, selfish, alien group who had taken root in the healthy body of the German people (and, later, in the parts of Europe gradually included in the Reich). In short, we need only study the history of these events, as many since Nolte have done, to realize how the German scholar's analytical "insight" is wide of the mark.

There is merit, nonetheless, in attempting to understand Europe's twentieth-century wars in a unitary fashion – though Nolte is not alone in doing this. One aspect of such a unitary vision should be an analysis of the links that make the two world wars a single conflict, as far as Europe is concerned. This is the same conceptual process that led Thucydides to consider the wars between the Greek powers of 431 to 404 BC as a single conflict, and led Friedrich Meinecke to an original, unitary interpretation of the first half of the twentieth century in his *The German Catastrophe*.⁴

In fact the First World War itself was the *first act* of the "European civil war" – though it is true that revolution broke out in Russia and achieved unhoped-for and unexpected success precisely because it was a *war waged on war* by the classes who were victims of the inhuman, imperialistic, conflict aimed at dominating world markets. The two revolutions, Russian and German (1917/18), were the *consequence* of the carnage sought by the imperialistic bourgeoisie. Although this "insight" appears in *Socialism and War*, the pamphlet Lenin wrote for the Zimmerwald conference in the summer of 1915, it was not his, having been discussed already in the socialist International's conference at Basel in 1912. If the Bolshevik movement – scattered in exile and reduced to quarrelsome, clandestine groups – was able in a few years, even months, to seize the epochal opportunity of taking power in Russia, and to keep that power through a bitter civil conflict, this was an *effect* of the war. It was the result of the exasperation of the people taken to war by what Rosa Luxemburg called the "chief enemy" – the bourgeoisie in their own country. Germany's majority socialist movement went from patriotic support for war credits to the rift between SPD and USPD in the spring of 1917 (the latter party was by then against the war) and, after the strikes of January 1918, embarked on the path that would lead it to seize power, riding on the wave of the Kiel sailors' mutiny. This too was an *effect* of the war, of the massacre into which the world had been casually flung by the "enlightened" ruling classes of civilized Europe. Fernand Braudel writes:

Without exaggerating the power of the Second International, we can say with confidence that if the West was on the brink of war in 1914, it was also on the brink of Socialism. The latter was on the point of taking power, of building a Europe as modern as the present one, and perhaps more so. In a few days, a few hours, war destroyed all hope.⁵

This is a telling vision, but it is almost naïve. Europe was immersed in slaughter by the very classes that had made it the garden of the world; it was they who began the “civil war.” Common people looked favorably on Lenin because their other masters throughout history had given them war and hunger.

Nolte, however, uses a trick to get himself off the hook: he reverses the order of events. First he deals with the Bolsheviki’s seizure of power (in chapter II) and *afterwards* with the crisis of 1914 and the emergence of the Spartacists in Germany. This leads him to be singularly naïve, as when he describes as “incomprehensible” the popularity the Bolsheviki rapidly gained among the troops fighting in France and Germany.⁶

What really matters however – in facing the inescapable fact of the immense political, social, and military conflict (and sometimes all three at once) which shook Europe between 1914 and 1945 – is not to discard Nolte’s impromptu connections, but to establish the elements involved. There were not two of these (communism and fascism, in its various forms) but three, and the third was the most important. As has often been pointed out, it finally emerged victorious at the end of the civil war, which lasted long after 1945, until the collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990s. This third element is the so-called “liberal democracies.”

The third element is crucial, and without it nothing can be properly understood. It was certainly the driving force behind the settling of scores with a Germany embarked on the conquest of “world power” (to use the famous phrase in Fritz Fischler’s important book).⁷ In any case, it does not matter whether the blame lies more with the allies or with the empires for striking the “first blow” of 1914. Since the governments that clashed in that memorable August were all parliamentary, it can be confidently asserted that the “third element” has the dubious but considerable distinction of having sparked off the hell of the twentieth century.

When the revolutions broke out, the “third element” tried to strangle them. In Russia’s case it did its utmost, but failed. Instead, it had to face the daunting task of dealing with Russian power at a distance – on home ground, behind its own front lines – once the policy of the *cordon sanitaire* and strangulation at birth had failed. The king of Italy was in the vanguard

in this: he understood that one way to safety was to defeat the people using nationalist populism, and he appointed Benito Mussolini to head the government, with the substantial and decisive support of the liberal establishment. On October 31, 1922, the *Corriere della Sera*, then edited by the liberal Albertini, devoted a full page to the first Mussolini government, which it discussed in tones filled with adulation for the new leader. Hindenburg was more cautious, but was driven by the same forces to the same conclusion. By June 1940 – when Marshal Pétain, leader of a *révolution nationale* that was identical in form to fascism, signed France's surrender to Nazi Germany and installed the anti-Semitic Vichy regime – all continental Europe except the Soviet Union was fascist. Parliamentary governments had fallen one by one because the various bourgeoisies, captured by the fascist movements swarming over Europe, had brought discredit upon what seemed even to the most well-disposed to be only a relic of the nineteenth century: multi-party parliamentary government.

It is considered bad form to say that, immediately after the war, the "liberal democracies" gradually "handed over" to fascist regimes in order to stop the left-wing parties in their tracks. There is, though, a more elegant and certainly more accurate way of putting this. The classes that had supported the parties in government until then (liberals, radicals, and so forth) gradually withdrew all favor, lost faith in "parliamentary democracy," and chose fascism instead. Social tensions, the "fear" and the discredit into which parliamentary systems had fallen, all shifted centrist-moderate opinion towards that choice. The backing of large sections of the capitalist class for fascist movements was, of course, vital, while the "public order" apparatus, guided by decisive "behind the scenes" forces at the high levels of state bureaucracies, offered the necessary logistic and "military" support. Where public opinion remained largely unaffected by this slide towards fascism, a coup directed from outside would intervene. This happened in Austria, where in the general elections of November 9, 1930, the socialist party won more than 42 percent of the vote. On March 4, 1933, Dollfuss suspended parliament, and on February 12, 1934, the socialist party and unions were outlawed. Schuschnigg installed a fascist regime that looked to Mussolini, promoter of the "Rome Protocols." Only four years later, the *Anschluss* took place. Horthy in Hungary and Primo de Rivera in Spain performed the same function.

Socialists who were profoundly sensitive to democratic values, such as Bruno Bauer, directly experienced a great disappointment: the rapid deterioration of liberal democracy in the countries where it had asserted itself after the earthquake of 1918. In the thick of the political struggle of those

years, Bauer and those like him had taken issue with the communists' sectarianism, especially with reference to the left's incurable rift during the Weimar Republic. In the final analysis, however, they saw the unavoidable fact of the middle classes' choice of fascism as the chief cause of the entire historical process they had witnessed, and therefore as the chief element in their *assessment* of it.

Complementing this choice was the acceptance of fascism as "normality," and the regard in which it was held, by the "great" nations that had retained a parliamentary system: France (though from at least February 1934 it was the scene of alarming subversive right-wing activity, leading, in the end, to Vichy)⁸ and England.

It is customary to quote this famous passage from the speech Winston Churchill gave to the British Anti-socialist and Anti-Communist Union on February 17, 1933:

The Roman genius personified by Mussolini, the greatest living legislator, has shown many nations how it is possible to resist the advances of socialism, and has shown the path a nation can follow when courageously led. With the fascist regime, Mussolini has established a reference point by which the countries that are engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with socialism should not hesitate to be guided.⁹

This was not an isolated comment. The elderly Lloyd George said in an interview in the *Manchester Guardian* of January 17, 1933, that the corporative state created by fascism was "the greatest social reform of the modern era," while George Lansbury, the leader of the Labour opposition, told the *News Chronicle* two months later: "I can see only two methods [of dealing with unemployment], and these have already been indicated by Mussolini: public works, or subsidies . . . If I were a dictator, I would do as Mussolini."

By this time, even in "respectable" countries fascism had become *normality* (if not always in private); antifascism, by contrast, was a tiresome mixture of subversion (where communists were concerned) or the lamentable beliefs of political exiles (members of the bourgeoisie who had not managed to move with the times). This obviously throws light on the severely critical tone of Silvio Trentin, a distinguished political exile and exponent of "Giustizia e Libertà" ["Justice and Freedom"], who described the political and economic situation in the USA, a country that symbolized Western values, as "government by boards of directors." It was to be a long time before antifascism would be seen in a positive light by the "democrats" who admired the Duce.

In those same countries there arose a feeling of dissatisfaction with what even Harold Laski, professor of social and political sciences at the London

School of Economics, by now called "capitalistic democracy." As his analysis in *Democracy in Crisis* (1933)¹⁰ shows, this feeling was inseparable from class self-interest, which would eventually destroy this democracy at the root. The same year, a harsh indictment of the irreversible crisis in parliamentary government was attributed to Pierre Cot,¹¹ an authoritative and combative exponent of French radical socialism. The *Corriere della Sera*, by then openly fascist, reported this prominently on its front page, the same day that it exultantly proclaimed Hitler's election victory (March 7, 1933) under the headline "Mussolini's way forward." The daily's conclusion was that parliamentary government was dead even in the view of Europe's foremost liberal leaders. In his chapter entitled "The Decadence of Institutions," Laski observes: "Democracy wants to be guided, and in a capitalistic democracy the principal weapons of those who guide it are in the hands of capitalists. Its opponents are always on the defensive, unless they confine their antagonism to minutiae." Clear-sightedly, he highlights the many factors which preserve "capitalistic democracies," and the means these democracies use to preserve themselves, such as electoral tests. "Capitalistic democracy will never allow its electorate to descend into socialism through the chance occurrence of an election result." Naturally "public opinion" is connected to social order and, more generally, to the existing social order: "A new order of things becomes acceptable to the multitude only when it is evident that the will of the old order has been definitively broken." Laski is clearly returning to analyses of the power of *building* public opinion which, as already mentioned, was a weapon of German counter-propaganda during the First World War. He cites disingenuous pronouncements on the subject by a great newspaper magnate, Lord Northcliffe, ("the greatest" according to Laski) in his book *Newspapers and the Public* (1920). Moving on to the other "democracy" – France – he adds: "*Le Temps* and *Le Journal des Débats* were recently bought by the Comité des Forges [the metalworking industry] and its subsidiary organizations, and no one believes that by these acquisitions they proposed, for example, to deal impartially with socialism or disarmament."

There is an intriguing detail in this broad, fascinating area of the *creation of public opinion*. Lord Northcliffe was the great architect of English propaganda during the First World War (he had been "cleverer" than the various German professors who brandished various difficult "truths" in vain). Thus the man who in 1920 laid bare the mechanisms used to build public opinion had not long before won the battle against German propaganda, which was attempting to unmask English "democracy" by pointing precisely at the insidious mechanism for building public opinion. As Ernst Bramstedt shows in a fine study, Northcliffe was to become Goebbels's "technical model."¹²

These and other critical voices were developing a debate on the nature and real mechanisms of democracy that had begun long before, springing up and gathering momentum fueled by daily observation of political-parliamentary societies during 40 long years of peace. It had its roots in the "elitist" criticism of the apparent "democracy" of parliamentary systems. This criticism had, to varying degrees, inspired all the postwar protagonists: the architects of fascism and of the "conciliar" system (with the considerable complication that the "dictatorship of the proletariat" had become in reality the "dictatorship of the party"), and the new democrats such as Laski and Trentin, to name only the best-known. The latter found the old system of parliamentary government – dusted down for the postwar period, and tempted on all sides by fascism – intolerable. They therefore advocated a radical renewal of democracy that was not dissimilar in its *content* to the way the soviet system had structured society: "justice" was to complement, and if necessary correct, "liberty." Their programs were to have a lasting echo in the attempt (of which more later) after the fall of fascism to found democracies in Europe that were no longer eroded by the flaws that the two inter-war decades had so glaringly exposed.

These criticisms were entirely justified, and not new.¹³ Naturally they played into the hands of the other two "solutions," fascism and the soviet system, which both claimed to solve the structural limits "capitalistic democracy" placed on representation of the people. It should be added however that, faced with the central problem of the twentieth century – democracy of the masses – these exponents of the "third solution" clearly expressed their sympathy (tempered with severe criticism) for the soviet experiment, but totally rejected fascism. They were well aware of the latter's close relationship with the same classes who had formerly dominated the "liberal democracies" and now continued to be the dominant force in the corporative and skillfully populist framework of fascist states.

The two "democracies" – France and England – showed themselves to be wanting in other respects too. How could English "democracy" object to renascent German imperialism, when England had waged a colonial war in Ireland from 1919 to 1923, finally succeeding (April 1923) in keeping control of a substantial area of Irish territory, in a conflict that continues today? How could hyper-nationalist postwar France, which was prepared to reignite the powder keg of a European conflict by occupying the Ruhr out of selfish chauvinism (1923), present itself as the model or guardian of a new international order? How could the two "democratic" powers be seen as credible in opposing Hitler's drive for European dominance – now universally regarded as inevitable – when they had unanimously abandoned the Spanish republic to its fate while it was attacked simultaneously by Franco's revolt

and German and Italian intervention in the civil war (1936–9) that had the Vatican's blessing? How could they present themselves as the backbone of a force against fascism while they had a hand in Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia by signing the Munich agreement of September 1938?

All this was being reasserted by the remaining non-communist "democrats," who were still active in a Europe on its way to being completely taken over by fascism. They were convinced that only a completely rebuilt form of democracy could offer a cause worth fighting for; certainly, it was not worth defending the "liberal" variety which, having brought tragedy in 1914, was now sliding towards a compromise with fascism.

The country that had attempted to lay the foundations for a "social democracy" rather than one that was merely "liberal" – that is, the Weimar Republic – was crushed in the grip of the conflict between Nazis and communists, which in many ways resembled a civil war. When defeat was complete, there could be no delaying the "strategic" revision set in train by the international communist movement and the USSR itself (which were inseparable). As is well known, Stalin asserted that it was possible, and eventually essential, to achieve "socialism in one country." Nevertheless, he had continued to believe that the "revolution," as it was described at the time, was possible in Germany – in other words, that all had not been lost with the defeat of 1918/19. This explains the immense investment in people and resources for the German party, the only truly mass communist party in western Europe, which, thanks to an electoral system that was not punitive like the French one, could secure a large number of representatives in the Reichstag. The KPD's entire strategy of direct opposition to social democracy can be explained by this colossal error of judgment, which was founded on a theory of "social fascism" asserted at the sixth congress of the Communist International.

The picture was uniformly gloomy. The long-lasting effects of the great crisis (1929–33) – the New Deal in the United States, and national socialism in Germany – demanded a radical rethink. Arguably, the shattering of the illusion that the situation remained "revolutionary" (which meant defeat also for the Trotskyist watchword of "permanent revolution") had two consequences. The USSR decided finally to concentrate on its own reconstruction and strengthening (which Deutscher describes as "Stalin's egoism"); and the remaining socialist and democratic parties regained credit on the strength of a new strategy whose fundamental plank was *antifascism*. This was precisely the line of the "popular fronts" that was launched at the seventh congress of the International (Moscow, August 1935). It was the brainchild of Dimitrov, the Bulgarian communist leader; his partner in this change of direction (Stalin did not involve himself personally) was Togliatti,

the Italian communist leader. The main "theoretical" innovation was that Dimitrov's report made a clear distinction between "bourgeois democracy" and fascist dictatorship; this was a change from the previous conference, when the two had been regarded as equivalent. The Italian party's failed attempt in August 1936 to drive a wedge between the fascists' rank and file and their leaders was not in contradiction with this line. (It took the form of an appeal to the "black-shirted brothers," and was based on the erroneous assumption that the African campaign had led to disillusionment and unease in fascism's popular base.)

The decision seemed to work in the communists' favor precisely in the area of electoral consensus. In the French election of May 1936 – when universal male suffrage, a majority system, and massive voter apathy played an important part in the results – the Popular Front (socialists, communists, and socialist-radicals) won a majority,¹⁴ thanks above all to the electoral success of the PCF. Léon Blum became prime minister, but the communists confined themselves to support from outside the government.

Never was a victory more bitter, from the very beginning, than this one. A few months earlier, on February 16, 1936, the *Frente popular* (in which the communists played an active part, though they were few in number) had won the general election in Spain, which had been a republic since 1931. That same month General Francisco Franco, who was in Morocco, to which he had been relegated by the Azaña government, renewed contact with the son of the deposed dictator Primo de Rivera and with the commanders of the military garrisons of Cadiz, Seville, Cordoba, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Pamplona, and Madrid itself, to plan the military revolt against the republic. On July 17, when Léon Blum had been in power in France for a few weeks, the insurrection led by Franco erupted throughout the country, beginning a three-year civil war that was to be the death of the Front Populaire in Paris. Inevitably, once Germany and Italy had helped Franco's rebels, and the Soviet Union had helped the republican side, what had been a Spanish civil war became a European one. However, Léon Blum's "socialist" and radical France preferred to align itself with the non-intervention policy favored by England. The "democracies" left Spain's democracy to its fate, while in the civil war the fascists on one side faced the Comintern on the other, with the consequences everyone knows. In Paris, Léon Blum was ousted and replaced on April 10, 1938, by Edouard Daladier, who had attended the Munich conference, with a majority of a different order.

None the less, the decision of the Comintern's seventh congress remained firm, at least for some leaders as prominent as Togliatti: "The communists today take their place at the head of the struggle for the defence and conquest of democracy, because today the struggle, everywhere in the

world, is between fascism and democracy. This defense of democracy must be undertaken with the greatest courage, and eschewing any political allusions that would weaken the struggle itself."¹⁵

The war in Spain was, in all senses, the "dress rehearsal" for the catastrophic event that was to be a watershed in the history of democracy: the Second World War. Then, anyone who chose not to choose had no political future. It was not enough to retain a veneer of conformist respectability: even the most irreproachable were at risk, if we look at the progressive degradation of the Daladier and Reynaud governments, and the radicals' initial possibilism with regard to Pétain.

The only country that stood firm alongside the Spanish republic was the USSR. It is no longer fashionable to recall this (except among those who are reassessing the politics of Franco as a painful necessity), and even recent films have indulged in an unexpected infatuation with Trotsky's views – nevertheless, it remains a fact. The Comintern line, opposed by the likes of the POUM and the anarchists, who believed the time had come for the Spanish socialist revolution, was that Largo Caballero-style "subversivism" had to be curbed. Instead, a course of action should be imposed that did not alienate the moderate bourgeoisie who were loyal to the republic, and this was to be done with all the harshness of which Stalinism was capable. Willy Brandt describes this situation realistically in his memoirs: "Three thousand Soviet advisers took over key positions, creating a secret service that set itself up as a state above the state, and furiously opposed the social revolution. The argument put forward – which was right in itself – was that military needs should be pre-eminent."¹⁶ Willy Brandt perfectly conveys the situation, which he witnessed personally. Like all witnesses, he saw what was "visible" and very little of the "secret" story, which the great historian Ronald Syme describes, in a charming paradox, as the only "true" one. This is to be found in documents, where these survive. It should thus be remembered that after the Reich had been defeated and the German archives had been seized by the victors, details emerged that in the heat of the moment might have seemed to be the shamefully false accusations now regarded as typical of Stalinism. Particularly striking today are the admissions Franco made to the German ambassador, von Faupel, about how nationalists had successfully infiltrated the ranks of the anarchists and Trotskyists to exacerbate to the maximum the friction with the "Stalinists."¹⁷ George Orwell describes this friction in *Homage to Catalonia*, a book that Hugh Thomas, the Labour-supporting historian of the Spanish Civil War, placidly observes is "marvellously written, but needs to be read with some reservations."¹⁸ The Spanish experience of 1936–9 was in many ways similar to that of

Salvador Allende in Chile in 1970–5. In Chile too the communists were accused of “shameful” betrayal by the extremists of the MIR and the socialist left. Allende fell partly because his government was regarded (in bad faith) as essentially dominated by the MIR, and a vast consensus of classes terrified by the MIR’s extremism gathered around the right.

Stalin’s letter to Largo Caballero of December 21, 1936, is a significant document:

The Spanish revolution opens up paths that differ in many respects from that trodden by Russia. This is the result of social, historical, and geographical differences, and of the demands of the international situation, which are different from those that faced the revolution in Russia. It may be that the parliamentary course proves to be a more effective process for bringing about revolution in Spain than it was in Russia.

He thus urges Largo Caballero to implement agrarian and fiscal measures to benefit peasants, to avoid confiscations, which can alienate the lower and middle bourgeoisie, to guarantee freedom of trade, and to secure the support of President Azaña and his republican circle. Then he goes on to his concerns in the international sphere: “Whatever is necessary to prevent Spain’s enemies seeing in her a communist republic, in order to prevent their intervention, which poses the greatest danger to republican Spain.”¹⁹

However, the Spanish communist party’s secretary, José Díaz, seemed to go farther, telling the central committee: “The republic for which we are fighting is a different one; it is not like France or that of any other capitalist country might be. We are fighting to destroy the *material foundations* on which reaction and fascism are founded, because unless these foundations are destroyed no true political democracy can exist.”²⁰

The difficulty in striking a balance, which undermined the republic, lay precisely in the various ways in which such proclamations could be interpreted. For Togliatti, who was there in his capacity as Comintern leader, the priority was “to win the war.” In his account of events, he writes:

Despite the vigorous and correct stance taken by our party, the nature of this war, as a war of independence, was not recognized by the other antifascist organizations from the outset, but only very late. For a long time we did not operate or fight as we should have done in a war of independence against large capitalist countries, but rather as we might have done in a Spanish civil war during the last century!

Togliatti’s criticism goes to the heart of the matter: he is condemning the absence of “forms of democracy that allow the masses to participate in

the life of the country and in politics." He censures the underground nature of the "popular front committees," the managerial nature of factory committees, the absence of democracy within trade unions, and the parties' lack of vitality. In a retrospective account, he says that in reality "a true democratic regime" never came into being during the civil war, and reaffirms his view that "the experience of popular front politics is fully confirmed" by the episode.²¹

It was not easy to sustain a political approach based on "fronts" while the Blum government was disintegrating, and "democracies" abandoned the Spanish republic and responded to Soviet efforts to secure collective guarantees against German aggression by signing the Munich Agreement of September 29, 1938.

The debate over the long-standing and immediate causes of the spectacular diplomatic about-turn known as the "Nazi-Soviet pact" (August 23, 1939) is destined to continue for a long time. What appears clear, especially in the light of Dimitrov's *Diary*, is that this was a strategic decision, rather than a tactical expedient, by Stalin. As might have been expected, its effect on the seventh Comintern congress was devastating. In the eyes of the political groups who had been the main target for the approach based on "fronts," which were now largely dispersed anyway, the fact that the English and French had complied with Hitler's wishes on all counts, from Spain to Czechoslovakia, became secondary: what stunned them was the Nazi-Soviet pact. "State" politics had prevailed, but it could not do so with impunity. What was appalling was the collapse of a certainty that had been taken for granted: the irreconcilability of the USSR and Nazi Germany. The former would not be forgiven for behaving like any other state. Saragat's letters to Nenni (1935-9), which were made public by the Fondazione Nenni in January 1998, directly convey the trauma, and the sudden, radical change in attitude. We need only compare Saragat's comments after Munich. On September 24, 1938, he wrote: "Russia is simply sublime. Litvinov is giving a lesson in dignity and democracy with the finesse of a great statesman. France lowers itself by its actions, while Russia reaches for the stars." He also derided "the anticommunist fools." On August 22, 1939, however, he wrote: "Dear Nenni, Russia's betrayal is complete. We can no longer blindfold ourselves. This is the end of the Third International, and perhaps the beginning of a new socialist movement to which the disgusted, disillusioned militant communists must flock." As early as September 2, 1939, Trotsky, in Mexico, writes of "fear of the masses" which supposedly drove Stalin to make the pact at a time when - according to Trotsky - he should have been concentrating his efforts on a European (and perhaps world) revolution.²²

The most convincing assessment of that decision can be found in the first volume (*From War to War*) of Churchill's history, *The Second World War*: "There can however be no doubt, even in the after-light, that Britain and France should have accepted the Russian offer, proclaimed the Triple Alliance [USSR, Britain, and France], and left the method by which it could be made effective in case of war to be adjusted between allies engaged against a common foe."²³ Only this would have made the pact impossible. We know that the Russians felt they had been cheated by the deliberately inconclusive way in which the English and French conducted the negotiations. They repeated the decision of Brest-Litovsk in a totally different situation, extracting themselves from the coming war as then they had come out of the anti-imperialist war. Over the years, a myth has sprung up over the "partition" of Poland by Hitler and Stalin, yet another episode in the long history of partition. The truth is that in 1938/9 Poland was a hysterically anti-Soviet state and compliant towards Hitler's Germany, on whose behavior Poland's foreign minister, Beck, modelled his own (including withdrawal from the League of Nations on August 11, 1938).²⁴ After the Munich Agreement of September 1938 Poland played a part in the partition of Czechoslovakia annexed by the Reich, receiving, as its share of the spoils, the mining area of Teschen.²⁵ Polish policy in the months leading up to the Nazi-Soviet pact is described in the following terms by Hugh Seton-Watson, the greatest Western historian of eastern Europe, in his fine study *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918-1941* (1945).²⁶ "Confident of their hold on army and police, 'cleverly' playing off against each other the different sections of the Opposition, the bosses of the regime prayed that the crisis would last as long as possible, and meanwhile made small preparations either on the home front or on the frontiers." For its part the USSR, through the pact, regained the territories it had lost in the peace imposed upon it by Germany in 1918 (a loss which the Versailles treaty had not remedied).

However, this pact could not remain a purely diplomatic and military decision. Inevitably, it called everything into question all over again – including, of course, the change to the entire Comintern policy that was made at the seventh congress. Clearly, it would have long-lasting consequences, lead to changes of heart, and put the roles of leaders at stake.

The two years of the Nazi-Soviet pact (August 1939–June 1941, though contacts had begun as early as March 1939, just before Molotov had replaced Litvinov in May) represent a considerable anomaly in the rigidly bipolar structure of the "European civil war." Moreover, because those two years tend to be judged in the light of what happened afterwards, they have not received the attention their importance deserves. There are exceptions,

such as Angelo Tasca's distinguished study *Deux Ans d'alliance Germano-Soviétique* (Paris, 1949), J. W. Brügel's documentary collection *Stalin und Hitler* (Vienna, 1973), and A. Read and D. Fisher's study *The Deadly Embrace* (London, 1988), but not much besides.²⁷ There are even extreme cases, such as the monumental universal history of the USSR Academy of Sciences, where it is not mentioned at all, except in a brief chronological table!

This disturbing section of the history of the Second World War is interesting here because of its effects on the political line of the "popular fronts." This line finds itself set aside, as does the campaign against fascism. In a speech to the Supreme Soviet on August 31, 1939, Molotov referred – apparently – with his customary savagery to "cretinous antifascism."²⁸ On September 7, in a meeting with Molotov, Zhdanov, Dimitrov, and Manuilski, Stalin made his position clear in person. The account in Dimitrov's *Diary* contains, among other things, this passage from the speech:

- *Before the war* [that is, before September 1], *opposing a democratic regime to fascism was entirely correct.*
- *During war between the imperialist powers that is now incorrect.*
- *The division of capitalist states into fascist and democratic no longer makes sense.*
- *The war has precipitated a radical change.*
- Yesterday's United Popular Front served to ease the position of slaves under a capitalist regime.
- *Under conditions of an imperialist war, the prospect of the annihilation of slavery arises!*
- Maintaining yesterday's position (the United Popular Front, the unity of the nation) today means slipping into the position of the bourgeoisie.
- That slogan is struck.²⁹

This assessment is rigidly schematic and without foundation; but what is striking is how definitely the "slogan" is declared dead. During the early months of the war and again in 1940, in his writings on the conflict that had just erupted, Trotsky sarcastically repeats that from 1935 Stalin had "*courted the democracies* for five years."

The next day Dimitrov received the following instructions in a text (written in German) addressed to all the parties in the International: "The division of the capitalist states into fascist and democratic [camps] has lost its former significance. Strategy must be altered accordingly." The conclusion is bizarre: "Everywhere, Communist parties must undertake a decisive offensive against the treacherous policy of social democracy."³⁰ Clearly the

authors of this extremely modest text, not knowing what model to emulate, imagined that it was August 1914 and they were faced with social democrats who were voting in favor of war credits. The directive specifies that it is aimed particularly at France, England, and Belgium, as well as the United States (*sic*). This is the same line that the Fourth International put out in May 1940, when the war escalated with the invasion of Belgium and the breaching of the Maginot line – a fact not usually mentioned because the focus is on the USSR’s foreign policy. The similarity of the *assessment* obviously points to a common political culture. This time, Trotsky’s words match those of the underground newspaper *l’Humanité*. The difference lies rather in the realism, verging on cynicism, with which the Soviet Union put this assessment into practice, contrasted with the unrealistic prospect of the world revolution which Trotsky inferred from that same assessment. Some quotations from *Imperialist War and the World Proletarian Revolution*,³¹ Trotsky’s very lengthy essay of May 26, 1940, serve to convey the “spirit of the time”:

The Fourth International is not addressing the governments that have plunged their peoples into slaughter, nor the bourgeois politicians that lead these governments, nor even the working-class bureaucrats [a reference to socialist parties] that support the bourgeoisie at war [p. 149];

The immediate cause of the present war is the rivalry between the old, wealthy colonial empires, Great Britain and France, and the belated imperialist pillagers, Germany and Italy [p. 152];³²

About a century ago, when the nation state still represented something relatively progressive, the *Communist Manifesto* proclaimed that the working class have no fatherland . . . The small satellites [Belgium, Norway, etc.] were about to be pulverised by the steel jaws of the big capitalist countries . . . The reactionary rallying cry of *national defence* needs to be countered by that of the destruction of the nation state by revolution. The madhouse of capitalist Europe needs to be countered by the programme for the United Socialist States of Europe [pp. 158–9: it is clear that in exile Trotsky has lost all sense of reality and believes he is Lenin in 1914];

Equally mendacious is the rallying cry of democracy’s war against fascism.³³ As if the workers had forgotten that it was the British government that helped Hitler to seize power! Imperialist democracies are in reality the great aristocracies of history, founded on the exploitation of colonial people [pp. 159–60];

With Hitler, world capitalism, driven to desperation, has begun to plunge a sharp sword into its own side. The butchers of the second imperialist war will not succeed in making Hitler the scapegoat for their own sins [*sic*]. All the leaders of our time will be answerable to the people’s court. Hitler will simply be the first in line among the criminals in the dock [pp. 162–3].

And so forth. The last words of his essay of August 20, 1940, his last before he was murdered and written several months after France had fallen, give an idea of how unreal Trotsky's ideas were in those months:

The German soldiers, that is, the workers and peasants, will in most cases feel much more sympathy for the defeated peoples than for their ruling caste. The necessity to act at all times like "pacifiers" [?] and oppressors will *rapidly disintegrate* [*sic*] the occupying armies, and infect them with the revolutionary spirit. (p. 231)

Anyone who wrote in this vein had understood nothing of the true nature of the Nazi regime, or of its consolidated and proven capacity for mass indoctrination and winning over the masses.

Good realist that he was, Stalin soon changed his mind about the revolutionary nature of the situation and, in a further meeting with Dimitrov and Zhdanov (October 25, 1939) explained that "Raising the issue of peace now, on the basis of the destruction of capital, means helping Chamberlain and the warmongers, – means isolating oneself from the masses!"³⁴

In Paris, a few days before he was arrested by the police because he was Italian and therefore a citizen of a non-friendly country, Togliatti found time to write a long appeal that was published in *La Voce degli Italiani* [*The Italians' Voice*] on August 25, 1939, under the title *Dichiarazione del partito comunista d'Italia* ["Declaration by the Communist Party of Italy"]. It deals with the Nazi-Soviet pact, which had just hit the headlines, and is a labored piece of work from the point of view of logic. Its central argument is a continuous denunciation of fascism – except, of course, for its many declarations of support for the pact – within a rather original interpretation of the pact itself as a deadly "blow against fascism" and "unmasking" of fascism and its "anticommunist demagoguery." Its final commitment is symptomatic, clashing somewhat with Moscow's tune and coinciding with the positions expressed at the time (though later recanted) by the PCF: "If, despite everything, war breaks out, we will fight unhesitatingly so that the war may bring fascism's political and military defeat, and its collapse." This commitment is reasserted immediately afterwards, in *Lettera aperta al partito socialista italiano* [Open Letter to the Italian Socialist Party]: "we will take advantage of every opportunity offered to us – if necessary joining the French army – to fight the fascists and help to defeat them, as we did in Spain at Guadalajara."³⁵ This is in total disagreement with what would soon be the Comintern's instructions – in deference to which Maurice Thorez, the PCF secretary, *would desert* the French army on October 4, 1939.

Togliatti went to Moscow, where he wrote his last report on Spain – which reasserts the essential validity of the line of the “fronts” – in May 1939, while the secret negotiations between Russia and Germany were already under way. He left for Paris in July.³⁶

After a long and brutal imprisonment in France, from which he was freed very probably thanks to intervention behind the scenes by the Comintern and by antifascist members of the French judiciary,³⁷ Togliatti spent a month of semi-liberty in Paris before returning to the USSR (May 1940). During this time he produced a small underground periodical for Italians: *Lettere di Spartaco* [Letters of Spartacus] whose title could hardly be a clearer allusion to the German Spartacists’ decision to oppose the war head-on in 1917/18.³⁸ In it he tried to find noble origins for the ghastly situation in which the communists found themselves after the “pact” had been signed. This was not an auspicious decision, however (unless it was intentional) given Lenin’s former extreme hostility to Rosa Luxemburg’s strategy, echoed with memorable vehemence by Stalin himself. In the *Letters* Togliatti adopts the Comintern’s line with some embarrassment, referring ironically to the “sentimental distinction” some militants insisted on making between the two warring blocs. Between March and April 1940 he aligns himself as much as possible: the socialists are graced with the epithet “guard dogs of the imperialist bourgeoisie” or branded “traitors” (no. 9, March 1–10). The PCF is rebuked for having “voted for war credits” when the conflict erupted, and in the article *Chi è Spartaco* [Who is Spartacus?], which deals with political programs, Togliatti reasserts that “Spartacus is *the mortal enemy of fascism* and of the imperialist bourgeoisie.” In a long piece for the *Stato Operaio* [Workers’ State], now published also in America, Togliatti further adjusts his sights, recalling with unusual harshness Lenin’s *On the Struggle against Social-chauvinism*, naturally moving on from that to the new war and the socialist parties’ newly “social chauvinist” position (the piece was published in May 1941 but had already appeared in Russian in January). Probably none of this was enough, however. On his return to the USSR he was subjected to an inquiry (September 1940) and in July 1941 – when the pact collapsed with Germany’s attack on the USSR on June 21, and the line abruptly changed – he was excluded from “especially secret business.”³⁹ In October 1941 he was even arrested and held for a few days.⁴⁰

Dimitrov describes a conversation with the two Spanish leaders who had taken refuge in Moscow after the fall of Madrid – José Díaz and Dolores Ibarruri, both of whom were rigorously aligned. He writes: “Dolores also states she has less than full confidence in Ercoli [Togliatti]. She feels there is something alien about him, something unlike us, although she cannot

substantiate that concretely.”⁴¹ Until he returned to Italy after the first fall of Mussolini, Togliatti was relegated to radio propaganda duties.

Faced with the choice between an immediate war with Germany in defence of Poland, which was a hostile country (and moreover forbade Soviet troops to cross its territory in the event of war) and a preventive peace with Germany in return for substantial territorial gains in Poland and the Baltic (compensation for the mutilations inflicted on Russia at Brest-Litovsk, which were certainly not remedied at Versailles), Stalin did not hesitate. He had also viewed peace acquired at such a low price as more favorable to further widening of the USSR's sphere of influence.

The Soviet Union unilaterally extended the area of expansion agreed with Germany by attacking Finland and trying to involve Bulgaria in a bilateral treaty – an attempt blocked by the Germans. Hitler – as we now know directly from Molotov's own account – aimed to push the USSR towards Iran and India, on to a collision course with England.⁴² It was the Soviet Union's unexpected drive in the opposite direction to the one Hitler had intended which drove him to the suicidal attack on Russia, under the illusion that he could finish a lightning war even before his invasion of England, to which it would be a prelude. On June 21, 1941, a month later than planned, "Operation Barbarossa" began. On the evening of June 22, Churchill addressed the English:

No one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty-five years. I will unsay no word that I have spoken about it. But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding. The past with its crimes, its follies and its tragedies, flashes away. I see the Russian soldiers standing on the threshold of their native land, guarding the fields which their fathers have tilled from time immemorial . . .

But now I have to declare the decision of His Majesty's Government . . . We have but one aim and one single, irrevocable purpose. We are resolved to destroy Hitler and every vestige of the Nazi régime. From this nothing will turn us – nothing. We will never parley, we will never negotiate with Hitler or any of his gang. We shall fight him by land, we shall fight him by sea, we shall fight him in the air, until with God's help we have rid the earth of his shadow and liberated its peoples from his yoke. Any man or state who fights on against Nazidom will have our aid. Any man or state who marches with Hitler is our foe.⁴³

Also attributed to Churchill is the witticism: "If Hitler invaded Hell I would not hesitate, in the Commons, to say something polite about the devil."

The immediacy of this reaction is an important historical fact that should be studied in depth. Its lightning speed, besides confirming the quick reactions and astuteness of the British premier (who had not long been at the head of a government of national unity that included the Labour Party) is also an indication of the doubts that British diplomats had gradually developed over the durability of the Nazi–Soviet pact. It should not be forgotten that the USSR and Britain maintained regular diplomatic relations during the period of almost two years that passed between the “non-aggression” pact and “Operation Barbarossa,” even though the former had, within a few weeks, become a treaty of friendship between the USSR and Germany. During those long months the task of the Soviet ambassador to London, Maisky, had been among other things to present to the English the USSR’s neutral position on the war as analogous to that of the United States, which was also neutral and also had an ambassador in Vichy when France fell. Not even the USSR’s war against Finland, which was ruinous in diplomatic terms and ended with a peace treaty on March 12, 1940, had led to an Anglo-Russian rupture, although in April Chamberlain (who was still prime minister) and Reynaud (Daladier’s successor) had seriously considered a preemptive bombardment of the Soviet oil wells in the Caucasus. The documents containing the details of this “Caucasus plan” fell into German hands when the French capital was occupied (June 1940), and had promptly been sent to Moscow in order to neutralize the sources of information from whom news of a possible imminent German attack was starting to filter back to Moscow. In a world totally different from the upper levels of government – among the German antifascist militants operating in Norway – the same conviction had taken hold at once, as Willy Brandt recalls in his *Memoirs*: “We did not believe that the two countries could remain allies for long” (p. 133). The vision that George Orwell drew from this disconcerting shift in alliances, to which a scene in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* clearly alludes, is both gloomy and, at bottom, unfair. The orator-leader of one of the three warring powers is addressing a political rally. As he is speaking, news reaches him that his country has changed alliances. He continues without flinching or interrupting his speech, but in the light of the new alliances and the changed international situation.⁴⁴

It was not thus. June 1941 not only changed the course of the war but also opened a new chapter in the history of democracy in Europe, thanks to the very men who had been crushed by the “pact” – “silenced” as Willy Brandt puts it, but not routed.⁴⁵

Progressive Democracies, People's Democracies

The change in alliances that led to the Yalta peace produced a situation that was profoundly changed once more, and not only in political and military terms. All the judgments and rallying cries of the inter-war period had become inadequate. It is misleading to assume that the collaboration in government with “constituent” aims that arose in various countries, such as France and Italy – based on, and continuing, the antifascist alliance that had defeated the Axis – was a sort of continuation of the prewar “fronts.” This was a new phase, something born of the long and grueling battle they had fought side by side following the lacerations of 1939–41. François Furet is mistaken in his latest, embittered book, *Le Passé d'une illusion* (1995), when he goes so far as to caricature European antifascism, more than once, as Stalin’s “useful idiot.” For several years (which were highly productive in terms of institutions) antifascism provided common ground for political cultures that had succeeded in surviving fascism because they had chosen to fight it, with the common aim of not reviving the old “liberal democracies” that had given birth to fascism in the first place. It is significant that the impetus towards innovation also involved England – the only European country whose institutions had continued in existence without interruption – where, immediately after victory over Germany, the Labour Party won a clear majority and Churchill was defeated.

In Italy, Togliatti had survived the misfortunes described in the previous chapter. He became convinced that, in the phase that began with the collapse of fascism, his party (now permanently designated “new”) should reveal and highlight its potential for developing an “advanced” democracy – which political groups with different values and origins, which had emerged

during the fight against fascism, had also shown they possessed. It should commit itself to building a politically and economically diverse society, a "progressive democracy" centered on an advanced constitutional charter and seeking radical "structural reforms" – such as Attlee's government had carried out in Britain. It should not retreat into waiting for the storming of some imaginary Winter Palace, but put forward the best political program that the labor movement could come up with at that moment. The idea of *antifascism* was widened from a negative concept – rejection – to a positive one. The fundamental idea was that Italian society contained forces, pressure groups, and more or less "erosive" tendencies which could push it towards decisions and outcomes consistent with the interests and aims that had given rise to fascism. A long-term struggle against such tendencies – in the new context in which the forces that had fought fascism came together in postwar governments – could by definition transform Italian society in a progressive direction. Precisely because the whole of the country's recent and earlier history had finally led to fascism – though this could be applied to all of Europe that had slid into fascism – the journey in the reverse direction, the *eradication* of fascism, would also be *a long phase of history*. Hence Togliatti's clear statement in his first pronouncement upon returning to Italy,¹ that it was not a matter of tactical or contingent decisions but of a program "for tomorrow," without subsidiary goals.

History, in other words, was not resuming where it left off once the "interlude" of fascism had passed; it was continuing, enriched by everything that had taken place in the meantime, but *starting from a completely different point*. Even what fascism had brought into being – thanks to its class inclusiveness, in some senses not dissimilar to the New Deal – should be included in the vast mass of "raw material" for this new beginning. Similarly, equally inescapable was everything that the Soviet experiment had achieved in practical terms and *codified in a constitutional charter* in 1936. That immense laboratory, which false historiography today reduces to a sort of giant detention camp, had aroused interest in the 1930s, before Nazism dragged the world towards catastrophe, and gained both critical and unconditional support in the most diverse quarters, for the wholly unfamiliar form of its constitution's text and for its economic planning and the effects this had. Silvio Trentin had written an impressive and admiring study and "commentary" on the Soviet constitution of 1936,² and in 1931 the periodical *Europe*, published by the Parisian "radical" Rieder, had devoted installment after installment to the "first five-year plan."³ What was radically new about that constitution was the priority it gave, in chapter I, to the description of "social organization," and the

regulation of property and of social rights, described in minute detail in chapter X (articles 121, 122, and 123 stipulate, among other things, that the crime of “contempt for race or nationality” is punishable under the law). This was the first time that a constitutional charter included among its articles “the right to material assistance in old age, and likewise in the event of illness and loss of the ability to work” (article 120), the “right to free education, including further education” (article 121), or the “right to be given a guaranteed job, with a wage that corresponds to the quantity and quality of the work” (article 118). Taken for granted was the general principle asserted in article 12: “In the USSR, work is the duty of every citizen who is fit to work, according to the principle that *whoever does not work does not eat*” – a singular echo of St. Paul.⁴ This was a completely new *style* of constitution.

Of course, there was at least one other recent authoritative source, though it had been swept away by the tragic end of the German republic: the social thinking incorporated in the articles of the constitution of the Weimar Republic, especially no. 165, which lay at the foundation of the new social order that the republic had been committed to creating. It read: “Workers and employees are called upon to collaborate with equal representation to, and in common with the entrepreneur in managing wages and work conditions, and in the overall development of the forces of production.” Strictly speaking, in this context the two sides become – despite the contradictions this produces on the constitutional level – *sources* of rights, though it is clear that these can only ensue from their collaboration. Another precedent that European constitution-builders had in mind when drawing up the new charters was Roosevelt’s New Deal, on which the conservative-leaning US Supreme Court had imposed limitations and reversals. Arthur Rosenberg, who had personally experienced revolution in Europe and known all its chief protagonists as a leader of the USPD and later of the KPD, spent his final years in the USA. In the last essay of a productive life, *Democracy and Socialism*, he sees the New Deal as the germ of something that would have surmounted the harmful separation between those two principles.

The aim, therefore, was to incorporate all this – the fruit of the struggles and victories of the first half of the century – into the constitutions that were being written from 1946 onwards. Strong elements of social democracy were being introduced in Italy, France, and the German Federal Republic, thanks to agreement between parties of the left and Catholic parties. These included the principle that was already included in the first draft of the German constitution of 1848 (article VII, § 26),⁵ which says that private property is subordinate to the criterion of the public interest, and must pass this test. Article 42, clause 3 of the Italian constitution states: “Private

property may, in cases stipulated by the law, and on payment of compensation, be expropriated on the grounds of the public interest." A subcommittee discussed whether to insert "equitable" or "fair" before "compensation." However, an eminent Christian democrat, Paolo Emilio Taviani, the committee's spokesman, rejected the amendment with the observation that if "equitable" meant the market value of the assets being expropriated, this would render agricultural reform impossible.

During the months when this was being sanctioned, an anti-landowner movement was springing up in Sicily, which advocated the occupation of land by peasants. To terrorize this movement and smash it at birth, the Sicilian landowners hired the feared band of Salvatore Giuliano, who carried out the massacre of Portella delle Ginestre (May 1, 1947). Yet these peasants were already on firm legal ground, in the wake of the decrees issued by the minister Gullo in the autumn of 1944 (to which the provision formulated by those who drew up the constitution had now given a firm ethical and legal character). On the other hand, the social forces that had armed Giuliano – landowners and the Mafia – soon found support in the party which included men such as Taviani in its ranks. The split between written constitution and "real" constitution is clear in this example; it will become even more evident later.

In France the balance between the different parliamentary parties in the constituent assembly was such that the PCF was even able to propose its own project for a constitution. In the event, it proved a wasted opportunity: the text was too insubstantial (a mere 18 articles) and disappointing. The first article, in terms that echoed the language of the French First Republic, intoned: "The French republic is a democracy in which sovereignty belongs exclusively to the nation." There was no mention of the right to property, which did not figure among the rights listed in article 4. However, it did include some cardinal principles of the social order of the Stalin era, drawn from the Soviet constitution of 1936: the right to work and to have job security, state-funded insurance against all risks that might entail inability to work, free schooling at all levels, and a free legal system. In any case, it was rejected.

Instead, the text approved by the constituent assembly on April 19, 1946, dealt with the right to property in articles 35 and 36. Both the principles contained in the Italian constitution were asserted: expropriation "in the public interest" (article 35), and the priority of "the interests of society" over the right to property (article 36). The formula for compensation is: "fair compensation calculated in compliance with the law." Strikingly, the start of article 35 repeats almost literally, but with an important variation, article 6 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* proposed by Robespierre in

1793. Robespierre's version reads: "Property is the right of every citizen to enjoy and to dispose at will of *that portion of goods* to which the law entitles him." Article 35 of the French constitution of 1946 reads: "Property is the inviolable right to use, enjoy, and dispose of *the goods* to which each is entitled by law." The reference is even clearer if we consider the next article in each case. Robespierre's article 7 reads: "The right to property is limited, like all other rights, by the obligation to respect the rights of others." Article 36 of the French constitution of 1946 reads: "The right to property cannot be exercised if it goes against the interests of society, or in such a way that it prejudices the security, liberty, life, or property of others." The reference to Robespierre's text is fundamental. This is clear from the definition of "liberty" in both documents. Robespierre says: "Liberty is the power man possesses to exercise all his faculties at will; it is regulated by justice." The constitution of 1946, article 3, reads: "Liberty is the ability to do everything that does not prejudice the rights of others. The conditions under which liberty is exercised are established by the law."⁶ The inspiration is Robespierist rather than Jacobin in a general sense. Articles 6 and 7 of Robespierre's document were "eviscerated" in the draft that was then incorporated into the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, which was approved and placed at the beginning of the constitution of 1793. This constitution, together with that of 1848, is recalled in the preamble to the French constitution of April 1946. To be exact, articles 6 and 7 in the draft had become a single article (no. 16), from which all references to limits or legal obligations had been removed: "The right to property is that right, enjoyed by every citizen, to enjoy and dispose at will of his goods, his income [a word entirely absent in the draft], the fruit of his labor, and his work."

Clearly those who drew up the constitution of April 1946 had in mind not only that of 1793 but above all, as regards fundamental principles, precisely Robespierre's proposal in its authentic version. In his *Conspiration pour l'égalité, dite de Babeuf, suivie du procès auquel elle donna lieu* (1828). Filippo Buonarroti includes Robespierre's document in a note to the first chapter, and introduces it thus:

This important document throws the greatest light on to the true aim of those men who were so savagely proscribed after the death of that famous legislator [Robespierre]. *In it can be admired the definition of the right to property, which is excluded from the list of principal rights... the limits placed on that right to property, the institution of progressive taxation etc.*⁷

However, all this effort put into drawing up the text was rendered vain when the electorate rejected the document, which had been approved in the

chamber in April thanks to the socialists' and communists' votes alone (309 to 249). Indeed, the decree of August 17, 1945, which set in train the election of the constituent assembly, stipulated among other things (article 3): "The Constitution adopted by the Assembly shall be subjected to the approval of the electorate of French citizens by means of a referendum within the month following its adoption by the Assembly itself." The referendum was held on May 5, 1946; the proposed constitution was rejected by 53 percent to 47 percent – proof of the shift that always occurs between elected representatives and their voters. The constituent assembly had been elected a mere six months earlier, on October 21, 1945! It is also a further demonstration of the fact that governing bodies are further "ahead" than their electorates. In Italy's constituent assembly, thinking Christian Democrat members worked essentially in consensus with the left (even after collaboration in government was conclusively broken off in February and March 1947). Even in Italy, however, the test of a referendum would have involved serious risks: Christian Democrat voters were certainly far behind their leaders.

For the purposes of this study, the main change in the new constitution, drawn up by the second French constituent assembly elected on June 2, 1946 (the same day as the its Italian counterpart) and approved by the referendum of October 13, was that articles 35 and 36 had disappeared. The *Préambule* was widened considerably to include the constitution's cardinal principles. The reference to the constitutions of the first and second republics was removed (the 1793 constitution cannot have been to the taste of the Catholic members, amply represented by the MRP); there was a mention only of the "Declaration of Rights" of 1789, in which property figures right at the beginning (article 2) and there is no mention of the right to work. As far as *property* is concerned, there is no more mention of limitations on such a right. However, in what seems to be an echo of the nationalizations begun by the new Labor government in England a few months earlier,⁸ the text hypothesizes: "Any enterprise whose functioning has or is acquiring the nature of a national public service or *de facto* monopoly must become the property of the community."

The third example is the German Federal Republic. Its *Grundgesetz* (basic law) contains a similar limitation in article 14. It is one of the fundamental principles (*Grundrechte*) in the first section of the constitutional decree. "Property and the right to inherit are safeguarded. The nature of, and limits upon, such rights are set by the law."

Catholic ideas about society also made a contribution. Some exponents of this approach – laboriously constructed through the profound moral

compromises the Catholic church had made with fascism – were among those who drew up the constitution both in Italy and in Germany. The leader of Italy's Christian Democrats, Alcide De Gasperi, already had a long career behind him, which began in 1911 when he was the representative of the Italian minority in the parliament of the old dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. He was a statesman of long experience, having spent the long parenthesis of fascism in the Vatican's sphere of influence to the extent of supporting the nationalists during the war in Spain. Now he acknowledged – without duplicity – the “Christian” greatness, as he put it “of the effort made by communist Russia” with the goal of “reducing the distance between social classes.”⁹

The economist Amintore Fanfani, whose cultural background had been the Catholic university of Father Gemelli (an epicenter of clerical fascism), was now a member of the constituent assembly and on the left of his party. He fought for “social control of economic life” to “facilitate the development of the individual.”¹⁰ Piero Calamandrei, a great Italian constitutionalist and one of the architects of the constitution issued on January 1, 1948, aptly described this type of constitutional charter, born after fascist regimes had fallen. He observed – especially with reference to Italy – that they were “polemic” documents, because they *called into question the existing order*, as was evident from their “fundamental principles.” They were a true “revolution” in the history of constitutional thought and in constitutional praxis. The “subversive” article *par excellence* is the third one in the Italian constitution, written by Lelio Basso. It reads: “It is the Republic's duty to remove the economic and social obstacles which, by limiting in effect the liberty and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human individual and the true participation of all workers in the political, economic, and social organization of the country.”¹¹ Thirty years later, by which time the gulf between this precept and the reality of the republic's history was clear, Lelio Basso described it as “the key article of the entire constitution: the fundamental, pivotal article.” He observed: “This article asserts that there is no democracy as long as economic and social inequalities endure. The legal importance of this article is immense.”¹²

It was something completely new. The notion that “to remove obstacles” was “the Republic's *task*” was totally novel and unique even among the other “antifascist” constitutional charters of the time. The French constitution of 1946 (approved by the second constituent assembly) states in a preliminary declaration that “the Republic guarantees to all the men and women living in the French Union the individual and collective exercise of a wide range of rights” – which Basso describes as “rights of credit” – but it does so only in terms of “guarantees.” Article 3, clause 2 of the German

Federal Republic's constitution (1949) uses language closer to that of the Italian constitution's article 3, clause 2, but confines itself to *real* equality between men and women: "Der Staat fördert die tatsächliche Durchsetzung der Gleichberechtigung von Frauen und Männer, und wirkt auf die Beseitigung bestehender Nachteile hin" ("The state *promotes* the achievement of real equality between men and women, and strives to do away with situations that prevent this at present"). Far broader is the scope of the formula adopted by the authors of the Italian constitution, who bring in a fundamental concept whose implications are incalculable: "the obstacles" to "true" and *substantial equality*, and their *necessary* "removal." The implied idea, which then prevailed, was the perception that equality is the essential nature of democracy. This equality is understood to be "the equality not only in form but also in substance of all mankind," as Norberto Bobbio tellingly defined it, before going on to explain: "egalitarianism is the absence of democracy."¹³

Indeed, the liberal members of Italy's constituent assembly concentrated their attacks on the phrase "remove the obstacles." The economist Epicarmo Corbino proposed that the sentence be changed to "It is the State's duty to make possible the complete development of the human individual," observing with alarm: "Whatever can it mean, to remove social and economic obstacles? It could mean, conceivably, to take away any obstacle, legal, economic, or social, to take away from the State its nature as a State!" (*Acts of the Constituent Assembly*, p. 2424). The article's wording was obviously the result of the meeting and intertwining of Catholic ideas about society ("the complete development of the *human individual*") and those of the left ("the true participation of all workers in the political, economic, and social organization of the country").

An important historical detail should be borne in mind. The commission in Italy's constituent assembly had discussed at length whether it was advisable to place a preamble before the constitutional charter's main text, containing a summary of its "direction" and future aims, such as that which became article 3. It was Calamandrei himself who advocated such a preamble at the time, arguing that it was appropriate because the constitutional text proper should contain only "precepts" that were effective from a legal point of view. (The French constitution's authors also included a very brief preamble, to which they relegated fundamental principles such as equality between men and women, and nationalization. It begins with an emphatic reference to the "Declaration of Rights" of 1789.¹⁴ By contrast, in the German Federal Republic's *Grundgesetz*, *all* the principles asserted, defined in the articles at the beginning, are included in the text of the constitution.) Togliatti replied to Calamandrei by developing an argument

that the latter would place at the center of his *Discorso sulla Costituzione* [On the Constitution] some 10 years later.

Our Constitution must say something more; it must have the character of a program, at least in some sections, and especially in those that assert the need to give a *new nature to citizens' rights* . . . The Constitution must not only enshrine what is taking place today, but also contain precepts that *light the way for legislators*. This could be done in a preamble. But what force does a preamble have? The Albertine Statute had a preamble too, but today it is ignored. When they are contained in the preamble, precepts lose all their force.¹⁵

The alarm of the conservative free-trader Corbino was thus not without foundation, albeit from his point of view. The argument developed by Togliatti in that session of the "Commission for the Constitution" began with a clear reference to the historical process which involved something absolutely new: the formalization of "directives" that were part of a "program" into constitutional precepts.

The Soviet Constitution has a precise character: it codifies into concise precepts the result of a revolution; it codifies a situation created by 20 years of revolutionary activity [the reference is to the constitution of 1936]. We are not in this situation in Italy, not only because the revolution did not happen, but also because everyone believes that under the present circumstances – given how political relations stand between classes, domestically and internationally, in Italy and in all of Europe – it is possible to achieve profound social change by following a different path. The Constitution must take this into account. Therefore, if it merely endorsed what exists in Italy today, it would not correspond to what the great majority of the people want from the Constitution. Our Constitution must say something more, etc.

There could be no clearer illustration of how the constitutional maturation of a socialist country was a part of the circumstances that produced *what was new* about western Europe's antifascist constitutions – Italy's in particular. What is historically significant is that such a clear, explicit direction was entirely consistent with the political and parliamentary situation during those years. Those constitutions should therefore really be seen as a *codification* of the power relationships between classes and their political groupings at the time of the fall of fascism.

The precedent of the Soviet constitutional order is also echoed in the wording of the first article: "Italy is a democratic Republic founded upon work." The wording that had been proposed by the parties of the left, and bore the names of, among others, Nenni, Basso, and Togliatti, read: "Italy is

a democratic republic of workers." From the centrist and liberal quarter came: "The Italian State has a republican, democratic, parliamentary, and anti-totalitarian order." The republicans joined the parties of the left: their spokesman was Pacciardi, who argued that the wording proposed by the three leading exponents of the left was perfectly in keeping with the teachings contained in Mazzini's *Dei doveri dell'uomo* [On the Duties of Man]. La Malfa, of the Action party, instead opposed it, on the grounds that the words "of workers" after "Italy is a democratic republic" risked "recalling historical experiments that are of very great value, but are not exactly the same as our present democratic political experiment."¹⁶ The obvious allusion was to the system in the Soviet Union, whose constitution (1936) opened with the words: "The USSR is the socialist state of the workers and peasants" (article 1), followed by the explanation in article 3: "All power in the USSR belongs to the workers in the cities and on the land, represented by the Councils of the workers' deputies." In the session of March 11, Togliatti had announced to the chamber:

We will propose again that the Italian Republic be designated the Italian democratic workers' republic. In doing this *we do not intend to ostracize anyone, nor do we wish to exclude anyone from exercising their civil and political rights*, but we want to assert that the Republic's ruling class must be a new ruling class, directly linked to the working classes.¹⁷

With this he was fending off in advance the objections that La Malfa was to articulate elegantly, unlike others both inside and outside the chamber. The problem he alluded to was the fundamental distinction, present in the Soviet system ever since the publication of the "Declaration of the Rights of Working People," between *workers* and *non-workers*, the latter being disqualified from political rights (article 7). This entailed, of course, the exclusion of part of the population from citizenship, but it was to be interpreted in the light of the article 12 of the constitution: "In the USSR, work is the duty of every citizen who is fit to work." Moreover, article 7 of the "Declaration of the Rights of Working People" also refers clearly to the exclusion of "exploiters."¹⁸ In his *Quaderni*, Gramsci describes Soviet elections as a form of "voluntary enrollment of a certain type of state official," and draws a distinction between the "common legal citizen" in these elections and "someone who consents and commits himself to doing something more."¹⁹ To dispel suspicion, Togliatti explained that the formula "workers' republic" was not intended "to exclude anyone from exercising their civil and political rights." However, the proposal was rejected by a small margin of votes, whereupon the wording devised by Fanfani, on the

left of the Christian Democrats – “democratic Republic founded upon work” – was passed with the support of the parties of the left.

Meanwhile, the “people’s democracies” were being born.

In understanding the events to which we now turn our attention, it will not be easy to disregard passions, resentments, and clichés for long. The representatives or heirs of almost all the political parties that had held the reins in these countries, and their opponents, were still in circulation. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to understand them, whatever their viewpoint, be they champions of a cause or their opponents, heretics or triumphant victors. Moreover, the euphoric triumphalism that was unleashed in 1989–90, when those political regimes gradually unraveled, has now given way to a caution that has two causes. One is the disappointment that replaced the euphoria: its most obvious aspect is that the same political groups, in a different guise, often returned to power in the same countries. The other is the savagery of the reintroduced “market” economy, which worsened social inequality and brought to power the parties “of the left,” variously “modernized” in their language and political programmes.

The chief factor to bear in mind, which applies to both the “spheres of influence” into which Europe was divided from 1945 onwards – is the international dimension. This was something utterly new in the continent’s history. The continent that had dictated terms to the world now found itself, as a result of the war triggered by Hitler, a sphere of influence of the two victors, the United States and the Soviet Union, with Britain in the far from insignificant role of equal partner to the “western” victor. The first division into spheres of influence was made by Churchill and Stalin in Moscow on October 9, 1944, in the memorable scene when Churchill wrote out the “percentages” on his own initiative and in his own hand. Churchill writes:

“So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety per cent predominance in Roumania, for us to have ninety per cent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?” While this was being translated I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper:

Roumania	
Russia	90%
The others	10%
Greece	
Great Britain	90%
(in accord with the USA)	
Russia	10%

Yugoslavia	50–50%
Hungary	50–50%
Bulgaria	
Russia	75%
The others	25%

I pushed this across to Stalin, who had by then heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down . . .

After this there was a long silence. The pencilled paper lay in the centre of the table. At length I said: "Might it not be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an offhand manner? Let us burn the paper." "No, you keep it," said Stalin.²⁰

The next day, in the meetings between the two foreign ministers, Molotov and Eden, the Soviet percentages were settled as follows: Hungary 80 percent, Romania 90 percent, Bulgaria 80 percent, Yugoslavia 60 percent. Poland was a more sensitive subject, partly because it was precisely to defend that state so resistant to any entente with the USSR that Britain said it had entered the war on September 1, 1939. The problem was resolved, however, with a little extra subtlety, at Yalta on February 4, 1945, and at Potsdam on July 17, 1945 (there was an anti-Soviet government in exile in London, and a pro-Soviet one in Lublin). A month later came the Polish–Soviet agreement over the Oder–Neisse Line, which shifted Poland's border westwards at the expense of the now devastated Germany. Czechoslovakia was not discussed, but it was the Soviet Union that had liberated that country from the Germans.

In essence, the method adopted was the same as in the Nazi–Soviet pact of August 1939. Then too, obscure areas had remained, which each party interpreted to suit its own purposes – which led to war, begun by Germany, in less than two years. This time, however, the USSR's partners were the "democracies," whose propaganda machines had in their time condemned the "pact." There is no room for moralizing when considering this episode. Neither democracy (the banner of the West) nor socialism behaved according to its "principles." Today, however – when apart from anything else we know the dangers of an unbalanced world that is no longer bipolar – we can say that there was no other way to "bring the war to a close." It appears that Stalin wrote to Tito in April 1945: "This war resembles none of those in the past. Whoever occupies a territory imposes his own social system upon it. Everyone imposes their own social system as far as their armies can

advance. And it could not be otherwise." He was clearly not acquainted with the history of ancient Greece, because there he would have encountered the same practice.

What was new in 1944–5 compared with 1939 was that the "chessboard" was more vast and complex, a multitude of urgent issues needed to be discussed (among other things, the fate of the defeated Germany remained unclear), and there were unpredictable "variants," such as De Gaulle and the ambitions of France, which was included, without much conviction, in the victors' "club." De Gaulle met Stalin at the end of November 1944, about a month after the "percentages" episode. By dealing directly with Moscow, he aimed to put himself in a stronger position *in opposition* to Britain and the United States, even though they had just recognized him as the leader of a French provisional government. He also pressed for the dismemberment of Germany, in an echo of the Third Republic's designs on the Ruhr, now extended to include the Saar.

Greece, meanwhile, was viewed by Churchill as a "hunting ground" reserved for Britain, even if this meant British forces replacing the Nazis in fighting the Greek partisans!

François Fejtö, the very precocious author (1952, second edition 1969) of *History of the People's Democracies*, raises the question of the "complicity," and therefore responsibility, of Roosevelt and Churchill. Singularly, however, he focuses the question not on the central fact, which is the adoption (on the initiative of the British and because of Britain's interest in preserving its long arm over Greece) of the principle of *partition*, but on the "breadth" of the concessions made to Stalin.²¹ His answer, in *Realpolitik* terms, is entirely reasonable: "At the time of Yalta, the Soviets already controlled the Baltic countries, Romania, and Bulgaria, were *profondément engagés* [deeply involved] in Poland and Hungary, and had occupied Belgrade. By now they also had an unimpeded passage to Berlin, Vienna, and Prague. They were thus *en position* [poised] to dominate Europe." It follows, he goes on, that "before this *tidal wave* [*raz-de-marée*] of Soviet military power on land" the two Western leaders faced the choice of "either war with Russia or compromise." Moreover, Germany was still putting up extraordinary and unexpected resistance,²² Japan was waging a ferocious war against the US in the Pacific, and the atomic bomb did not yet exist. Therefore, he argues, "a war to drive back Russia would have been an absurdity." The picture is a fascinating one: from a certain point onwards, the three-way game had resumed, at least behind the scenes, in military and intelligence circles. Some of the propaganda from the Axis, or connected to it (for example, *Le Mois Suisse* in Switzerland) had begun to harp on the theme of "Western civilization" (and/or European civilization), which was

to be defended against rampant Bolshevism. Neither had there ever been any lack in the three countries – especially in the USA – of groups that openly favored Germany or at least, given the choice between the USSR and Germany, would certainly have preferred the latter. Joseph Bendersky's recent book *The "Jewish Threat"* (2001) amply illustrates this phenomenon, recalling among other things how General Patton accused two of Truman's advisers, Morgenthau and Baruch, of "spreading the virus of Semitic vengeance against Germany." In short, with those words Fejtö hints that the possibility – remote and impracticable as it was for the Anglo-American political leaders – of changing enemies while the war was still in progress was not so far-fetched after all, at least in influential circles, which were to become even more influential with the start and build-up of the "cold war" from 1947 onwards.

There is a further factor that should not be neglected in trying to understand how the fate of central and eastern Europe was already being shaped in the closing months of the war. Fejtö also mentions it: "the way in which the East was liberated by the Red Army." The army had been able to rely on the *active support* of partisans – a form of warfare that Stalin had strongly supported ever since the German invasion – who were largely connected to clandestine communist organizations. These formed outposts which almost automatically found themselves in a dominant position when the Soviet army arrived. Stalin, moreover, was far from having an idealized view of his immediate western neighbours. Fejtö recalls a caustic comment the Soviet leader made to Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's brilliant aide, regarding Poland: "A country is not necessarily innocent just because it is small." Certainly, recent revelations of the Poles' ferocious anti-Semitism during the Nazi occupation seem to confirm this bitter judgment.²³

In this situation – which is well known and recalled here only in passing – there was an implied principle that was a logical corollary of the division into spheres of influence. This ran as follows: elections will be held as soon as possible, to give representative governments to the countries involved; in any case, if the division into areas has any sense, the elections will be won by the parties that are sympathetic to the power with hegemony in that area. If we look at the map, however, we notice that since France and Britain were not "satellites" but partners, and thus went by their own "rules," the only two countries apart from Germany not "covered" by this principle were Czechoslovakia in the east and Italy in the west. They met their foreseeable fate in 1947–8. The "principle" worked in its pure form when the two Germanies were established.

Very briefly, this is how the international situation was to determine subsequent events. It should be added that even in the "people's democracies,"

communist-dominated coalitions “won the elections.” They too came to power through consensus, in a favorable electoral climate whose immediate cause was the way in which these countries had been liberated. The long-term weakness in all these countries was the conviction that this success, once achieved, was valid *for an indefinite period*, and that there was no need for the periodic checks and renewals of legitimacy so skillfully carried out in the West. On the contrary: it was believed that social programs would consolidate regimes. This clearly did not happen. They did not succeed in building a clear model for a new “people’s state” and persevered, skeptically, with a system of sham elections, which mimicked western ones only outwardly. Inexorably, this led to the diminishing of consensus.

In short, it is not possible to reduce this period in Europe’s history, and these European experiments in democracy, to puppet theater. Equally meaningless is a merely polemic representation of the immediately preceding phase in the history of these countries, when large sections of the population consciously supported Nazi supremacy.

Monsignor Tiso, leader of Nazified Slovakia, remained popular after the country was liberated and he was sentenced. The same can be said of Croatia with regard, on the one hand, to German “comrades” and, on the other, to the partisans led by Tito (who faced a unique problem in successfully integrating that republic into the Yugoslav federation). Neither is it out of place to remember, in this context, how close the country that was to become the symbol of “Nordic socialism” – Sweden – was to Hitler’s Reich until 1943. On July 5, 1940, the social democratic government of Per Albin Hansson, widened into a coalition of national unity, signed an agreement with the Reich that gave German military forces the right to pass through Swedish territory.²⁴ The consensus in the country was broad and remained so even after, in the second half of 1943, the war began to go badly for the Axis and the Hansson government shifted from a position of pro-Nazi neutrality to a neutrality that supported the Allies.

Consensus-building is not an invention of recent times.

During those months “public opinion” shifted massively in support of the Anglo-Americans in France and Italy and of the Soviet Union in eastern Europe. The factors that precipitated this were the mounting crisis in the fascist regimes, closely linked to acceleration in the war, increasingly harsh repression by the German occupiers, and rapid worsening of the population’s living conditions. The partisans’ struggle too, while having had a negative effect on part of the population because of Nazi reprisals, had the opposite effect on another part, gaining its psychological or active support for the actions of the “irregular” fighters, most of whom were

communists.²⁵ This was an important factor when provisional governments were formed, at the end of the war, in the countries liberated by Soviet forces. Whenever a political regime is born, a group of leaders seizes power and builds a new "state of affairs" within which – if their project succeeds – successive events take place and a new "legality" asserts itself. Thus a new order affirms itself; it must then prove its legitimacy. This is what the Piedmontese did when they annexed central and southern Italy in 1861 (though not without an unexpected, and prolonged, guerrilla war dubbed "southern banditry"). In 1871 Thiers proclaimed the Republic in a country where the majority were certainly monarchists, and where a republican constitution was successfully promulgated only in 1875. The fascist party too acted similarly between 1922 and 1926, as described in the preceding chapters. In the wake of the endorsement it had received at the outset from the state's highest authority, it could count on the firm support of the ruling and middle classes, and embark on winning over the masses. Thus too anti-fascism became the state in 1944–6 on the basis of self-legitimization, whose foundations were the same as those that underpinned the governments established by the Soviet Union in the east European countries it had progressively liberated. Everything that came afterwards was made possible precisely by this act of foundation, simultaneously reinforced and safeguarded by the framework created by the "partition" which the three victors in the war repeatedly reasserted.

The respect that the various "people's democracies" have enjoyed in the world that forms public opinion throughout the rest of the planet – that is, in the West – has fluctuated for reasons of international politics and international loyalties. The most striking example is Yugoslavia. Until his clash with Stalin in 1948, Tito and the one-party "socialist" regime he had established on the basis of strong consensus (and equally strong repression of dissent) was judged to be the foremost of the Soviet satellites. The summary, truly ferocious methods with which its partisans had "finished off the game" on the Italian front were reviled. After the rupture between Tito and Stalin the Yugoslav regime – which certainly had not changed its nature *ipso facto* – found itself the object of a pervasive shift in opinion that largely prevailed. Until Khrushchev decided to resume collaboration with Tito in 1955, it was the turn of the Soviet side to denounce the "criminal" nature of the Yugoslav regime; however, this relentless propaganda, though it too contained elements of truth, did not shape public opinion. Tito reached the height of his reputation with the Greek–Turkish–Yugoslav pact, which was manifestly anti-USSR and fitted geographically with the various alliances (NATO, SEATO, etc.) of the new *cordon sanitaire*.

Tito's funeral in May 1980 was attended by all the world's statesmen, in full and deferential respect for the experiment that he had embodied. The US's decision to proceed, after the end of the USSR, with the dismantling of the Yugoslav federation led, on a historiographic level, to a radical reassessment of Tito and the whole "Yugoslav experiment." All the crimes committed in the Istria region at the end of the Second World War came back under the spotlight, eclipsing the anti-Nazi epic of Tito's forces and becoming a decisive factor in the assessment of the political and social regime Yugoslavia's communists established and kept alive over several decades.

Hungary, by contrast, earned only contempt and irony in the West, even though from a certain point onwards the political regime was "liberalized" in ways that would have been unthinkable in Yugoslavia under Tito. János Kádár's government, however, had to be kept in a state of "quarantine" because it was "tainted" by the very way it came into being. As for Ceausescu, his story is a roller-coaster tragicomedy. Thanks to an ostentatious display of autonomy from the USSR, he soared to heights that were unthinkable for an eastern European leader, only to plunge to the depths of hell when he met his well-deserved end.

In short, to study these political systems means to grapple with material that is weighed down under a thick blanket of excess propaganda, which has survived, irritatingly, even after the end of its "useful life."

The two "blank spaces" were, as indicated above, Italy and Czechoslovakia. It is clear, however, that Italy – though not mentioned by name in the partition agreements – found itself in the American, even more than the British, sphere of influence. This was because of the manner of its liberation by Anglo-American forces and because of the determinant presence of the allied authorities in the life of the "kingdom of the South" – which, little by little, reverted to being the Kingdom of Italy. It was now necessary to steer it towards the birth of a suitable government.

When Mussolini outlawed them in November 1926, the communists were a small party. In the elections of 1921 and 1924 they had achieved modest results. Then they were persecuted and dispersed. However, they had continued to maintain a clandestine network, which the fascists succeeded in infecting and filling with infiltrators, but never in destroying completely. In 1929, in compliance with the senseless instructions of the fourth Comintern congress, many communists had returned to Italy, and almost all had been caught by the police or the OVRA. Nevertheless, they had a significant presence in the International Brigades in Spain. While the other parties outlawed by the fascists remained essentially inactive, the communists never ceased to exist as an organization, or to act. At the end

of 1943 they were the first to try to start a guerrilla war by the partisans against Salò and the German occupation. In those 18 months of unequal struggle, the communist organization was reborn. In the kingdom of the south, meanwhile, Togliatti's deliberately moderate and unifying action, which began with the "kick-start" of the "turning point of Salerno" and the entry of the communists into the Badoglio government, created the conditions in which a communist party could *exist* again in remote, conservative southern Italy. Togliatti's political masterstroke was to marry the great prestige and popular support that the partisan struggle had produced in central and northern Italy with his becoming a statesman in the national government. The setting aside of the institutional question until the whole of Italy had been liberated – his line, gradually imposed on the whole of the left – prevented a drift into extremism, to which the socialist party was naturally predisposed. Such a drift would have offered a pretext, indeed, an excellent opportunity, for outlawing the communists once the emergency of war was over.

This was anything but a far-fetched prospect in the Anglo-American sphere of influence, as was demonstrated by events in Greece after the Athens revolt (December 3, 1944) triggered by the order of the British General Scobie that all partisan groups were to be disarmed. British repression of the revolt lasted more than a month, after which the Varkiza accords (February 1945) were betrayed; a farcical election was held in March 1946, and ignored by all parties except the monarchist-populists, controlled by the British; the king returned; and a guerrilla war was begun in October 1946 by the "Democratic Army of Greece," later the "Provisional Government of Free Greece" (December 1947). To crush this government, Churchill asked Truman to intervene, a move that marked Greece's passage under direct American control. The guerrilla war was finally suppressed only in 1949, after which Greece was under the "parliamentary" dictatorship of the right, under US protection, until the return of the elder Papandreou (the victory of the center party in 1964, which was closely followed by the colonels' coup in April 1967).

This is the scenario that Togliatti managed to avoid in Italy, through the skill and firmness with which he held his moderate course, but also thanks to the frankly antifascist members of the Christian Democrat party leadership and in the so-called "lay" parties (republicans and democratic socialists).

In the first electoral test (June 2, 1946) the communists achieved a good result (19 percent of the vote) though this was less than the socialist party, which then styled itself "proletarian unity." The left parties won 40 percent of the vote between them, whereas the Christian Democrats alone received 30 percent. In France, that same year, the socialists and communists won a

parliamentary majority. However, since France was (with some reservations) one of the countries playing a leading role, it could not be treated as one that was under others' guardianship. Indeed, the history of the Fourth Republic is that of the return to power of moderate parties, which had always been dominant. The "Atlantic" partnership was *one* element in this return, but not the only one, and eventually it even became marginal. The history of the Italian republic, by contrast, is that of a country that was under the guardianship of others and under constant observation, for which the dominant power had a ready-made "alternative" solution in the event that the electorate returned an "unacceptable" verdict.

The big test came on April 18, 1948. At a time when there were no opinion polls, forecasting the result of the election was extremely difficult. The US made preparations for a possible victory by the "democratic popular front." A document released in November 1994, when the first Clinton administration made CIA records available to scholars,²⁶ is entitled "Consequences of Communist Accession to Power in Italy by Legal Means." Dated March 5, 1948, it envisages immediate United States intervention, initially by the separation of Sardinia and Sicily and then by means of a guerrilla war which the Americans would back without, however, appearing in person. The other alternative it considers, after the statement "the USA cannot allow the communists to come to power in Italy by legal means" because "the psychological repercussions would be disastrous," is to "falsify the election results." As is well known, none of this was necessary, the effects of American "food aid" proving far more powerful. The Christian Democratic party won an absolute majority of the seats in the chamber on its own; nevertheless, De Gasperi formed a coalition government with the "lay" parties (democratic socialists, republicans, and liberals). It is said that Togliatti commented that this was "the best result":²⁷ he meant, certainly, that a victory would have had precisely the consequences outlined in the CIA document of March 5.

What the American "experts" could not foresee, and never understood, was the nature of the Christian Democratic party. In 1990 the correspondence between the United States ambassador to Rome, Clare Boothe Luce, and the State Department was published. In June 1953 there had been an attempt to introduce an electoral law to "correct" the proportional representation system by means of a "majority premium." This missed being triggered by a handful of votes. In November 1953, after this electoral blow, the ambassador wrote in her report: "Mr. Scelba told me that the communists can always be *jailed* if this is deemed necessary, but that the time for this has not yet come." Feeling that his attitude was soft, the ambassador produces the following irritable assessment of Scelba (who has gone down

in history as a harsh opponent of the PCI): "Mr. Scelba has no true feelings or convictions on the subject of communism."²⁸

The PCI leadership was infiltrated,²⁹ and every other kind of pressure was attempted. The Vatican too became involved, aiming to intimidate by announcing excommunication for those who voted communist. The Christian Democrats, however, refused to be pushed towards a decision whose consequences would have been irreversible. De Gasperi began to fall out of favor with the Vatican; and yet the succeeding generation produced leaders such as Fanfani and Moro, whose main strategy was that of the "center-left", with the PSI being brought back to take direct responsibility in government. All this, it must never be forgotten, subsequently led to attempts to treat "untamed" Italy in the same way as Greece in 1967 and Chile in 1973. This, however, comes later.

In reviewing the complex history of the Italian republic in such a summary way there is perhaps a risk of adopting too linear an approach, which neglects nuances, comings and goings, changes of role, advances, and defeats – and above all focuses too much on crises, linking them too closely together. These complexities aside, however, the period can be summed up very briefly but accurately in terms of two elements. One is the constant threat from outside of the dominant power, which was based on its perception of the Italian communists as the obedient, long arm of a Soviet power that was forever on the offensive; the other is the fact that the constitutional pact between the three main parties that had founded the republic and written its constitution held firm.

De Gasperi may have alienated the Vatican, but Togliatti did not have it any easier on his side of the political spectrum. It has been observed that after he refused Stalin's request that he move to the Cominform, leaving his role in the Italian party,³⁰ Togliatti did not return to Moscow even for the nineteenth congress of the communist party of the Soviet Union (October 1952), going there only for Stalin's funeral (March 1953). These episodes remain rather obscure. One thing is certain, however: the so-called "resistance" and "insurreccional" section of the Italian communist party, represented by Pietro Secchia, tried at one particularly critical point to call Togliatti's leadership into question by appealing directly to Stalin, who turned down the request.³¹

Moreover, the nineteenth congress of the communist party of the Soviet Union (which was eclipsed by the far more famous twentieth congress) marked an unexpected recognition of the line pursued by the Italian party, after Stalin's postwar policies had zigzagged on many issues, from the German question to détente, creating a state of siege in all the "people's democracies."

Stalin attended that congress, but for the first time did not make the keynote speech (which was entrusted to his successor), pronouncing instead a brief final reflection. This short address named only two Western communist leaders: Togliatti and Thorez. Togliatti, who was not present but had sent Luigi Longo with a message from his leader, was mentioned by Stalin as if he had spoken at the congress in person. Both messages, the French and the Italian, referred to the “internationalist” approach the two countries’ communists would have taken in the event of war with the USSR. Thorez was more explicit, Togliatti less direct. Stalin responded by making it clear that such a “promise” was not a *gift* to the Soviet Union since, he observed, the two leaders’ commitment to preventing “that their peoples wage war against the USSR” *was first and foremost aimed at helping the French and Italians, “and second at helping the USSR’s efforts for peace.”* This was an almost stinging reply. In the second part, however, there was explicit support for *progressive* programs: *the present task* of communists in the West, therefore, was to pursue such programs rather than social revolution. Stalin said: “The bourgeoisie has thrown away the flag of bourgeois democratic freedoms. I think it is for you, the representatives of communist and democratic parties, to raise it again and carry it forward, *if you want to rally the majority of the people around you.*”³² Therefore, to win the support of the majority – which thus remained the classic way to gain power – in the West it was necessary to fight “for bourgeois democratic freedoms,” which were trampled upon precisely in the West. This was music to the ears of the delegates Togliatti had sent.

In Czechoslovakia too, food aid – from the Soviet side this time – influenced the outcome of elections, just as American bread had done in the poll of April 18 in Italy shortly before. In the summer of 1947 the harvest had been very poor, partly as a result of an exceptional drought. Czechoslovakia had been forced to seek help abroad. In November, when the elections, fixed for May 30, were on the horizon, the minister Hubert Ripka left for Moscow. Since the end of war the Czechoslovak government had been a coalition of communists, socialists, national socialists, and populists, led by the communist Klement Gottwald. On July 7 this government had announced its interest in the Marshall plan, but the block the Soviet Union placed on the plan had rendered such a declaration of principle vain. The *coup de théâtre* came when, before Ripka had even reached Moscow, Stalin announced that “at Gottwald’s request” the USSR would send Czechoslovakia 600,000 tonnes of grain – much more than it had requested. The grain was indeed delivered, in February. On February 19, Zorin, former ambassador to Prague and now deputy foreign minister, arrived in Prague to oversee the operation and attend a timely “Czech-Soviet friendship rally.”

The national socialists' and populists' counter-attack – aimed at bringing down the coalition government before the election – damaged them instead. They threatened that their ministers would resign if the police, too “contaminated” by elements loyal to the communist party, were not placed under investigation. In doing this, they hoped to provoke the socialists' exit from the coalition with Gottwald. This is precisely where the plan failed, however. Fierlinger, the socialist leader, remained in the government, partly because of pressure from a section of his party and partly out of his own conviction. Moreover Beneš, the elderly president of the republic, had published an autobiographical book in October in which he expressed his essential support for the communist party, and warmly appealed for “patience”: “Our communists, who have already gone so far along the path of power, must understand that they should pause awhile. They are not being asked to go into reverse, but to have a little more patience, to be able to choose the most favorable moment to resume their journey, taking a course of reasonable evolution.”³³

The result was that the ministers belonging to the nationalist and populist parties left the government, a move the communist party portrayed as the beginning of a coup d'état against the legitimate government. There was an impressive degree of mobilization against the danger that had been described to the public in such dramatic terms. Fejtö observes that the communists were supported by “almost all” the working classes, which was certainly not a majority of the electorate but was by far its most active part and, at that time, on the offensive. On February 25 “revolutionary action committees” were formed, on the communists' initiative, in every factory, in government offices, and in villages. Beneš was inundated by messages from all over the country, urging him to accept the resignation of the 12 ministers and reaffirm his faith in the Gottwald government. At first, Beneš told Ripka: “I will never yield.” Amid the general ferment, the police began to arrest prominent members of the two parties. Beneš was confronted by the revelation that they had been hatching a “plot.” In Moscow, *Pravda* commented: “The Czechoslovak people have spoken. Gottwald's policies have the approval of tens of thousands of workers and peasants: they are the expression of the will of the people.” Events moved rapidly thereafter, hinging on the decision by the social democrats (the majority led by Fierlinger and the center by Lausman) to support Gottwald. The new government, made up of social democrats and communists, included the prestigious and non-aligned Jan Masaryk, as well as some dissident national socialists. Masaryk's suicide and Beneš's decision to resign formed the background to the elections, which were held in a manner openly geared to producing a unanimous result. Voters were given two voting papers: one

was for the Front (its full name was "National Front") and the other was blank. The interior ministry claimed that it had not been possible to draw up an independent list, since the requisite 1,000 signatories were lacking. The Front received 6,431,963 votes, and the number of blank papers cast was 1,573,924. Beneš resigned on June 8, and Gottwald himself became president of the republic.

After studying the documents on the 1948 "coup" that came to light during the "Prague Spring" of 1968, Fejtö reasserted the judgment he had made in the first edition of his study. It has two parts: first, the communists' success was founded on the total support they had from the working class, which was numerous even if it did not constitute a majority of the electorate; second, the decision by the communist party (and initially by its allies) to force the electoral mechanism in such a way as to "preventively construct" an election victory was not, at that point, something they were obliged to do. The "Prague coup" was part revolution, part coup d'état.

The first mistake was to fail to appreciate the growing difficulties such a decision would bring, and promptly did bring. These were worsened by the internal convulsions of the communist movement, which were soon to become rampant in the wake of the break with Tito. The second mistake, perhaps even more serious, was to believe – as Gottwald, Kopecky, and others repeatedly asserted at the time – that the Czechoslovak experiment could become a model even for the possible political development of the West, given the central European country's modernity in a Western sense. The socialist experiment's social roots and foundations were deep, however. There can be no other explanation for the fact that, 20 years on, the reform movement that was widespread in the country and liquidated by the invasion of August 1968 still looked to socialism as its reference point. Today, it is clear that the very liquidation of that experiment in 1968 created the conditions for the unstoppable disintegration that was to take place 20 years later.

At the time, however, the effect of the "Prague coup" in the West was exactly opposite to the expectations of those who carried it out. Italy went to the polls on April 18, after the second Gottwald government was formed and before the election-plebiscite. However, the deterrent, anti-communist effect among the middle classes was undeniable. The Italian communist party improved its electoral performance (as a breakdown by party of the "democratic-popular front" reveals) but, after the socialist split, the left as a whole saw its share of the vote fall from 39.7 percent to 31 percent. Soon the campaign against "Titoist deviationism" would be launched. It was to tear through all communist parties, especially in the eastern bloc, but it would also touch the French and the Italians (though the latter, in compen-

sation, could now brandish their “patriotism” over the Trieste question). However, it was precisely the thriving and authoritative Czechoslovak party³⁴ that suffered the worst lacerations as a result of the Tito “schism” – and of Stalin’s alarm that this might prove far more disruptive than the struggle with Trotsky in its day. The bitter, almost suicidal nature of the clash was, among other things, one of the consequences of the vision that sustained the birth of “people’s democracies”: that consensus is obtained once and for all, that the consensus that matters is that of the “politically active mass”³⁵ – and that, in any case, it is valid for an entire historical phase. The history of the “people’s democracies” – which successive chapters will touch upon – is essentially the story of how consensus ebbed irreversibly away *in the very social base that was considered to confer legitimacy*.

The Cold War: Democracy in Retreat

The notorious Mundt–Nixon bill of 1948 was supported by the Un-American Activities Committee, soon to set in train the series of investigations and political trials usually known as the McCarthyist trials, after Senator Joseph McCarthy, the committee’s most prominent member. In June that year, just after the bill’s introduction, Thomas Mann, who had been in exile in the USA since 1938, raised the alarm with a speech to the “Peace Group” in Hollywood. He said: “Everything that is happening now is due to rage and regret at not having defeated Russia with Germany by our side, rather than defeating fascism with Russia by our side.”¹ The writer continued: “This rage and regret have produced the Mundt–Nixon bill which, if converted into law, would constitute a decisive and dangerous step – though not the first step – towards an American fascism.” He saw a symptom of this tendency in the United States’ indifference “to the horrors that are happening in Greece today, to the murdered hostages, the daily shootings [of communist partisans]: all crimes committed by a reactionary regime, and not comparable with what happened in Czechoslovakia.” These words will have been repeated by the activists on the committee, convinced that Mann – like Charlie Chaplin,² Moses Finley, Dashiell Hammett, and many others who were persecuted – was a “communist.” Besides, Nixon never disavowed his past. On October 5, 1999 the National Archives in Washington released 445 hours of his conversations when he was president, which took place in the White House between February and August 1971. Among many gems, one stands out. Addressing the loyal Haldeman (one of the protagonists in the Watergate affair), he says: “I want to control every sensitive

area in which Jews are involved. There are exceptions, but on the whole I don't trust those bastards."

These were the men who still encountered opposition under President Truman but would soon afterwards prevail, having contributed to General Eisenhower's presidential election victory of 1952. (Nixon was vice-president for two terms, until 1960, when Kennedy defeated him by a handful of votes. Kennedy was murdered in November 1963 by those who felt he was "pro-communist.") These men felt the time had come to "settle the score" with the "communists" and to realize, essentially, the very scenario that Mann evoked at the start of his speech: the rearming of West Germany (which had been established in 1949) in opposition to any proposals of neutralization in return for unification, the integration of Germany into the Western defensive-offensive system, and overtures to Franco's Spain with a view to its early entry into NATO. The proposal that Franco's Spain be admitted to the organization was approved by the American senate's foreign relations committee, and passed *unanimously* by the House of Representatives on July 14, 1955. Among other things, the resolution said:

Spain is an important link in the defense of western Europe against international communist imperialism. The United States already has important bases in Spain [which Franco had willingly offered], and Spain co-operates cordially with the United States in the upkeep of these bases. It is thus entirely pertinent to invite Spain to become a part of the North Atlantic Treaty and its organization (NATO), thus joining our other allies.³

The secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, personally met *el Caudillo*, Francisco Franco, on 1 November 1955. The joint communiqué issued afterwards refers to the military and economic pact (for reciprocal defense and US aid to Spain) that Dulles himself had made with Spain in September 1953, and highlights, with satisfaction, the full agreement between the two sides "on all questions" of international politics.

With the arrival of a new Republican administration, and the appointment of John Foster Dulles, whose brother was head of the CIA, as secretary of state, the challenge was relaunched in Europe itself. The new secretary of state's watchword was to roll back the Soviet Union. The bastion of this new front of attack was West Germany.

Today – when Germany, reunified in 1990, is an economic colossus at the center of Europe, governed by socialists and Greens, whose foreign minister's cultural and political background is in the student "radicalism" of 1968

and the years that followed – it is not easy to recall and bring back into focus the West Germany from the Adenauer era to that of Brandt.

The very establishment of the federal republic was a product of the “cold war.” Begun with the London conference of May 27 1948, the transformation of the three western occupation zones into the “German Federal Republic” was the prelude to an analogous operation in the Soviet occupation zone (August 1948). Both states were given their definitive form in 1949. It is significant that each referred, in the first draft of its constitutional charter, to the whole of Germany. The three western zones were not, initially, homogeneous. The wealthier and politically livelier British zone, whose main city was Hamburg, contrasted with the American one, which was more staid and conservative (Bavaria especially). The French case was a special one. Relations with France were sensitive, since they were poisoned by its original aspiration to the dismemberment of Germany, the internationalization of the Ruhr, and the occupation of the Saar. The last of these was carried out, and the Saar was returned to Germany only in 1957, after a referendum. All sides had wavered over these questions. At the Tehran conference (November 28, 1943) Roosevelt had proposed that, after the war had been won, Germany be divided into five autonomous states, with the Kiel canal, Ruhr, Saar, and Hamburg under United Nations control. Churchill had proposed the creation of a large Austro-Bavarian federation, and the separation of the Ruhr and Westphalia from Prussia. It was decided to set up a committee chaired by the English foreign minister, Eden, helped by the Soviet and American ambassadors, to study “how to proceed with the dismemberment of Germany.” The understanding was that the committee would decide only at a later stage whether “to include a French representative or not.” The committee achieved nothing. To the astonishment of the Western leaders, on the very day Germany surrendered (May 8, 1945) Stalin announced that “the USSR has no intention of dismembering or destroying Germany.”⁴

In his *History of the Cold War* (1965) André Fontaine wonders what might have caused Stalin’s “sudden volte-face,” and speculates that he may have aimed “to take possession of the whole of Germany, making use of the country’s pro-Soviet elements.”⁵ Milovan Djilas’s *Conversations with Stalin* (published in New York in 1962), recalls a declaration Stalin made in January 1947 during a meeting with Yugoslav representatives, including Djilas himself: “Germany would remain divided; ‘The West will make Western Germany their own, and we shall turn Eastern Germany into our own state.’”⁶ According to Wilfried Loch, a historian at the University of Essen, East Germany was in any case Stalin’s “unloved child” (his study, published by Rowohlt in 1994, is entitled *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind*). Loch believes Stalin’s preferred option would have been the reunification of

Germany (and thus the abolition of the GDR) in exchange for the reunified state's neutrality – a proposal made in a note Gromyko handed to the three allied ministers on March 10, 1952. Documents that have recently come to light reveal that immediately after Stalin's death Beria, one of his most trusted colleagues in the Soviet leadership (who was liquidated by his rivals soon afterwards, in July 1953), had made the same proposal. Clearly, such a distant outpost was considered unsustainable. It is no coincidence that the first serious friction came precisely with the Berlin revolt of June 1953, which was repressed by the Soviet Union amid the disarray and panic of the new German state's leaders.

The theme of unification was, of course, a favorite one in the West: it was an important component of West Germany's political climate, especially during the Adenauer era, when the country was being fully and unconditionally integrated into the West's supranational structures and organizations. Enzo Collotti describes this climate well in his study *Storia delle due Germanie* [A History of the Two Germanies]:

to create a strong, materially and spiritually militarized Germany, capable of withstanding a clash with the East, in a permanent state of internal and international tension due partly to the anti-communist crusading spirit and partly to permanent territorial claims on its eastern neighbors. The rallying-cry of German reunification served to sustain, galvanise, and unite in a drive towards a single goal all the motives that underlay this state of tension, which was further fuelled by Western and Atlanticist extremism. However, behind the façade of the desire for reunification there was only a vacuum. There was no possibility of negotiation with the East, no contact, and no gesture that could in some way restore trust in the Germany irreparably destroyed by Nazism – not even the repudiation of the Munich agreement.⁷

The first 10 years of the German Federal Republic's existence – until the eruption of political confrontation and the rediscovery in the collective consciousness of "German guilt" and the uniqueness of the Nazism/genocide phenomenon – was marked by a conflict between two factors. The country's "high-minded" inception was represented by its advanced legal culture – derived from the best traditions of the Weimar Republic (as indeed was the case with the constitutional committee of the Democratic Republic's *Volksrat*) and from the reinvigorated socialist movement (which in the first general election, in 1949, was as strong as the CDU-CSU). However, all this was overwhelmed by a spirit of revanchism, which sometimes became openly Nazi in character. This spirit was accepted and protected with the same unscrupulousness which, in another context but with the same aims, saw Iberian fascist movements also embraced in the "Atlanticist" cause.

Tete Harens Tetens, a German Jew who emigrated to the USA after 1933 and who remained in an American university after the war, provides a snapshot of the situation in the German Federal Republic around 1959, in his *The New Germany and the Old Nazis*, published in London in 1961.

Surveying the entire political structure of the Bonn Republic, one comes to the inescapable conclusion that the Nazis have had a quiet comeback almost everywhere. From the Chancellery down through every cabinet office, through the parties, the parliaments of the Laender, the police, the school system, and the press, former Nazis are deeply entrenched in many key positions, as well as in the middle and lower ranks of the federal and state government.⁸

It was thanks to Tetens's book that the Globke case was denounced. Hans Globke, one of the architects of the Nuremberg race laws during the Nazi era, was a permanent under-secretary at the chancellery, who was protected by Adenauer and remained in his post as long as Adenauer was chancellor. The picture would be incomplete without a mention of the part played by the Deutsche Partei, the revanchist movement that opposed denazification, the Nuremberg trials, and the "defamation" of the German soldier who brought about the release of Kesselring and Manstein. Members of the movement became ministers under Adenauer, and one, Hans-Christoph Seeböhm, was personally involved, as a Sudeten German, in the moves to reject Czechoslovakia's persistent demands that the Federal Republic declare the Munich agreement totally invalid. Besides, the mainstay of foreign policy under Adenauer was to lay claim to Germany's 1937 borders; this meant, among other things, rejecting the Oder-Neisse line as the border between Germany and Poland (which was, clearly, recognized by the German Democratic Republic).⁹

Entirely consistent with this picture is the fact that, on November 22 1951, the federal government asked the constitutional court to declare that the communist party (KPD) was unconstitutional. In effect, this was the start of a legal process aimed at outlawing the party. The legal basis for the move – which echoed the analogous step taken by Hitler on the grounds of the Reichstag fire – was article 21, clause 2 of the constitution. This declared that parties which, because of their aims or behavior, threatened the German Federal Republic's existence or its democratic-liberal order were "against the constitution." Naturally, this article had been conceived by the parliamentary council, which contained some KPD deputies including the secretary, Max Reimann, as a tool to prevent the formation of Nazi parties or groups. Now, however, the federal government was asking the court to decide whether a party could be tolerated on the grounds of its

Marxist beliefs! The implication was that Marxism as such was “incompatible” with the constitutional order – whereas Hans Globke was compatible with a ministerial post at the chancellery.

When this question was raised, the KPD had 15 deputies in the Bundestag elected in 1949 (and 5.7 percent of the votes). The court took its time: it would give an opinion only in 1956. Meanwhile, the 1953 general election was imminent, and communists were expected to perform less well because of the abstract sectarianism of their politics and because of the division of Germany. The government promptly produced an electoral reform, the “5 percent cut-off clause,” under which no party that received less than 5 percent of the vote nationwide would be represented in parliament. Thus, in the meantime, the KPD was to be excluded from the Bundestag anyway – as indeed it was after the election. This was the first adjustment made in Europe to a system of proportional representation, such as had been introduced everywhere (except, of course, in Britain) after the end of fascism.

France was growing increasingly uneasy at these developments – an unease heightened by the persistent and erosive political actions of General de Gaulle. He had made a dramatic exit from the provisional government, which comprised socialists and communists, on January 20, 1946. All his subsequent actions were directed against the work of those who were drawing up the constitution. It was his sharp disagreement with the work of the first and second constituent assemblies that led to the disturbing – if nominally positive – result of the referendum of October 13, 1946, with which the electorate approved the constitution of the Fourth Republic: 9,263,000 yes, 8,143,000 no, and 8,467,000 abstentions! De Gaulle did not abandon politics, however. After his speech in Strasbourg on April 7, 1947, he formed the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français*, which swelled into a broad parliamentary group in the national assembly, bringing together – under the leadership of “his” men, important resistance leaders such as Jacques Soustelle and André Malraux – a considerable number of former *Pétainists*. The movement was against political parties (speech at Epinal, September 30, 1946), and it echoed some of the themes dear to *Action Française*. After its initial success, however, the *Rassemblement* went into rapid decline. On May 6, 1953, De Gaulle dramatically – as was his style – left politics and the movement he had founded, declaring that he was keeping himself in reserve for a time when “the country suffered a severe shock.” As we shall see, this happened exactly five years later.

Meanwhile, the break between the SFIO and the PCF had shifted the political center of gravity towards a “centrist” administration. This struggled and was undermined by the executive’s inherent weakness, ascribed by the Gaullists and their allies to the mechanism of the constitution itself.

Colonial wars, which continued practically without interruption, dominated and poisoned the atmosphere. On December 19, 1946, a rebellion broke out in Indo-China (whose partition between Chiang Kai-shek's China and the Anglo-Americans had been established by the Potsdam accords); it was led by Ho Chi Minh, one of the leaders of Asian communism. The PCF was accused of being unpatriotic because of its position on the conflict (in which France became the protagonist), which increased the party's isolation. France's colonial war was to end in the disastrous capitulation of Dien Bien Phu (May 7, 1954), by which time the Geneva conference was already under way. It was there that France, which since June 17 had been under the government of Pierre Mendès-France, learned of its defeat.

Mendès-France was seen during these years as the anti-De Gaulle figure, even though the new French premier's very long career had begun in the Resistance in the shadow of De Gaulle. A Jew with "Jacobin" sentiments (he kept a portrait of Robespierre in his austere study), Mendès-France also restored vitality to a parliamentary coalition that leaned to the left.

Nevertheless, on one point he agreed with the Gaullist movement – or more accurately, current opinion: in his rejection of the nascent European Defense Community (EDC) as unacceptable. This was strongly favored by the United States, and conceived in such a way as to transfer the leading role in Atlanticist "defense" on European soil to the German Federal Republic: in effect, it marked Germany's return to international politics in grand style, and entailed its inevitable rearmament. On December 14, 1953, John Foster Dulles declared the United States' overriding interest in the approval of the new treaty, arguing, among other things, that "the West would be senseless if it ignored the contribution that Germany can bring to our common defense."¹⁰ Under Mendès-France's leadership, the EDC foundered in the French chamber on August 30, 1954. Among other things, the issue was intertwined with Franco-German friction over the return of the Saar, to which Germany laid claim. This was seen as a severe setback, and a success for the policies of the Soviet Union, which had opposed the EDC from the outset, considering it essentially a vehicle for rearming Germany with the East in its sights. On December 4, 1954, General de Gaulle declared that "all possibilities of reaching agreement with the USSR should be explored" before setting in train the mechanism that, after the failure of the EDC, would bring into being the Western European Union and in any case lead to some form of German rearmament. France was suspicious of its German neighbor, so openly protected by the USA, and at that point showed perhaps more interest than others in the international campaign of détente launched by the Soviet leadership after the death of Stalin and the elimination of

Beria. However, the year that stands out in the history of the cold war – 1956 – radically changed the possible scenarios and the decisions that would be made.

The year had begun with elections in France, held on January 2. As in the previous elections in 1951, the PCF confirmed that it was the party that commanded by far the greatest support, receiving 5,500,000 votes – a quarter of the electorate – which elected 145 deputies. The socialists, with 3,200,000 votes, had 88 deputies, while the various radical and radical-socialist parties received 2,800,000 votes but, being divided, won very few seats. The Catholic party (MRP) held its own, receiving 2,300,000 votes and losing only a small number of seats. After Guy Mollet, leader of the SFIO, had refused a communist proposal that a common basic government program be drawn up, a socialist-radical administration without a built-in majority was formed, receiving the backing of both communists and MRP. The Mollet government had an emphatically “social” program: an increase in paid holidays to three weeks, establishment of a national fund for the elderly, and fiscal reforms. The government included Mendès-France, who soon clashed with the cabinet of which he was a member. He disagreed with the minister resident in Algiers, the socialist Lacoste, who wanted to combat the Algerian rebellion with an iron fist, and he opposed Mollet’s social policy, which he considered dangerously inflationary. However, his exit from the government did not induce the other radical ministers to leave it. Neither he nor his opponents could foresee then that, within barely two years, the Algerian crisis would mark the end of the Republic.

On January 31 the Mollet government was approved by a crushing majority (420 votes to 71, with some 80 abstentions). A few days later, on February 14, the twentieth congress of the communist party of the Soviet Union opened in Moscow. This precipitated a deep crisis in the communist movement throughout the world. It laid the foundations for the break with the People’s Republic of China, which only a few months earlier had been favored with excellent economic agreements. It went far beyond the professed intention of combating the “cult” of Stalin, to demolish the figure of Stalin himself and with it the credibility of the whole of Soviet history from the death of Lenin (January 1924) onwards. It sparked a chain reaction in the “people’s democracies,” already severely tested by the paranoid “anti-Titoist” campaign Stalin began in 1948, and laid the foundations for popular unrest that threatened to overwhelm two essential components of the newly established Warsaw Pact (1955) – Poland and Hungary. Its result outside the pact nations was that European communist parties were once again isolated in their respective countries, in a way that was difficult to

remedy. The French and Italian parties were worst affected, but the small British communist party also came out of the “unforgettable 1956” (as it was referred to at the time) badly damaged.

Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin was one stage in the political and personal struggle within the communist party of the Soviet Union, or rather, within its ruling group. It was felt to be necessary in order to force onto its recalcitrant members the liquidation of a monumental, anachronistic apparatus of repression. The political weakness of this plan was that the new critics had all been part of the leadership under Stalin. From a historiographic standpoint, Khrushchev’s speech to the twentieth congress seemed extremely ambiguous, but the “secret” speech that may have been leaked to the West by Soviet intelligence was far worse. In his recent book of memoirs, *Interesting Times*, Eric Hobsbawm recalls that many members of the “historians’ group” in the English communist party (of which Hobsbawm himself was president) reacted instinctively with a question embarrassing to the politicians: “Why should we simply approve Khrushchev? We do not know, we can only endorse policy – but historians go by evidence.”¹¹

In an obituary in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 6, 1953, written on the day Stalin’s death was announced, Isaac Deutscher’s penetrating words sum up the forthcoming tragedy: “Around his deathbed it is only his shadows that quarrel and come to blows to seize his mantle... They have all been projections of Stalin, pure and simple. How long can a shadow continue to wear a mantle, when the body is gone?”

However, the vitality of the states that had been constructed in eastern Europe was far from exhausted, as was demonstrated in Poland in October 1956. This is perhaps the most significant episode in the history of the “people’s democracies,” because all the elements of that history intertwine within it. The events are well known. On August 4, after the suppression of workers’ unrest over wage demands in Poznań, the United Polish Workers’ party (POUP – the communist party) decided to rehabilitate Wladislaw Gomulka, a politician who three years earlier had been expelled from the party and arrested, accused of “Titoism” (treason and other improbable charges). On October 8, Gomulka was readmitted to the central committee. From October 19 to 21, after a threatening and futile flying visit by Khrushchev and the entire Soviet leadership, accompanied by Marshal Konev, the head of the Warsaw Pact forces, Gomulka was elected first secretary of the POUP. On October 24 he addressed a crowd of 240,000 people in the centre of Warsaw. Soviet military intervention – it is now known for certain – was prevented personally by Chou En-lai, the Chinese prime minister, apparently at the request of the Poles themselves. Never had the communists enjoyed such popularity in Poland. On January 17 an

election was held, the integrity and fairness of which have never been impugned by even the most hostile commentator. Almost 18,000,000 people voted: the POUP received more than 50 percent of the votes, and the other parties, which collaborated with the POUP in the “National Front,” won 48 percent. Ironically Marshal Rokossovski – a Pole from Warsaw who had joined the Red Army in 1918 and fought to liberate the USSR from Nazism during the Second World War, becoming defense minister in the “people’s” Poland and well known for his closeness to Gomulka – was expelled from Poland because he had become a minister while remaining a Soviet general.

Gomulka had been persecuted for his “Titoism.” His victory was certainly a victory for Titoism, though also, it became clear later, for China in its capacity as standard-bearer of the struggle against Russian “hegemony.” During Stalin’s last years, the foundations for the ruin of the system of “people’s democracies” were laid precisely when Tito had been identified as the enemy “in the pay of the reactionaries.” The fact that he was looked upon favorably in the West *exactly because Stalin had made him a target* of an action he had wrongly supposed would destroy him confirmed Stalin in his senseless view of Titoism. It is striking that Khrushchev himself, the man who demolished Stalin, should hasten to Warsaw to block Gomulka, the only person who could save the “people’s democracy” in Poland, as indeed he succeeded in doing for some years. This was confirmation of the tortuous and indecisive nature of “de-Stalinization.”

The un hoped-for and overwhelming success of the Polish communists was eclipsed on the world stage by another episode, a few days later: the Hungarian revolution that culminated, on November 4, 1956, in the Soviet invasion of Hungary. However, despite the fog of rhetoric and false historiography that still hangs over that terrible episode, it cannot be fully understood without taking its international aspect into consideration. Two facets need to be distinguished. There was the internal crisis, which followed a course similar to that of the Polish crisis: the men who had been driven away and persecuted during the “anti-Titoist” witch-hunt (Imre Nagy in Hungary’s case) returned, and were largely welcomed by the population. There was also the international crisis, into which the Nagy government plunged the country when it decided to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact on November 1, 1956, and to proclaim its neutrality, guaranteed by the United Nations. No one was innocent in this episode, which ended with a real war in the center of Europe. The USA is responsible for having incited to revolt a population that had many reasons to rise up – via the continuous, relentless campaign of “Radio Free Europe,” which urged rebellion – while knowing that it could never intervene except at the price of a generalized

war. In this case, the “roll back” doctrine became cynical, if not criminal. The Soviet Union, for its part, had no intention of suffering a repetition of the defeat in Poland, or of supporting another Gomulka: it wanted its own people. Probably in this case it would have intervened anyway, all the more since there was no Hungarian Gomulka. Nagy had been totally unable to control the situation: on the contrary, he had allowed himself to be swept along by a tide of events that was stronger than he was – massacres of communists in the street and summary executions had brought no reaction from his government. The role of Maleter, the minister who announced the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, could be seen as either provocative or suicidal. Most important, in the few days that separated the remarkable success of “people’s democracy” in Poland from the disaster in Hungary, an event took place that changed the terms in which international relations were conceived. On October 29, 1956, Israel, guided by the British and French, attacked Egypt to try to reverse by force the latter’s decision of July 26 to nationalize the Suez Canal and remove it from Anglo-French control. Israel’s action triggered an insane war by proxy. On October 30 an Anglo-French ultimatum to Egypt was rejected by President Nasser, and on the night of November 4, Anglo-French forces landed at Port Said. The connection between the two crises is obvious. Eden and Guy Mollet decided (independently, it seems, of the policy of the United States) to choose a moment when the Soviet Union was engaged in a tense and intractable situation in eastern Europe to launch an attack worthy of the great colonial powers of a previous age. In any context, and against any opponent – but especially in the setting of the “cold war” – such a military escalation of the crisis would have produced a military response which left no room for a political solution. So it proved. Hungary, abandoned to its fate, was crushed. The Kádár government, imposed by the Soviet Union and built on what had remained of the old regime, got under way amid enormous difficulties, and for a long time was almost ostracized by the international community. Hungary became an extraordinary, and in some senses legitimate, propaganda weapon. The cynicism of “Radio Free Europe” had borne fruit beyond all expectations.

The French government at the time of the Suez invasion was nevertheless still Mollet’s socialist administration. In the heat of the agitation throughout western Europe in support of the Hungarian revolution, the French right gave a signal that went farther than what was seen in other countries by setting fire to the offices of the communist daily *l’Humanité*. Threats against the PCF, seen as an “anti-national” party because it opposed the aggression against Egypt but supported the invasion of Hungary, multiplied. Two events also coincided in a way that was far from insignificant. On August

18, 1956, when the crisis in the communist world that had begun in February was already far advanced, the constitutional court of the German Federal Republic gave its judgment on the question raised by the Adenauer government in 1951. The verdict outlawed the German communist party, which had in any case been diminished in the elections three years earlier and, thanks to the cut-off clause, excluded from the Bundestag.

By this time the French right was doubly frustrated. First of all, a humiliating defeat had been suffered at Suez, where ominous Soviet threats uttered by Khrushchev himself had imposed a hurried withdrawal of the Anglo-French airborne forces; worse still, America had rejected the action and the United Nations had condemned it. Second, nationalist resistance in Algeria was strengthening, and the Algerians' struggle was receiving growing international support. The colonial war – which many refused to describe as such, in deference to the anachronistic notion of a structural as well as institutional link between France and Algeria, represented by the Algerian French – could no longer be circumscribed as an “internal issue” of the republic. Moreover, tension with Tunisia was increasing because of continual cross-border incursions by French forces on anti-guerrilla operations. Above all, the scandal of the torture of Algerian nationalists erupted. Public opinion could not fail to be shocked at seeing the French military and police inflict on the Algerians the same treatment that, a decade earlier, the country's own partisans had suffered at the hands of the Germans. Henri Alleg, a communist journalist and editor of the daily *Alger Républicain*, was arrested for having condemned the torture – which was soon to be described as “the gangrene” of the Republic – in a pamphlet that pilloried the torturers. Meanwhile, the French expeditionary force swelled to more than 500,000 men. During 1957, General Massu crushed the clandestine National Liberation Front in the so-called “battle of Algiers.” This was followed by summary executions and a massive population displacement that affected about 1,500,000 Algerians. However, the crisis acquired an international dimension between July 2, when Senator Kennedy told the American senate that the USA should use its influence to help the Algerian people regain their independence, and December 10, 1957, when the United Nations general assembly unanimously approved a resolution calling for a negotiated solution to the Algerian question. In Paris there was a rapid series of changes of government: Bourgès-Maunoury, Gaillard, Mollet's second, failed attempt, and finally Pflimlin. Already, the Gaillard government put in place “special powers” to extricate the country from the Algerian hornet's nest.

However, there was news from Algiers, where an instruction booklet for the occupying army (Secretariat of the Land Armed Forces, Army General

Staff, Office XXX) was in circulation. It gives an idea of the prevailing climate. On page 28, among other things, it advises: "Muslims are not all terrorists, certainly, but every one of them could be one, no matter what their references may say."

On May 13, 1958, while the new government was laboriously being put together, the army took power in Algiers. It was a fearsome army, of impressive size, and it wanted to impose political change from the colonies on metropolitan France, as Franco had done in Spain in 1936. Its leaders were Massu, Salan, Thomazo, and Chérière. The cry that went up from the mass of colonists and echoed in public pronouncements during the coup d'état was: "Power to De Gaulle." General Massu appointed himself head of a civil and military committee of public safety, and peremptorily informed the president in Paris of his move. In the capital, parliament voted by a very large majority to back the Pflimlin government: this was supposed to be the "republican" government that would oppose the fascist-like coup. On May 17, De Gaulle made it known from his retreat at Colombey-les-deux-Eglises that he would speak on the 19th. That day, at 3 p.m., as De Gaulle was addressing a press conference at the Quai d'Orsay, the general strike broke out. The man invoked by those who had carried out the Algiers coup had not a word of condemnation for what they had done. Mysteriously, Mollet kept his own counsel, declaring only: "Any reaction would be premature." On May 20 parliament voted by 473 to 93 – with the communists also voting in favor – to confirm full powers for Pflimlin.

On May 24 the revolt spread to Corsica. Parachute troops and extreme right-wing militants occupied the Ajaccio prefecture, encountering no resistance. On May 26, De Gaulle decided to move back to Paris. The next day agencies circulated this communiqué from the general: "I have begun the normal process required to establish a republican government capable of ensuring the country's unity and independence." He went on to reassure the leaders of the rebellion: "I would like to convey to them my trust, and my intention to remain in constant touch with them." Pflimlin and De Gaulle were in contact throughout the day. At 7 p.m., after the meeting of the council of ministers, Pflimlin announced that, during his conversations with De Gaulle, the general had asked to be summoned to govern *by the "national" parties*, that is, with the exclusion of the communists. At the same time, in Algiers, Salan announced to the crowd: "Our appeal to General de Gaulle has been granted!" At 9.30 p.m. the prime minister told the national assembly that that he wanted to put to the vote a proposal for constitutional reform, adding, however, that he would not count the votes of the communists. This was a ploy to trigger his resignation. The proposal was passed, during the night between May 27 and 28, by 408 votes to 165.

Pflimlin deducted the communist votes in favor, concluded that he did not have a majority, and resigned, presenting himself at the Elysée at 2.30 a.m. As a large demonstration marched from the Place de la Nation to the Place de la République, the president, Coty, made it known that he had asked De Gaulle, via the presidents of the two chambers, to form the new government. Coty justified himself in a message to the two chambers: "Should I perhaps forgo appealing to the man whose peerless moral integrity can ensure the safety of the fatherland?"

On June 1, De Gaulle appeared before the national assembly and requested full powers. Mendès-France, Mitterrand, and many others, as well as the communists, spoke against granting the request. However, the chamber approved it by 329 votes to 224. What Boulanger had failed to achieve against the Third Republic, De Gaulle had achieved with the fourth. Caesarism had returned, in the middle of the twentieth century, riding on the wave of a colonial war that was ever more beset with unknowns. De Gaulle himself would be forced to bring this war to a close by withdrawing from Algiers in 1962, after years of fruitless intransigence, and not without suffering a renewed mutiny among those who had brought him to power. The single article that constituted the "Law granting full powers" (June 2, 1958) did not dispense with the customary rhetoric, and referred to the "declaration of rights of 1789."

An example of the practical application of the "declaration" and its immortal principles can be seen in the testimony of Khider Seghir, a 26-year-old pharmacist who was arrested and tortured in Paris during the six months in which the full powers were in force:

I was arrested at 6.30 p.m on 29 November 1958, at 146 rue Montmartre, by six policemen. They took me to the Noailles barracks at Versailles, where we arrived about 7.15 p.m. After they had undressed me, three police officers began to beat me, punching me in the abdomen, chest, and kidneys for half an hour. Then they attached me to the horizontal bar, which they connected to an electric current. This operation lasted until midnight; every half hour they would release me for a ten-minute break, to allow me to recover part of my strength. After a certain number of doses I could no longer stand up. At midnight they took me down to a basement, where I spent the night.

On 30 November I was interrogated closely by six police officers, who demanded confessions about the way the FLN and its leaders were organised, while using obscene language and telling me I belonged to a "filthy race".

On 1 December, about 9 a.m., they attached me to the horizontal bar again, as described above. This lasted until midday. At 1 p. m. they took me to the DST in rue des Saussaies. As soon as we got there a police officer, who had the

job of interrogating me, punched me in the abdomen many times. The interrogation lasted until 6 p.m. At about 8 p.m. they took me back to Versailles, where I spent the night.

On 2 December, at 6 p.m., the same officers, including M. R. – I remember his name well, and he was the most vicious to me – gave me a “going over” for the third time at the horizontal bar. The operation lasted about two hours. Afterwards, they kicked and punched me, and attacked me in other ways: twisting my muscles, arms, and legs, even pushing their fingers into my anus.

Then the torture was over. On 3, 4, and 5 December they interrogated me. They would take me to the DST in the mornings and back to Versailles in the evenings; this continued for a further four days. On the evening of 9 December they transferred me to the prison, where I stayed until the evening of 10 December. When I was taken to the judge to sign the warrant, I told Mr Batigne himself of the torture I had suffered, but he ignored me, saying: “We’ve heard that song before; you’re all the same.”¹²

As might have been expected, De Gaulle was aiming for a radical rewriting of the constitution – not for nothing had he broken with the parties over the constitution in 1946 – and above all for an electoral system that would liquidate a specific political party: the communists. On September 28, 1958, he had a new constitution approved, which was centered on the president’s powers. It was a success of Bonapartist proportions: out of 36,500,000 voters, 31,000,000 voted “yes” and only 5,500,000 “no” (essentially these were the PCF’s voters). Apart from the haziness of the constitution’s text, it was the new electoral law that transformed the country’s political life. Proportional representation was abolished, and replaced by a single-member, majority system with two rounds of voting. In essence, this system reduced to a minimum the representation of a party supported by almost a quarter of the electorate. Elections for the national assembly were held on November 23 and 30. The shares of the vote were: Union for the New Republic (UNR) – the reborn Gaullist party – 28 percent; communists 20.1 percent; SFIO 13 percent; independents and moderates, 18 percent. The numbers of members returned were: 189 for the UNR, 10 for the communists, 40 for the SFIO, and 130 independents and moderates.

On January 8, 1959, De Gaulle became president. In September 1962, after a failed assassination attempt (by the OAS, the same people who in 1958 had backed the coup) and counting on the popularity this brought him, he proposed that the president be elected directly, and secured approval for this – once again overwhelmingly.

The Bonapartist project had thus been realized completely. Foreign policy was where the “genius” of the new Bonaparte found its fullest expression,

and France returned to being the third great bloc, a position that had been obscured by the bland Atlanticism of the Fourth Republic governments, whether centrist, radical, or socialist. The most significant gesture was withdrawal from the NATO military organization, after the resounding re-election of 1965. This, combined with recognition of the People's Republic of China, and the way France kept its distance over the Six Day War in the Middle East, demonstrates that the plan was organic and not fragmentary. In 1968, student revolution and the belligerent return of social unrest were the signals that, after 10 years of unbroken domination, the country no longer appreciated this form of government, which it had so emphatically chosen. The last referendum (April 1969) was a defeat, and De Gaulle brusquely left the stage.

Gaullism as a regime, a set of policies, and a style had ended with the exit of its inimitable protagonist. However, it left behind a new political system. This concentrated the political struggle in the center, cut out "extremes" by means of the lethal electoral system, and inaugurated – ahead of other countries – the predominance of the "mixed system."

Towards the “Mixed System”

Among different peoples and in revolutions the aristocracy always survives: if you destroy it in the nobility, it immediately finds a home in the rich, powerful houses of the third estate; destroy it there, and it resurfaces and takes refuge among factory foremen and the leaders of the common people.

Napoleon III, *Précis des guerres de César*, chapter XVI

Fifteen years ago Maurice Duverger, a champion of this system, produced a lively study, *La V République, achèvement de la Révolution française*,¹ as the Italian parliament celebrated the bicentenary of 1789 – although, as a scholar in the subject, he had shown a very different bent until then. In the heat of the traumatic end of the Fourth Republic, Duverger had produced *Demain la République* (1958) a combative essay dealing with that episode and the prospects of De Gaulle’s return. In it he denounced, among other things, the backwardness of De Gaulle’s political categories, while not sparing the Fourth Republic’s “weaknesses”:

Nothing suggests that De Gaulle has changed the essence of the opinions he expressed in his Bayeux speech, which was a famous declaration in favor of a type of regime similar in many ways to that in England at the end of the eighteenth century, and to that France experienced under Louis Philippe, which Marshal Mac-Mahon attempted to revive on 16 May 1877. A head of state with power and prestige, who appoints and dismisses the prime minister, who should enjoy his trust and that of the assembly at the same time: this is a phase through which all parliamentary regimes have had to pass in the course of their development: the *Orléanist* phase. The Fourth Republic thought it could govern France in the atomic age with the methods of Fallières: do we now want to replace them with those of Guizot?²

In 1961 Duverger had perceived the birth of a “sixth” republic in the constitutional change through which De Gaulle secured the direct election of the president of the republic (*La VI République et le régime présidentiel*). In a new edition (1978) of his essay *Institutions politiques et droit consti-*

tutionnel (1955) none of the authoritarian features of the Gaullist constitution escapes the spotlight, especially its fundamental limitation, which was that it could function only in the presence and under the guidance of the "charismatic" leader who had created it.³

Until that point, however, the center-right coalition (ex-independents and Gaullists) had won every election, without fail, for 20 years. Then, with Mitterrand's repeated victories, periods when the left prevailed began to alternate with periods marked by the hybrid phenomenon of *cohabitation*, where solutions to problems also came through the skill and dominance of the "charismatic" personality (now Mitterrand). Duverger followed with critical attention, to use Nilde Iotti's words in the introduction, the evolution of the Gaullist constitution and of its practical application (*La République des citoyens*, 1982; *Bréviaire de la cohabitation*, 1986), until the outburst of the essay of 1989, presented to the Italian chamber. In this work, historical digressions aside, the central theme is the majority electoral system and its glories. The author does not care that some of his assertions clash with the evidence – as when he observes, and of course deplores, the "communists' tendency to shut themselves away in a monolithic ghetto."⁴ This comment is almost comical, if we think that what little remains of the PCF is ironically reproached for suffering from a ministerial zeal and service ethic that are rarely encountered in other parties once they have entered what Pietro Nenni (mythologizing them) calls the "corridors of power." It is a sad end – for a party that more than 80 years ago, in Tours, broke away from its socialist roots to seize "the fullness of time" – to end up as an annex of that same socialist party, without even being granted the indulgence of allowing itself occasional moments of autonomy. Is this a "monolithic ghetto"? The mechanism is clear and well known, and when the French socialists realized that they had everything to gain from it, they became resolute supporters of the Fifth Republic "model." At least four parties compete in each single-member constituency: two on the center-right and two on the left (socialists and communists). In the first round of voting, each receives its supporters' votes. Which candidate should run in the second round? Certainly not – or almost never – the communist, because not all the socialist voters will vote for him and he will certainly not take votes from the center: therefore he and his party are doomed to defeat. Conversely, communist voters will be prepared to transfer their vote to the other candidate – through discipline, because he is the "lesser evil," out of solidarity, and so forth. Thus, from 1958 onwards the PCF continued to play the role of the socialists' servant or blood donor, especially after the alliance with the socialist party became firm. It did this for a variety of reasons perhaps, but certainly for one overriding one: because it had no choice.

However, after almost half a century of such altruistic acrobatics it is almost a miracle that it exists at all. Its voters obviously became gradually aware of their de facto "second-division" or "subordinate" status. As time went by, two options appeared clearly preferable to voters who were doomed to the frustrating role of servants: either to vote *directly* for the party that would benefit from their votes anyway, or not to vote at all.

At the other end of the political spectrum the situation is different. Negotiations are between "equals," and the choice of candidate depends on other factors: the balance between the two allies, which candidate enjoys the greatest patronage, and so forth. Notables have returned to dominance on the electoral scene, and each of the two members of the center-right alliance possesses them in plenty.

Even outside France, which led the way in this process immediately after the war, there was an ever more sophisticated campaign to adopt electoral laws of the majority type. This was nothing more than one aspect of the effort to deprive representative democracy of its validity *erga omnes* or, to put it another way, to offset the still unpleasant effects of universal suffrage. According to their advocates, these processes aimed to "rationalize" the expression of the people's will, avoiding its realization in pure form, precisely by limiting the range of options.

If voters wanted to cast a vote that was "useful" they were forced – the verb may seem harsh, but this was the result – to choose not whatever they wanted but from *those given options*. Since the "useful" options converged towards the center – the conquest of which is the real electoral prize in industrialised countries – elected representatives tended, to a great extent, to have moderate views. Also, given the *cost* of getting elected, they belonged largely to the middle and upper classes,⁵ which are traditionally moderate. Thus, by a different route, the phenomenon that prevailed at the time of restricted suffrage reasserted itself: the drastically diminished representation of the less "competitive" classes.

The system of restricted suffrage, with the variant of the "plural" vote, is in itself the appropriate instrument for bringing into being the "mixed system": a little democracy, and a great deal of oligarchy. It combines the electoral *principle* (the democratic process) with the *reality* of the protected ascendancy of the middle and upper classes. Majority systems achieve the same result by more tortuous means. The representation of the more restless minorities is considered a destabilizing factor, and so measures have been taken to correct this "flaw," without any fear now of any propaganda backlash such as was still possible when there were substantial opposition forces in society. Even though they are numerically superior, the moderate classes need absolute safety in the parliamentary sphere, partly because they

are divided into parties and groupings that compete against each other. This is why mechanisms to limit universal suffrage were set in train.

Oddly, in Italy there is talk in various quarters of the "historical" need to bring into being a "second" republic. This has already been born, however, as a result of the electoral reform that brought in the majority system and abolished proportional representation (1993) – the central event of Italian history in the last decade.

The argument that it is "instability" that leads political systems to adopt majority procedures – and thus to favor the "mixed" system in preference to the democratic one – is arbitrary. This is confirmed by the fact that precisely in Italy the collapse of the political system was not due at all to the instability of governments or to the frequent crises (these occurred even when the Christian Democrats held an absolute majority *on their own*) but to the explosion of the "moral question." The Italian case is an extremely interesting one. The "disease" was the intertwining of business and politics (a *classic* phenomenon in any capitalist society), yet the "cure" was applied in a totally different sphere: by changing the voting system (no longer "one man, one vote," but "useful" and "useless" votes). Admirable cleverness was shown by those who exploited the widespread disgust and disdain for bribed "politicians" (though in truth there was somewhat less for the capitalists who did the bribing) to pass off as a remedy for these ills an electoral system precisely on the grounds that it appeared to penalize the "politicians." Perfect too was its demagogic power, capable of deflecting popular indignation on to the wrong target.⁶ Of course, as happens in the underworld after a "big job," those who carried out the operation were soon discarded, and their names are barely remembered.

Much of the left, meanwhile, has been gripped by what might be termed the gambler syndrome. The gambler, as we know, is ill: he ruins himself by continuing to bet sums of money on the green table, hopefully clutching his *fiches*, always believing that fortune will smile on him sooner or later in this illogical game. The left too, knowing it does not have a majority in the country, is reduced to putting its hopes in the last goddess: the green table of the majority system. Like any self-respecting gambler, the left hysterically defends the system as being not only appropriate but, in the more desperate cases, fair. Here and there, residual groups or segments that are penalized (or feel they are) within well-fortified alliances raise the alarm again and demand a more equitable system; but their voice is lost in the void. They are indeed referred to as the "debris" of the previous republic (confirmation that it is precisely the change of electoral system that has already altered the constitution).

Remarkably, however, what is ignored is the fact that the proportional principle is readily regarded, and rightly, as the only possible one when

types of differentiation or division other than political parties are in play – for example, different ethnic groups or religious faiths in the same region or state, or different shareholders within a company or board of directors. Clearly, it can also be argued that, when the aim is to organize political representation, applying the “one man, one vote” principle rigorously can be tiresome. However, it is rather squalid to affirm that it is fine and just to rule it out.⁷

Thus the “mixed” system has come back into favor in the West, its chief instrument being majority electoral systems. Rather than explicit limiting of others’ rights, as happens in the classic type of mixed system (restricted suffrage), the preference is for indirect limitation (majority electoral laws).⁸ There are various reasons for this greater *souplesse* [flexibility]. The democratic principle (one man, one vote) can no longer be dismissed *directly*; moreover, it seems preferable to have a situation in which those who are deprived of their political say are led to believe – possibly against their own interests – that “governability” benefits everyone (even if it actually consists of the most unchecked exercise of power by the most powerful classes).

Moreover, such flexibility, or even “fluency,” in behavior is possible because in the meantime those who exercise real power have in any case eluded the control of elected bodies, and are supported by the “plebiscite of the markets” much more than by votes. Power lies elsewhere, and the creation of supranational, “technical,” European bodies (which are also *physically* elsewhere), has done much to remove decisions that are fundamentally important to the economy (and therefore fundamental *tout court*) from the control of national parliaments. As is well known, a constant bone of contention between the Confindustria and the unions is the subject of pensions (the heart of the “welfare state”: the social use of contributions gradually deducted from salaries over decades of work). No government, whether center-right or center-left, has succeeded in eroding this “bastion” (France’s right-wing government has been trying since, thanks to the insane electoral system, the left was routed in all the elections in 2002 – but there is no guarantee that it will succeed). This is where the remote, invisible “technicians” of the “European” institutions come in. The “economists” working for these institutions have made it known that the economic planning document produced by the Italian government (certainly not a left-wing administration) “does not fit the Maastricht parameters” precisely because it is not sufficiently drastic in the matter of social policy (that is, pensions). Once the steel cage located “elsewhere” has been built, the battle is lost: it is just a matter of time and gradual change. The blackmail by means of “parameters” is perfect, and no workers’ organization can go and

fight *directly* against the remote and inaccessible "priests" of these parameters. Against this background the electoral plaything, though "cleansed" and automatically producing parliaments that are predominantly moderate on either side of the political spectrum, continues to function. The compensation for the "soft" abolition of universal suffrage is the gracious concession by which this abolition is periodically legitimized through elections.

In short, the mixed system is asserting itself in the workings of present-day parliamentary "democracies" in two ways. First, it limits the real effectiveness of elected bodies, which end up playing a peripheral or ratifying role with respect to oligarchic powers, especially in the sphere of economics and finance. Second, it acts as a technical adjustment, through majority electoral systems, for there is a fear that full proportional representation would clog up the mechanism. The elimination of proportional representation was Mussolini's *first* concern as soon as he was appointed prime minister, and it had the effects already described. Today, proportional representation is discarded in the name of efficiency, because of the firm belief that it is impracticable or, more accurately, in order to sideline universal suffrage deliberately. For that is the true aim. Santo Mazzarino rightly observed in his "spiritual testament" that "the ends the ancient Greeks achieved by drawing lots or holding elections [what Tocqueville describes as "Athens with its universal suffrage"] the moderns achieve more modestly through proportional representation, since direct democracy is ruled out."⁹ Thus, since a vote held in a large mass of people such as a nation does not produce an immediate majority, it is felt that the process should be helped along with technical tricks. The bogeyman of "fragmentation" into many political groups is invoked, supposedly an *effect* of proportional representation, yet now, after 10 years of the majority system in Italy, the number of political parties has increased. We also know that where the majority system functions in a harsh way (as in Britain) it expels large political parties from parliament. In Britain, this has led to the paradox that governments in trouble *threaten* to adopt proportional representation in order to blackmail the opposition!¹⁰ The fascination with technical devices ignores the fact that the "fragmentation" of political groupings is not a disease: it is a natural process, and can be enriching. Under proportional representation parties are *forced* to seek points in common, whether between parties that are close or between majority and opposition. This encourages the search for a point of *balance between the different interests of different social groups*. This is the only way to avoid the "winner" principle, and the only one that allows the *whole* of society's views to be represented. By contrast, the "forcing" that takes place in a majority system necessarily produces minority government.

Duverger, however, wants to proceed “with his head held high,” so to speak. He wants his beloved majority system to be labeled not only *efficient* but also *democratic* (the word was still popular in 1989). After exalting the annihilation of the Front National (which won just one seat where, proportionally, it should have won 35) as a result of the majority law, he takes the bull by the horns:

Where is equality best safeguarded? Is it in the country which makes the distribution of seats reflect that of votes, but allows parties to play the cards thus dealt out as it suits them, allowing dozens of different combinations whose only common feature is the inability to govern? Or is it in countries that are less faithful to the apparent rigor of these mathematical calculations, but where it is certain that an election victory by the left brings the left to power, and one by the right brings the right to power, with no change of government possible except through a new election? Where does true democracy lie? Is it in the nations that give the voters the real power, allowing them truly to vest it in the government, or in those that transform voters into passive citizens as soon as they have placed their voting slip in the ballot box, restricting decisions to a small nucleus of active citizens, formed into a political class?

In this year of the bicentenary of the French revolution *the greatest living philosopher*¹¹ justifies the idea of presenting the Fifth Republic as the conclusion of the cycle that began in 1789. “To believe that proportional representation is more democratic than the English or American system is an indefensible position, because to do this would require *applying the outmoded theory of democracy as the sovereignty of the people*. This theory has been superseded by the theory according to which the fundamental thing is only the right and power of the majority [of the people] to dismiss the government.”¹²

We do not know whether the author of this tirade was in a mood for clever jokes on that day in March 1989, or whether he wanted to *épater* [startle] an audience that was too “old-fashioned” (proportional representation was still in place in Italy at the time). Certainly, it is an excellent joke to claim that the French Revolution is fulfilled when we have finally convinced ourselves that *democracy does not consist at all in the sovereignty of the people!* The argument would be perfect if it evoked the total efficiency of the monarch as the ideal, conclusive solution to the problem of politics, a problem over which the West has been tormenting itself since at least the time of Herodotus.

After all, Demosthenes too envied Philip of Macedon for the extraordinary efficiency he possessed by virtue of being a monarch, and thus able to take any decision quickly after a brief discussion with himself. Demosthenes railed against the Athenian system which, being democratic, was weighed down, indeed paralyzed, by the assembly and its discussions.

To get rid of the monarch there is always tyrannicide (the power to "dismiss the government"): so, what could be more democratic than a monarchy? That is why the French Revolution took place – to restore the monarchy. What else is the charter of Louis XVIII if not precisely the "*achèvement de la Révolution française*" ["the fulfillment of the French Revolution"]?

Having cleared the air of this startlingly original stroke of wit, perhaps we should, with hindsight, consider the history of European electoral systems after the Second World War as a progressive dismantling of universal suffrage. It is worth asking why this happened, given that it was clear by then that this electoral "method" was not "dangerous" and that those who had made it their banner had practically never benefited from it. The problem denoted by the sterile term "governability" is, in plainer language, the following: preventing radical minorities in "affluent" societies from counting, or at any rate upsetting the system. It is precisely the proportional representation electoral system, with its rigid, indestructible "equity," that allows radical minorities to be represented, if they so wish. Moreover, it *invites* people to vote, in theory, for the obvious reason that it is the only system that allows the various contours and layers of society to be revealed.

However, the idea that this is precisely what should *not* happen is so widespread that now the last, weary defenders of proportional representation (which is tantamount to universal suffrage in its fullest expression) hasten to declare that it is perfectly acceptable to "correct" it with a German-style cut-off clause. It is as if it were obvious that a party that corresponds to 5 percent of society, or millions of voters, should be denied representation. In 1993, when various pressure groups in Italy set in train the referendum that would lead to the abolition of proportional representation, the American magazine *Newsweek* came to the rescue of the operation, branding the old electoral system in terms that were suitably damning. The old system, according to the weekly, involved "too much democracy" (February 1, 1993, p. 23).

In *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Robert Dahl rightly observes that some of the troubles that plague democracies come precisely from the "ill-fated majority system based on the first-past-the-post principle" (in which the candidate who receives the most votes in a constituency becomes its *sole* representative). "Is it not time at last that we took seriously the idea that the first-past-the-post system may be appropriate to horse races, but not to elections in large democratic countries?"¹³

This type of mechanism can produce some memorable paradoxes, whether *only two* parties are competing in an election (as in Britain) or

several (as in France). In the first case it can happen (and has) that one of the two parties receives more votes but fewer elected members, if its voters are not evenly distributed. This is because a party with strong working-class support wins by large majorities in some constituencies and loses narrowly in others; its opponent, with fewer working-class votes, can therefore equal it or defeat it in terms of elected members. Moreover, in practice this mechanism penalizes any “third” party. In Britain, statistically, 20 percent of the electorate is unrepresented; it is not in the interest of either of the main parties to grant electoral pacts to the third party to make room for it in parliament. In the second case the mechanism can produce spectacular paradoxes, as happened in the French election of 2002. This ended with a second round of voting between the center-right bloc and the racist Jean-Marie Le Pen (who had “come second in the horse race” by a whisker), while more than 40 percent of the electorate had voted for the left.

After fulminating against it for so long, European parties of the left have begun to be fascinated by this form of “gambling,” because their support base has begun to change within the wider and more profound transformation of Europe’s social classes, their relative numbers, and their aspirations. The communist viewpoint has virtually vanished, because its “global” perspective no longer corresponds to the interests of the working classes in the richest part of the world – indeed, it is opposite to them. The great project aimed at achieving justice (the “welfare state”) carried out by the parties of the left in Europe, spurred also by the USSR’s alternative model (certainly during the 1930s), has attained important goals. Not for nothing was the most advanced form of company *Mitbestimmung* realized in the German Federal Republic, the “showcase” that was to unhinge the East by displaying its own desirable model – as indeed happened. However, this admirable achievement – one of whose less attractive aspects is the uncontrollable power of capital – has only been possible because of regionalization. The “global” perspective was abandoned, and it is futile to speculate as to whether, or when, it might come back into vogue.

This outcome should not, however, obscure the fact that in the new political and social equilibrium towards which much of western Europe is moving – anxiously followed by the other Europe, which has jettisoned the experiment of “people’s democracy” – excluded minorities nevertheless continue to exist. To these are added the *external* minorities (immigrants), which the rest of the planet “exports” to the rich countries, and who are needed to carry out work that no one else is willing to do. These minorities hold a diminished form of citizenship and, precisely because they are minorities, are unlikely to fight successfully to attain equal status to those who have achieved, and firmly hold, full citizenship.

The voiding of the “progressive democracies”, that is, the removal of their concrete antifascist content which had been translated into constitutional precepts, was effected in two converging senses. On an institutional level the executive was strengthened, and electoral systems were put in place that shifted the electorate towards the center and selected politicians using criteria of wealth; this led to the final defeat of universal suffrage. On a practical level, influential oligarchies tightened their grip on the whole of society; the result was impaired legislative efficacy of parliaments, increased power for financial and technical bodies, and the pervasive spread of the culture of wealth, or more accurately of the myth and worship of wealth through all-pervasive media.

Whenever someone raises the problem of the building of “public opinion” through the powerful medium of television, the usual reaction is outrage. (There is slightly less indignation at such an “obscene” allegation when a battle for control of the airwaves is in progress.) However, the truth of this thesis should be taken as proven, ever since Rupert Murdoch became a pillar of electoral support for George Bush Jr., while in Italy the owner of virtually all the private stations, who is also the century’s greatest advertiser, created a political party in a few months and won two elections (1994 and 2001). This does not prevent a swarm of opinion-formers from periodically “contriving,” as Donna Prassede used to say, to demonstrate that such an assessment is little short of infamous, or rather, the sinister sophistry beloved of those who lose elections.

There is no doubt that television *directly* influences the electorate’s “voting intentions”. In a highly competent study, *La spirale del silenzio* [*The Spiral of Silence*] (2002), Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann – founder back in 1947 of the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, a collaborator of Helmut Kohl’s for many years, and co-publisher for more than a decade of the quarterly *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* – describes an instructive experiment carried out by the Allensbach institute during the 1976 elections in the German Federal Republic. Two representative samples were chosen, from two different groups: (a) television viewers who regularly watched political programs, and (b) viewers who rarely or never watched them. The survey ran over two main periods: March and June 1976; the election was on October 3. Between March and June, when asked “Even though no one can know, who do you think will win the next election?” the percentage of group (a) predicting a CDU/CSU victory fell from 47 percent to just 34 percent, while those predicting a victory for the socialist-liberal coalition rose from 32 percent to 42 percent. In group (b), however, the percentages remained stable (36 percent to 24 percent in March, and 38 percent to 25 percent in July, and with a very high proportion – about 40

percent – of “don’t knows”). In fact, although the two coalitions were running neck and neck (and the socialist-liberal coalition indeed won, by a margin of 300,000 votes out of 38,000,000 cast) television political journalists had continued to declare that there was not chance of a CDU/CSU victory. The effect of this was clearly visible.¹⁴

Naturally, since the experiment examined viewers “who regularly watched political programs,” it related to only a narrow segment of the electorate. Those who watch political programs, like newspaper readers who glean their political views from the press, are a narrow, politicized minority. This well-known fact is confirmed by the result of these elections, in which the small (in absolute terms) electoral shift brought about by the *political* part of television programming proved decisive in an electorate that was split into two virtually equal halves.

However, the directly *political* part of television output is the smallest part, and insignificant in the *politicization* of television as a whole.

In terms of political communication, what counts for much more is if anything the *silences*: what an information machine of a size unprecedented in history *manages to leave unsaid*. One example will suffice to illustrate this improbable situation: an example that clearly shows the role, and essential subordination, of Europe. As everyone knows, in 2003, amid general consternation in European governments and in the United Nations, the United States launched an attack in grand style – aerial, naval, and on land, causing a hitherto unknown number of casualties – against the republic of Iraq, which it accused of secretly possessing chemical weapons of mass destruction. It is equally well known that the inspectors sent before the conflict to “discover” these arms found no trace of them. No trace was found either, many months after the war was over, when the country was occupied by Anglo-American forces, and every corner of it pillaged and controlled. Initially the aggressors cited another “good cause” for the war: Iraq’s oppression of its Kurdish minority. However, since Turkey, an indispensable ally of the United States, also persecutes and massacres its Kurds, it was thought better to drop this other “good cause,” and it was no longer mentioned. The silence that descended over the Kurds and their unhappy fate in our media – primed as they were to produce a humanitarian encore after Kosovo, but suddenly forgetful of the Kurds’ just cause – is impressive.

Let us come back, though, to Iraq’s supposed weapons of mass destruction. It is now generally recognized that they do not exist, to the point that the White House’s and Downing Street’s problem is no longer to insist that they do, but to find someone to blame for having *convinced* the world’s two most powerful intelligence services that they really did exist. Europe’s media are silent on another embarrassing detail of this story. A year before the war

began, José Mauricio Bustani, director-general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), urged his organization to press Iraq to join. However, as the *Guardian* reported on April 20, 2002, the American government saw this as an unexpected obstacle to its intention to attack Iraq. The United States flatly rejected Bustani’s proposal – to the point of ordering the Brazilian government (whose president at the time was Professor Cardoso) to remove Bustani from his post. The text of this injunction, and a reconstruction of this episode, were published in the São Paulo University periodical *Estudos Avançados* (16, 2002). Bustani was catapulted to the post of consul general in London; war, by now, was imminent. However, his appeal to the International Labor Organization (ILO) was successful, and last July Bustani’s expulsion from OPCW was ruled “illegal.”¹⁵ No one deigned to give even the briefest details of this episode in our turgid television news programs or daily newspapers. It was essential that citizens and television viewers *should not know* the explicit proof of how criminal the United States’ behavior had been in instigating the war, which the European governments themselves opposed. It must be admitted, nevertheless, that the impact of this enormity would have been confined to a restricted circle of “political specialists.” The real game was played out elsewhere.

The long-running debate over the “electoral” and, more broadly, “political” effects of media power is obviously based on a misunderstanding. There are those who pretend to believe that political or electoral dominance is attributed (by the losers) to the possession and control of *political news*. However, this is a tiny part of the overall issue: at most, it is the part of media power that concerns the political elite. *All the rest* of the vast media output – in which private and state stations no longer differ, since the latter must become mere copies of the former in order to survive – is now a *colossal vehicle for the ideology*, or more accurately the *worship, of wealth*. It no longer matters who controls the output: tastes have been formed, and they demand total compliance. The dominance of consumer goods has become the worship of consumer goods, and it is this worship that daily creates, and in the long run confirms, the worship of wealth. The colossal mass of output devoted to the promotion of goods is, in reality, *the main content* of the gigantic television “machine.” It does not matter what product is being promoted; it is even better if *all* are. What a minority of viewers see as a *disturbance* (which they must sit out before “picking up the thread again”) is in fact *the main text*: hours and hours every day in praise of wealth, presented, to impressive effect, as an accessible way to achieve *status*.

The genius and irresistibility of this entirely new method of “opinion-forming” lie in the fact that it never manifests itself in a *directly* political

way. It has taken careful note of the defeat of the other, so-called "conceptual" method: "brainwashing," which is explicitly propagandist. As we have seen, direct indoctrination has everywhere provoked discomfort, alienation, and finally rejection. It can succeed only if applied to a restricted elite that bears special responsibilities (as in the case of the Catholic church in the education of its "cadres"), otherwise it produces the opposite effect to that desired. The "subliminal" method, on the other hand, works infallibly, if only because the choices it persuades people to make are elementary if not infantile (more goods = more happiness). It does nothing but present an uninterrupted sequence of brief images, easily understood even by the intellectually subnormal, *of a fictitious world rendered perfect by an excess of goods* of every kind. Just as effective is the technique – constantly used in the flood of advertising – of showing *every (individual) item of goods* in the setting of the happy, everyday life of endless "ordinary people," in its most glittering, attractive form. These people are in fact skillfully chosen so that viewers can identify with them and imagine themselves in their place, with the result that they strive to emulate them. When this has been achieved, it is "game over." There is no need for an Orwellian "big brother" to orchestrate all this: it is a self-adjusting machine that reproduces itself by the very fact that it is supremely profitable.

Before they persuaded hundreds of thousands of people to cross the now vanished "iron curtain" or put to sea, sometimes risking their lives, to reach the "land of plenty" (a few years ago these were referred to as "spot people," a term echoing "boat people," invented by some Italian newspapers to denote Albanian refugees who tried to enter the country, because their only knowledge of Italy had been gained from advertising spots on television) these highly influential texts, which cost billions to produce and mobilize millions of consumers worldwide, had already conquered the minds, if not the souls, first of all of first-division citizens, that is to say those who "were already" in the land of plenty. The big producers of advertising are therefore the true "intellectuals" inherent in the all-conquering dictatorship of wealth, and in their own way they perform this role with genius. The pathetic battle to ensure that different parties' political broadcasts receive equal air time matters little: the real party political broadcasts are *everything else that is shown*. This urges millions of viewers to sympathize with the forces that shout, with pious indignation: "Let us enjoy our wealth!" The only "ideology" conveyed is the most persuasive of messages: "Try to become like us!"¹⁶

The invincible power of the "ideology of wealth" is associated with other mass mythologies: the great "myths of illiteracy," of which sport is perhaps the most striking example, having now become – and not by chance – a

directly political factor, as well as the *only* occasion for spontaneous mobilization of the masses.

The cult of wealth, of which the myths of sport are a part, has created the perfect demagogic society. This is perhaps its greatest achievement. The vulgarizing manipulation of the masses is the new form of the “demagogic word.” Precisely where it seems to help make the masses more literate – through the media – it in fact produces (and this is only an apparent paradox) a lower level of culture, as well as a general blunting of critical faculties. The alarm raised by Giacomo Leopardi – “where everyone knows little, and little is known”¹⁷ – may have seemed, at the time, an excessively aristocratic preoccupation: today it has been fully realized.

It seemed that fascism had made the biggest contribution in this direction; but in fact it remained a movement whose remote roots were deep in the previous century, and in the ever-present Bonapartist model. Fascism met “the crowd” head-on and manipulated it, as Gustave Le Bon experienced and described it. By contrast, present-day “oligarchic democracy,” or the mixed system, or whatever else one may wish to call it, orients, inspires, and thus directs an atomized crowd which is at the same time homogenized by the pervasive presence of the small screen. It feeds, deceives, and projects myriad individuals towards an accessible, marketing-based bliss. They are unaware of the mental and emotional uniformity that is being imposed on them, for they are content with the apparent *truth* and *universality*, suffused with dreams, which that inexhaustible source supplies to them every day.

The postscript has been the victory – and it promises to be a lasting one – of what the Greeks called the “mixed constitution,” in which the “people” express their views but those who matter are the property-owning classes. In more modern terms, it is the victory of a dynamic oligarchy that is centered on great wealth but capable of building consensus and securing legitimacy through elections, because it keeps the electoral mechanisms under its control. This scenario is of course confined to the Euro-Atlantic world, and to “islands” in the rest of the planet connected to it. And the rest of the planet is being brought into line at gunpoint.

This has not happened overnight. The birth and development of the welfare state, for example, deserve an *ad hoc* examination that would cover not only the “challenge” of the Soviet model of social security but also the New Deal and fascism. At the end of its development, the welfare state is seen as a precious pillar of the economic and social system, and is therefore appreciated also by those who opposed it and who would even now like to reduce it, but who clearly know how precious it is.

Democracy, too, has had its moments of greatness. The United States actively supported military fascist regimes that came to power by coups d'état all over the planet, from Indonesia to the whole of South America (especially ferociously in Argentina and Chile) assuming that these dictatorships were a necessary bastion against communism. It extended this action to Europe, where it supported the "historical" fascist regimes in the Iberian peninsula, the establishment of military dictatorship in Greece, and the fascist subversion in Italy. Despite all this, the democratic counter-attack also had its spectacular successes, from the Portuguese revolution to the ousting of the Greek colonels and the "Brandt era" in Germany. Also worth a passing mention is the shift in balance at the expense of the wealthy classes that took place in Italy, in a climate of renewed antifascist tension, at the end of the 1960s. It was codified in a law solemnly called, with good reason, the "workers' statute," which is now under attack.

These high points, however, marked victories that were only temporary in the end. Democracy (which has nothing to do with the mixed system) is indeed an unstable phenomenon: the temporary ascendancy of the poorer classes in the course of an endless struggle for equality – a concept which itself widens with time to include ever newer, and ever more strongly challenged, "rights." Bobbio rightly wrote in 1975 that "the essence of democracy is egalitarianism."¹⁸ It does not emerge so very frequently, and it flourished with antifascism in the second half of the twentieth century. When it does emerge, this is due to the irruption of egalitarian demands on to the mixed or semi-oligarchic regime codified by classic liberalism; these achieve more or less lasting success almost always through bitter conflict, which Plato describes, somewhat horrified, in a famous passage of the *Republic* (557a). These are more or less lasting interruptions of the "mixed" system. Gaetano Mosca, a great analyst of the forces at work in society, came very close to this kind of assessment. To support his certainly pessimistic thesis of the *nonexistence* of democracy he resorts, in his words, "to the fable of the dying father who confided in his sons that a treasure lay buried in the family's ancestral field. This led them to turn over every clod, finding no treasure but considerably increasing the land's fertility."¹⁹ The fable can be read in many ways, for example, to support the thesis that faith in the possible existence of democracy has beneficial (precisely "democratic") effects in itself. Certainly it expresses well the *nonexistence* in reality, and at the same time the *indispensability* of "democracy" (in its original and fullest sense, naturally).

This measured and lucid pessimism can perhaps also help to understand why democracy that aimed to be egalitarian has been set aside even where it

was, so to speak, "bulletproof" and, besides being tautologically described as "of the people," also equipped with dictatorial instruments precisely for putting its plans into practice.

The tragedy of the "people's democracies" is evoked by the career of a man whose life powerfully symbolizes their whole history: Wladislaw Gomulka. We have seen him in his moment of triumph, which was also one of the high points of democracy in Europe: Poland in October 1956. How did he become the man who, at the sad, failed end of his political career, ordered troops to open fire on workers in Gdansk in December 1970? The question does not arise out of reverence for the worker as such. Neither can it be fended off by recalling the even greater harshness which capitalism, supported by the power of the state, has shown throughout its long life. (It still does, in its methods, "updated" for the present day, of dealing with immigrant, semi-slave labor. In the West this takes one of two forms: either mow them down, or use them to do jobs which the white proletariat is no longer prepared to do.)²⁰ The question arises because those political and social systems, now defunct, described themselves as "*workers'* states." Therefore, that response to a malaise that had many causes, some of them induced, was wrong in any case – and moreover ineffective in the end.

The problem is thus to understand what did not work, taking it as established that the rival "camp" would inevitably respond with propaganda or practical measures (economic or military) which tended to be destructive. All those who had thought that "socialism in one country" was possible must have known this. (The idea was that socialism could survive, all the more when the one country became a system of states surrounded by a world that was not just hostile but would never resign itself to "coexisting" permanently with its own "negation.") What did not work cannot be summed up in a short list of flaws. Now, rather than a wholesale history, there certainly needs to be differentiation between the experiences of the various "people's democracies" and their progressive, accelerating march towards the "models" of the other half of Europe. Especially worthy of study is the silent emergence, under the skin of the old parties that played a marginal role alongside the dominant party, of *real* parties which in the end took power, as in the case of the East German CDU. The fragility and rebellions, however, were the result of just one factor: the spectacle of renewed inequality, in forms that were both miserable and class-ridden, and resented all the more amid a general lack of prosperity. It is not helpful to observe – though it is entirely true – that the prosperity of the showcase (the rich West), whose allure unhinged equilibrium and seduced public opinion in the "socialist" countries, was born of the exploitation of the whole of the rest of the planet. This is something that the servile,

propagandist journalists in the West try to conceal daily. However, it neither explained nor justified the material privileges enjoyed by the many ramifications of the *nomenklatura* by comparison with Gdansk metalworkers or Soviet miners. It would have been senseless to argue that these political systems needed to resort to a *nomenklatura* endowed with substantial privileges in order to continue to function: not only would such an argument have failed to convince those who suffered from this inequality, but it would have been an open admission of total impotence.

The formation of this “new class,” as it was called, was not a “necessary evil,” but it marked the start of the transformation that led to the apparently sudden metamorphosis of post-Soviet Russia into the realm of the most savage, Mafia-based capitalism. Today it has become one of the high places of the new global face of capitalism. The process has been a very long one: its roots can be traced in Stakhanovism. H el ene Carr ere d’Encausse writes:

First of all, Stalin extended to the mass of the workers (1934) the notion of elitism and the privileges that organize society on hierarchical lines. The “Stakhanovite” phenomenon allowed him to hide his policy of social differentiation and, at the same time, to take advantage of worker competition to modify the rules governing production . . . From 1932, in fact, Stakhanov’s predecessors began to emerge from the “heap.” In factories, the first *front line* workers were not manipulated by the government . . . [But after 1934] to be a *front-line worker*, a new privileged category, was a prospect *that the Party offered* to individuals chosen from the mass of workers, not a path that the mass of workers as a whole chose to follow.

Stakhanovism thus completed the picture of the model of society that came to prevail under Stalin. Stalinist society was not a community of equals; it was dominated by the “best,” whose skills justified, at all levels, authority and privileges.

This touches on another essential feature of Stalinism: *the precariousness of positions and privileges*. Stalin was the creator of a proliferating bureaucracy, in which all those who had a crumb of power were awarded a high degree of authority and codified privileges, which were recognized in practice. However, he was also the systematic destroyer of this bureaucracy. In this system, the privileged were always under threat of being purged, that is to say, expelled from the universe of the privileged!

The Party presents an excellent picture of this mobility!²¹

In the post-Stalin period this process was certainly speeded up markedly. Apart from anything else, the formation of a new class within the apparent uniformity of the system itself eroded that system, which finally collapsed, like an outer covering cast off by an organization that had been transformed

in terms of relations within society. In 1968 Alexander Gerschenkron looked doubtfully on the USSR in his study *Continuity in History*:

If what has been taking place in Russia is an erosion of dictatorship, the process has been so slow as to be almost imperceptible. By the same token, neither the length of this process nor the degree of its reversibility can be foreseen. At any rate, past experience offers no guidance in this respect. Modern history shows clearly enough how dictatorships have tried to assure the stability of their regimes. And it contains the record of their violent downfalls. But – the ambiguous case of Kemal's Turkey aside – a gradual and peaceful transformation of a modern dictatorship would be a historical *novum*, as has been, for that matter, its continued survival for five decades.²²

The paradox is that the monstrous historical result of the collapse of the USSR and the arrival of the Mafia has continued to be passed off in the West, for about a decade, as a Russia that had finally achieved democracy. Today it is not yet clear whether what is developing there is merely a clash between the new oligarchs or an authoritarian and in some ways neo-Soviet attempt to crush at least the worst of the all-powerful Mafia oligarchy.

Indeed it is post-soviet Russia, now more than a decade old, that has dealt a severe blow to the rhetorical vision of a democracy once again on the march in Europe (from one '89 to another). The long reign of Boris Yeltsin was in reality a dictatorship directed from outside by the United States. First of all there was the bombing of parliament in September 1993.²³ Dramatic events followed each other in quick succession: Yeltsin revoked parliament's authority; parliament removed him and named Rutskoi, the vice-president, in his place; and Yeltsin responded with artillery fire. The other watershed event was the presidential election of 1997, when the CIA, directly controlling the entire electoral contest, brought Yeltsin to victory in the second round, whereas at the outset only 2 percent of the electorate intended to vote for him. This was partly thanks to the Lebed operation (Lebed was a puppet nationalist-populist candidate whose function was to prevent the communist candidate winning in the first round). As well as crushing every democratic procedure, Yeltsin established – in late Brezhnev style – the personal and direct ascendancy of his clan of unscrupulous businessmen and parasitic relatives. The regime that succeeded him was alternately praised and vituperated in the West, according to the conduct of the new president, Putin, in foreign policy. Every time he strayed from the US's directives in international relations, the quality, middle-brow, and popular press, in its craven docility, would discover that Putin led a "non-democratic" regime.

Joseph Stiglitz of Columbia University, winner of the Nobel Prize for economics (2001) and adviser to Clinton, observed:

Ten years ago the Russian parliament, the Duma, tried to remove President Boris Yeltsin, triggering a period of stalemate and confrontation that ended seven months later, when Yeltsin ordered the tanks to fire on the Duma building. Yeltsin's victory decided who would govern Russia from that point on, and who would devise its economic policy. But were Yeltsin's economic policy decisions really the right ones for Russia? The switch from communism to capitalism in Russia after 1991 should have brought the country an unprecedented prosperity, but this did not happen. When the rouble crisis came in August 1998, output had fallen by about half, and poverty had increased from 2% of the population to more than 40%

Russia's successes since that date have been impressive. Nevertheless, gross domestic product remains 30% below what it was in 1990. With growth at 4% per year, the Russian economy will need at least a decade to return to the levels where it was when communism collapsed.

A transition period lasting two decades, during which poverty and inequality grow enormously while a few become rich, cannot be described as a victory for capitalism and democracy.²⁴

One might ask how it is that so much lucidity emerges only with hindsight. Clinton was president precisely between 1992 and 2000, and thus for almost all the decade that Stiglitz now sees, rightly, as so monstrous. However, one of the most powerful weapons of the victorious “free world” is precisely the capacity to create, reveal, or remove a set of circumstances by means of the perfect machine of the news media. This is a “technique,” certainly, but perhaps it is precisely through techniques that “absolute” and arguably empty words such as liberty and democracy have taken on their present form and content.

Was it a New Beginning?

This time I said: “A new era in the history of the world starts today, and you can say that you were present.”

J. W. von Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich*

Simone Weil: Why did you give the order to open fire on the Kronstadt sailors?

Trotsky: Are you from the Salvation Army?

Simone Pétrement, *La Vie de Simone Weil*

The history of modern Europe is encompassed and punctuated by symbolic dates which should, according to different viewpoints, indicate its meaning and even constitute a provisional epilogue. Different assessments give different pairings of dates which, obviously, divide up history in different ways. The first pairing is 1789/1917; the second 1789/1989.

In the first case the idea of *movement towards something* predominates. At its root lies the notion of the historicity of all political forms, including “parliamentary democracy.” In the second there is the vision, or ideology if you will, of the innate, extra-temporal superiority of “parliamentary democracy,” and the conviction that it is the duty of all peoples to attain it sooner or later, beginning with Europe, the cradle of this everlasting model. According to this view, everything that took place between the establishment of a (somewhat imperfect) parliamentary regime at the end of the quarter-century of 1789–1815 and this system’s triumph in 1989 was no more than a “deviance,” a temporary eclipse. This “glorious” bicentenary brought to an end not only history but also the making of political models. The other perspective instead contains, alongside the optimism implicit in the idea of progress (which is itself a faith), also a critical impulse to decipher what lies hidden behind the different regimes’ portrayals of themselves. This impulse aims constantly to probe the connection, correspondence, or non-correspondence between “words” and “things.”

For Marx and Engels, socialism was the stuff of the “First World.” It is evident from their writings that they thought of history and possible future transformations purely with reference to the most advanced countries in

Europe (Germany, France, and England) and to the USA. The rest of the world was “behind” in their eyes. They predicted that capitalism was “digging its own grave” in the very heart of the industrialized West by creating the working class, which would replace capital at the helm of that same advanced industrial system that capitalism had so powerfully helped to build. Furthermore, they added, by freeing itself the working class would free all others. They concluded their call to arms by invoking “proletarians of the whole world”: but the world they had in mind was above all the “First World.”

Once, well after 1848, Engels wrote that a remote, ancient, and “backward” country such as China could join this (foreseeable) historical movement when, and only when, the three words of the French revolution, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, had appeared upon the Great Wall. China therefore needed to make giant strides to attain “bourgeois democracy,” and only then would socialism begin to be on the agenda there.

In 1848 everything had seemed within reach: indeed, in that year Marx and Engels were not thinking of socialism as a horizon that was faintly visible in the far future but as *something whose time had come*. It was not thus. Neither did the Paris Commune fare better in 1871: quite the opposite. The two Dioscuri of socialism did not like to be contradicted by events, nor to preach about an evanescent future on the horizon. Therefore they soon had to practice the disagreeable art of explaining where they had gone wrong (or rather, where others had gone wrong) and they were extremely harsh in pointing out other people’s mistakes. They also had to practice the art of putting themselves to the test by following new, different, long, and gruelling paths: the daily political and union struggle, the electoral struggle, party congresses, and so forth.

The time of the subversion foreseen in the *Manifesto* of 1848 was receding farther into the future. Socialism as a parliamentary as well as a social force was being born. Engels was certainly its most authoritative luminary.

What was completely unforeseen, and shocking from all points of view, was the October revolution in Russia in 1917, when the social-democratic “Bolsheviks” took power. They were a small party, conscious of being a “Jacobin” vanguard prepared to carry the masses with it. However, this happened in a backward country – tsarist Russia – and moreover after just a few months of “bourgeois democracy” (February–October 1917). This was so new, and so much at odds with everything Marx and Engels had written, that Antonio Gramsci wrote the famous article *La rivoluzione contro il Capitale* [The Revolution against Capital] (the capital in question being Marx’s *Das Kapital*, which had been “repudiated” by what was happening in Russia).

What followed was tragic, as the birth of the revolution itself had been. Born of the ferocious war of 1914, the revolution was under attack from the beginning. The West intervened *manu militari*, as at the time of the “coalitions”; for this reason too the Bolsheviks felt they were protagonists in a new 1793. The revolution survived outside intervention, civil war, and constant, creeping intrigue; but it emerged transformed, or rather convulsed. That, in the long run, was its opponents’ true achievement. For this reason too, Churchill described Lenin as “the great renegade,” and Croce, in the final pages of his *Storia d’Europa* (1932) predicted that revolutionaries who had survived epic trials would themselves dismantle what they had built.

The test of the second, and even more deadly war, unleashed by Nazism, transformed the “workers’ state” into an ideological empire, similar to France after Campo Formio but on a grander scale. War was therefore its natural habitat. The USSR had not wanted to enter that war, and Stalin at first took the “Leninist” course of staying out of the conflict between Western powers with the pact of 1939. He was then dragged into it by Germany’s attack, and provided help that was to be crucial in saving the anti-Hitler West. This help was one of his most lasting achievements, yet the West showed no gratitude, not even in a historiographic sense. By contrast, it sympathized at least in a literary sense with Trotsky, who in May 1940 called, in the name of the Fourth International, for revolution in the West and the colonies against the “democracies” he described as “butchers of the second world war on a par with Hitler.”¹

The problem of repression within the Russian, and later Soviet, communist party merits special consideration. To understand the vast extent of this repression, and the conflict that preceded it, we must appreciate that Trotsky’s split (involving also Zinoviev and Kamenev) was on a grand scale – a schism, in a sense. Conflicts of this kind, when the party coincides with the “political community” and pervades the whole of society, become civil wars, as happened with the Cultural Revolution in China. The dramatic nature of the clash of personalities, and over “the party line,” between Stalin and Trotsky was already forecast in the so-called “testament of Lenin.”²

Clearly, in the heat of this conflict, and for a long time afterwards, the two sides portrayed each other in terms filled with hatred, and there was certainly no effort at mutual historiographic interpretation. For the Stalinist majority, their opponents were nothing but a handful of traitors and saboteurs, whereas for Trotsky and his followers the Stalinist majority were worse than the Thermidoreans.

Nevertheless, the *substance* of the issue was the *split* in a party that had just taken power by means of revolution, and therefore the consequence was

a latent (and sometimes open) civil war, whose visible face was the greatly prolonged repression. This split took place despite Stalin's mistaken belief that he could keep disruptive forces in check by means of the *gradual* removal of Trotsky (ending in his expulsion from the USSR). Stalin's plan, using the "small steps" approach, was to reach the stage of an open breach having first gained the advantage within the party "machine". However, this had little effect on the real consequences of this lacerating break, and on its perception in the ranks of the party. Trotsky was too good a revolutionary: he was totally convinced he was right, and that he was acting to save the revolution. He would stop at nothing to win, not even – apparently – at an attempted coup d'état on the eve of the parade on the tenth anniversary of the revolution (November 7, 1927).

This episode is the subject of much controversy.

Curzio Malaparte gives a detailed account of it at the beginning of his study *Technique du coup d'état*, published in Paris in 1931. The first two chapters are devoted to Trotsky, and the book takes him as its starting point. The first chapter (pp. 13–66) deals with the architect of the seizure of power in October 1917; Trotsky is admired precisely as the originator of a "military" technique for taking power that was applied on that occasion. The second chapter (pp. 67–105) describes the failure, 10 years later, of Trotsky's attempt to do the same thing – against Stalin this time. Trotsky responded repeatedly, and harshly, to Malaparte: first at the first conference held in the West after his exile (Copenhagen, October 1931),³ and then in a couple of pages of the last chapter of his *History of the Revolution*⁴ (Berlin, 1933). Essad Bey's biography of Stalin was published the same year as *Technique du coup d'état*. It too mentions several times the "coup d'état" Trotsky attempted in September–November 1927,⁵ but without going into detail. Malaparte mentions his sources very briefly in a letter he sent from Turin to his publisher Grasset, on December 22, 1930: "à Moscou, [1929] j'ai eu l'occasion de m'entretenir avec les hommes les plus en vue de l'URSS"⁶ ["in Moscow I had the chance to talk to the most prominent men in the USSR"]. In the Italian edition (1948, reprinted 1994) the chapters on Trotsky have been removed from their prominent position in the original edition, and inserted into the main body of the work. The chapter on the failed "coup d'état" of 1927 has thus become chapter XII.⁷ Both in Malaparte's account and in Essad Bey's, what took place in Moscow on November 7, 1927 – that is, the Trotskyist counter-demonstrations broken up by the police during the course of the celebrations of the revolution's tenth anniversary – appears as both the expedient and the failed postscript of the abortive "coup d'état." Regarding this episode, E. H. Carr confines himself to recalling, as sole source, a report by the head of the OGPU, Menzhinsky, dated November 9

and 10, 1927.⁸ Malaparte repeatedly mentions Menzhinsky, who may have been one of his main sources.

By contrast the two protagonists, Trotsky and Stalin, gave a reduced version of these events, for opposite reasons: Stalin in the collectively written *History of the Communist Party (b) of the USSR*,⁹ which he inspired, and Trotsky in his autobiography.¹⁰ Trotsky naturally rejects the label of someone who attempted a coup d'état; indeed, it is on this very point that he goes on the offensive in *History of the Revolution*,¹¹ although Malaparte's high praise for his extraordinary tactical skill is flattering. (Malaparte attributes to him, and him alone, the success of the October revolution. It is highly significant that as regards facts Malaparte's account of October 1917 matches – in its emphasis on Trotsky's role – Trotsky's own account in his autobiography, which was already available in June 1930 in Germany, in France from Rieder, and in Italy from Mondadori.)¹² For his part Stalin – whose account of October 1917 is false – naturally aims to portray his opponents of 1927 as a handful of irresponsible people, and to hide their true strength and the severe danger they posed. Finally, Isaac Deutscher, in the second volume of his trilogy on Trotsky, certainly devotes ample space to the well-documented agitation of the opposition against Stalin in those crucial months at the end of 1927 (indeed, a Trotsky that succumbed without fighting would not appear credible).¹³ However, he is not aware of the Menzhinsky documents, which were published that same year in *Voprosy Istorii* (6, 1959). It is obvious, in any case, that out of devotion to his hero Deutscher prefers to ignore Malaparte's book, of whose existence he must have known. The episode, therefore, still awaits proper historical reconstruction.

From 1927 to 1940 not only the party's history but that of the whole of Soviet society, as well as of the parties affiliated to the Comintern, pivoted on this conflict. Even the Italian, German, and other parties suffered the same lacerations, and by similar methods.

Lion Feuchtwanger – the great Jewish novelist who fled to the United States – wrote of the “great trials” in Moscow:

Most of the accused were, on the other hand, first and foremost conspirators, revolutionaries; all their lives they had been impassioned revolutionaries and changers – they were born to it. Everything they had achieved they had achieved in defiance of the predictions of “sensible people,” by courage, by their love of adventure, and by their optimism. Moreover, they believed in Trotsky, whose powers of suggestion cannot be overestimated. With their master, they saw in the “Stalin state” a caricature of what they had wanted to achieve, and their chief object was to correct this caricature according to their own ideas.

This portrayal, which is both very realistic and very respectful, helps to make clear the depth of dissension, and the implacable nature of this conflict.

Alcide de Gasperi said in July 1944: "We thought the trials were fraudulent, that testimonies were fabricated, and that confessions were forced. However, objective information from American sources assures us that this was not a false process, and that the saboteurs were not common frauds but old idealist conspirators... who would rather face death than submit to what, for them, was a betrayal of communism in its original form."¹⁵ What is significant is not so much that De Gasperi said this, as that this information came from the United States.

In 1933 Ettore Lo Gatto, an eminent scholar of Slavonic culture, described Maxim Gorky in volume XVII of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* as "a champion of the proletariat long before the dictatorship of the proletariat was established in Russia." In the encyclopedia created by Gentile as fascism's highest intellectual achievement, the notion of "dictatorship of the proletariat" was certainly not presented in a positive light. That description is therefore a small sign of a much broader and more important phenomenon: the fact that, for a long time, the USSR was opposed *because it was a proletarian dictatorship*. During the 1920s and 1930s, this was the negative connotation of the USSR, conveyed in the propaganda put out by liberal or fascist governments. (Perhaps Italian fascism is peculiar in this respect, because of the especial attention it paid to the Soviet experiment.) However, it was during the second phase of its relations with the West, after 1947, that governments with various claims to being "democratic" opposed the USSR with the argument that *it was not* (or *was no longer*) the country where the proletariat was in charge, but instead was the setting for the actions of a new oligarchy. This type of portrayal revives, almost to the letter, the image of the USSR that the Trotskyist tendency already put forward in the 1920s and 1930s, when the other perception predominated.

Various factors were behind this change. They could be summed up as follows:

(a) Change in social conditions in the Soviet Union after Stalin: an ever more profound shift in relations between the classes. This produced the rise to power of a class of para-property-owners that had been formed within the system, as the latter gradually loosened controls and reduced the pressure aimed at preventing the re-formation of new classes.

(b) The relentless criticism of the Soviet compromise by those who advocated "left-wing communism."

(c) From the end of the 1920s, the Trotskyist International portrayed the USSR in “Thermidorean” terms. This found a sympathetic ear in intellectually influential circles in both the United States and South America.

(d) The fracture of the front with the socialists, which began at a very early stage. From the October revolution itself, and immediately afterwards with the dissolution of the constituent assembly at the beginning of 1918, European socialists, even those farthest to the left, denounced the Soviet experiment as “elitist” and “terrorist,” and as a dictatorship *over*, not *by*, the proletariat. In 1929–30 the split deepened when the fourth congress of the Communist International launched the watchword of the battle against “social fascism.” The “popular fronts” of 1936 brought a laborious reconstruction, but this weakened and then vanished completely after the Second World War.

(e) The identification of all these criticisms by a publicity and propaganda machine that used them to produce divisions in the areas where there was consensus on the left.

At a certain point after every important revolution, some historiographers turn their minds to arguing that “it was not a revolution.” Various reasons are put forward to support this reductionist judgment, but they can perhaps be divided into two categories: (1) the revolution in question has failed to achieve its objectives in the sense that its leaders, having come to power, have implemented policies completely different from those in whose name they took power, or (2) the revolution has failed because, after a certain time, its attempts at radical innovation have failed, and there has been a return to the previous order.

Often these judgments intermingle or overlap. For example, in the case of the French Revolution both theories were put forward. The revolution that had sanctioned – in the face of feudal bonds and the restrictions of the church – the right to freedom had soon taken a completely libercidal course: far more so than the previous regime. This criticism was countered by various partial responses, depending on whether those who made them supported the revolution in its entirety or only a part of it. For example, until the convention was elected, or until Valmy, or until the king’s arrest, or until the Girondists were outlawed, and so forth, the revolution was a positive development. Then (from the time of one of these events, or some other) it degenerated into the opposite of what it had been at the outset.

As for the other type of reductionist diagnosis – that a revolution failed because the pre-existing order was restored at a certain point – this is well known to be true of the French Revolution up to a point, because after the definitive fall of Bonaparte the *ancien régime* was completely restored for a time. Of course, even this apparently objective judgment soon crumbles if

we consider the rapid rise of bourgeois France under the frail veneer of the so-called “restoration.” Although this “restoration” marked the start of a new phase with its own clearly visible and original developments, it is obvious that the clock had only apparently been turned back to July 14, 1789. Therefore, despite this excessively crude restoration of the past, the French Revolution – though destroyed, and subsequently scorned or mocked – had changed the face and the substance of France, and of Europe. The history that came afterwards was different because an immense, traumatic event had taken place in the meantime, but the revolution is not to be described as a *failure* for this very reason. This is also the modest conclusion of François Furet’s *The Passing of an Illusion* (Paris, 1995): “The Russian revolution came to nothing.”

On the contrary: from the point of view of relations between states the Russian revolution was the start of Russia’s recovery as a great power after the humiliation it had suffered at the hands first of the Japanese and then of the Germans, which led to the collapse of its empire. In another sense, it also triggered a chain reaction (Hungary, Germany, China, and so forth): it was the first revolution in which a “proletarian” party had taken all power for itself by force, with the aim of exercising it for a long period using exceptional methods. It was also, however, the most disruptive liberating experience in the non-developed world (the first Third World revolution that was not ephemeral, one might say), and indeed it provoked possibly greater upheaval in the Third World than Gandhi did. Seen through the eyes of the leaders of the great power with which Russia was then at war – Germany – the October revolution was simply the culmination of the break-up of the tsarist military machine: a mutiny in the grand style. It was also an un-hoped-for strategic success which Germany had long desired, and which for a considerable period almost reversed the course of the war itself. It is no mystery that the kaiser’s high command offered help to Lenin (including a private train!) to assist his revolutionary activities, which Ludendorff and his colleagues viewed as a useful reinforcement of Germany’s war strategy. However, although Ludendorff aimed to use Lenin, and certainly did to some extent, looking back it is apparent that Lenin saw more clearly, and further ahead, than Ludendorff. This is because he understood better than his powerful “counterpart” that by traveling across Germany, even in a German train, he struck a blow against Ludendorff: for the Bolshevik victory in Petrograd, further breaching Germany’s so-called “internal front,” was one of the factors that within a year would plant the red flag on top of the Reichstag.

Historical processes can be broken up into segments *only arbitrarily and in abstract terms*. Once this is fully appreciated we can take account – in contrast to those who believe in the “revolutionary break” – of the fact of continuity. In the case of revolutionary breaks, profound elements of continuity are present even at times of rapid change. In such cases continuity temporarily moves into the background, so to speak, and for a time the foreground is occupied by elements that break with the past. This happens not only as a deliberate, pedagogic act (“revolutionary pedagogy”) but also because the same people who will later resume their habitual behavior and way of thinking are capable – at the moment when revolution erupts – of temporarily abandoning their normal selves and adopting behavior worthy of the “new man” which every revolution aims to produce. The revolution makes use of these high points of collective psychology, knowing well that they do not last and that therefore, when the wave recedes, a fall-back position must be adopted. This explains, for example, the devotion to the “cause” on the part of the hungry masses in Russia at the end of the 1920s, in contrast to the bored skepticism of much of Soviet youth, thirsty for Western consumerism, during the 1970s and 1980s. Continuity – the drive towards continuity – is therefore above all within individuals. There exists, despite everything, a “human nature” – as the Greek historians and Machiavelli called it – that forms a rock-solid substratum to events.

There is also, however, a “collective” continuity, or a continuity of (physical and mental) structures; thus the centralism of the French monarchy resurfaced at the heart of the Jacobin revolution, as Tocqueville clearly saw, and the old Russia of the Okhrana and deportations resurfaced in the heat of the civil war between Whites and Reds, and during the long phase of dictatorship that followed. In governments, individuals, and in “human nature” these two types of continuity eventually fuse: government officials themselves, having acquired a more or less superficial veneer out of conviction or opportunism, come to embody that continuity.

The cultural limitations of the Russian revolution – which of necessity became also practical ones – lay in the fact that that its leaders were utterly convinced that the epochal turning point of the end of capitalism had been reached. All their actions are explained, and were guided, by this mistaken belief. Not that there were no grounds for holding such a belief in the most tragic and decisive phase of the First World War: the autumn of 1917. It was in many ways a unique moment in the history of Europe, when all the world’s great states except America were fighting, and plunged into a desperate military, social, and moral crisis. This renewed the tension within the labor and socialist movements of the countries at war, reviving the

disputes of 1914. The clash was renewed between those who continued to believe that the crisis in the ruling order, shaken by the war, was serious but not definitive, and those who believed the time had come for epochal change.

The collapse of the Central Powers, the fall of so many crowned heads, the manifest inability of “liberal” Europe’s ruling classes – who had so lightly led their peoples to the slaughter – to deal with the problems that confronted them after the war: all this contributed to the belief that the extreme, totally new solution adopted by Russia was the only way out of a crisis that others besides the communists now considered to be epochal. This explains why Bolshevik Russia and its leaders rapidly acquired widespread prestige. They were demonized, certainly, by the governments of the “victorious” countries (now fearful that the revolution could spread rapidly), but popular in broad swaths of the working classes and in the liveliest and most intellectually aware sections of socialist parties. The latter were now either on the verge of a split between supporters and opponents of the Soviet Union, or ready to join the new International founded by Lenin (as, in Italy, were the maximalists under Serrati).

The other cultural limitation from which the leaders of the October revolution suffered, which had immediate political consequences, was their predominantly, if not exclusively, European outlook. With the (partial) exception of Trotsky, who had lived as an exile in America for a time, the leaders of the Russian revolution, and therefore of the world communist movement, failed to understand something that is clearly apparent to us today. The great North American power – which had stayed out of the world war until the autumn of 1917, when it entered it to alter the balance definitively in favor of the Anglo-French alliance in the last months of the conflict – was not only safe from the material destruction caused by that devastating war but, more important, essentially alien to the moral and social crisis which in continental Europe had produced the rapid advance of the revolution, or at least expectations of revolution. The world’s most powerful and richest capitalist country stood outside that crisis. How could the revolution that took place in Russia, which its architects saw as the first step in a general upheaval (and dependent upon this for its success) trigger capitalism’s final crisis if capitalism was thriving in its most solid stronghold, the epicenter of an empire that encompassed an entire hemisphere? With Wilson’s interventionism, moreover, this stronghold had evinced the most vigilant interest in the destiny of Europe, now rescued from the prospect of lasting German hegemony.

The roots of the revolution’s failure lie in these two limitations, which are all the more apparent to us today in the light of their consequences, but were

not, either, completely hidden at the time. It was the failure of an experiment that had something of the heroic and the tragic at the same time, but it did not prevent the revolution as such, or the state that it brought into being, from possessing its own lasting momentum, positive aspects, and flaws. It continued to live and function as a historical fact, a reality, no matter how dissimilar it was to the intentions, ideological predictions, or hopes of its promoters.

The theory that the Russian revolution heralded the start of the “socialist era in the history of humanity” (which makes an appearance as late as the early 1950s, in the study *The World and the West* by the great historian Arnold Toynbee, but was discredited by the demolition of Stalin at the hands of his successor) was proved false. Gradually, however, the realization that this revolution, like all others, was nationalist in origin and character began to gather strength. There is now a significant number of examples to support the observation that every large country has needed *its own* revolution. Often such events have presented universalist characteristics and aspirations, but have turned into a process of transformation or growth of a *given* situation peculiar to the country where they took shape or, if they had spread from elsewhere, took root.

Thus we can observe that ideologies which had a universalist outlook – from the Reformation to the “Declaration of Rights” of 1789 to socialism – have been obliged to become “national” in character in order to take hold and last, in the end becoming closely intertwined with the histories of individual nations. The geographical progress of the Reformation is significant: it took hold in Germany, England (where it became the national church), and parts of Switzerland, but it came to a halt in France because there Catholicism itself became the “Gallican” church (and therefore, with all the caution appropriate to the case, the national church). At its time of greatest danger the Jacobin revolution saved itself by embracing the ideology of the “fatherland” (*nation* and *patrie* were the words that mobilized the large active minority that defended it, much more so than *république*, which was in any case seen as synonymous with *patrie*).

The Russian revolution too underwent this process, which was already visible in the formula “socialism in one country.” It was consolidated with the advent of economic planning, and was most forcefully confirmed in the war of 1941–5 (still officially described as the “great patriotic war”), in which the revolution showed its strong national roots to the outside world. The Stalinist option – the only realistic one for Russia, whose position as one of the great powers *obliged* it to behave in certain ways – was so trenchant, firm, and irreversible that it provides grounds for believing that in Stalin’s

eyes the International (finally dissolved during the war, in May 1943) was a prospect that had faded into the mist. This was the lesson of history, which buried this typically nineteenth-century driving force of an idea.

Thus was the “historical law” mentioned above confirmed, in the most lacerating way (a schism took place within communism whose elements survive today). According to this law, in revolutions ideologies become in reality an *ingredient* of a phenomenon which is not foreseen at the outset and becomes decisive in the end: when a nation grows internally, achieves a new world role, becomes a protagonist, or is truly reborn. In Russia’s case it is significant that *Russian tradition for its own sake* was revived under Stalin. This ranged from an updated reading of *War and Peace* to the films of Eisenstein (*Alexander Nevsky*, *Ivan the Terrible*). Stalin himself clearly declared this national “bias” when he unequivocally stated that the revolution’s *first task* was not to spread *outwards* (its defeats in Germany and China had been painful) but to operate *internally*, rescuing Russia from its own centuries-old backwardness. (It is no coincidence that this statement came immediately after his congress victory over Trotsky.) He cited the precedent of Peter the Great¹⁶ in support of his argument, adding however that, notwithstanding the valorous efforts of that great tsar, none of the old classes had proved itself up to the task. He concluded: “Our country’s centuries-old inferiority can be eliminated only by successfully building the socialist state.” Here is the relevant extract of his speech to the central committee of the Russian communist party on November 14, 1928:

We are not responsible for the technical and economic backwardness of our country. It has existed for centuries and has come down to us as an inheritance from our entire history. This backwardness was also felt to be an evil in pre-Revolutionary days and it continued to be so after the Revolution. Peter the Great’s attempt, after his experience of developed Western States, feverishly to build factories and other works to supply the army and to increase the defensive strength of the country, was a unique attempt to burst the bonds of this backwardness. It is only natural that neither of the old classes – feudal aristocracy or middle class – was able to solve the problem provided by the backwardness of our country. Indeed these classes were not only incapable of solving this problem but even of visualizing it properly. The centuries-old backwardness of our country can only be overcome by successful Socialization and only the proletariat, which had established its dictatorship and directs the destiny of the country, is able to accomplish it.

This is precisely what happened subsequently: the rise of Russia *through that very socialism* (state capitalism, an emulation of socialism, with the corollary of forced labor inflicted on armies of “enemies of the people”

during the hardest years). When backwardness had been “eliminated” and the USSR became, through that transformation, a modern industrial power, the framework within which this “miracle” had been worked disintegrated (Deutscher writes: “Twenty years accomplished the work of 20 generations”)¹⁸ partly because the tension that had sustained and accomplished so much could not be prolonged beyond a couple of generations. Arthur Rosenberg wrote in 1932, in the final pages of his *History of Bolshevism*: “It is no coincidence that Soviet Russia has been progressing continuously since 1921, and that over the same period the communist International has continuously receded.” Neither is it a coincidence, it could be said – touching on a subject that would deserve far more detailed examination – that this very book of Rosenberg’s attracted the attention of Giovanni Gentile, and was translated by his publisher, Sansoni, in 1933. At the time Italian fascism, implacable persecutor of Italy’s communists, showed an interest in Stalin’s Russia that went beyond mere “curiosity”, especially in the Soviet leader’s decision to focus on internal issues. (The anonymous entry on Stalin in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* describes him as having a “predominantly practical temperament.”)¹⁹ There is perhaps no clearer evidence of this fascist assessment than the account Italo Balbo gave of his highly positive mission to the USSR. Among other things, what is striking is Balbo’s comment that by then the Internationale, which was the USSR’s national anthem at the time, “has taken on the character of a hymn of the Russian race . . . it is the expression of a desire for power that is peculiar to the Russian nation.”²⁰

Deutscher, writing just after Stalin’s death, had dreamt that once the “crust” of the coercive system had been shed, “true” socialism would be released. He had not understood that that experiment *was not a parenthesis; it was socialism as it had come into being*. In this form it had survived everything imaginable (civil war, ideological schism) and unimaginable (external aggression) precisely because it had identified itself with the cause of the nation’s rebirth and had made this its own *raison d’être*. For this very reason it could not survive as it stood beyond the “accomplishment” of the project. A country that had reached the forefront of science, and was pervaded from one end to the other by the most intensive imposition of a mass culture ever seen, could not continue to exist, like a child, under the protection of the grotesque autocracy of Brezhnev.

Stalin was well aware that his model could not be exported to the West. Even more significant is that with hindsight, 20 years later, he believed that the revolution would have been impossible in the West even in 1917. Dimitrov records this in a note in his *Diary* dated November 7, 1939.²¹ The “national roads to socialism,” famous in their day, were, on reflection,

the fruit of “socialism in one country.” Each country could, and perhaps had to, try to find its own path.

What finally deserves especial attention is therefore the link between certain revolutions and the commanding ideologies of the periods in which those revolutions occurred. This historiographic excavation may help to understand why great leaders who played an important role in their countries’ affairs spoke a given type of language, which mobilized people at the time. It may also help to explain why, with time, their survival in power was increasingly based upon their position as leader, and less and less on the ideology of which they had been the standard-bearer. In the persons of these leaders themselves, these two factors came to be intertwined in a complex and fluctuating way.

It is not easy to make a judgment, but it is probably safe to say that therefore what remains of “revolutions” is above all the impact they have had on the fabric of a nation, and in areas culturally connected to it. This is the most important reason why “restorations” have never succeeded in being true returns *ad pristinum*, even when they appeared to be.

It seems almost inhuman to refer to “errors of analysis” and “cultural limitations” when discussing events in which such “errors” led to often extreme human suffering. However, this consideration applies not only to the Russian revolution; it applies to every episode of violent change, with which history – including the history of Christianity – is closely interwoven.

In December 1815, *L’Europe tourmentée par la Révolution en France*, a prodigious work in two volumes, was published in Paris. At the end of the second volume is a sort of “black book”: “Tableau ou inventaire effrayant de la Révolution,” divided into periods – convention, directory, consulate, empire – and containing different headings: guillotine, foreign wars, Bonaparte’s wars, and so forth. It gives a total, calculated by who knows what means, of 8,526,476 “morts par la Révolution” – “victims of the revolution.” The author, who hides behind the initials L. P., is the former extremist revolutionary Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752–1830), who during the years of turmoil had hoped to terrify the rulers of half of Europe with the accusatory posters he put up in the streets of Paris. History repeats itself: Courtois, too, and his “black book” comrades enlisted a good number of “reformed” characters. We do not know, however, whether they glanced at their book’s forerunner, which is so similar in many ways, when they set to work.

Not even the most far-sighted of people can be expected to transcend the dimension and the passions of their time in a superhuman way. With the detachment of historiography, we lose the perception of the “necessity” – if I may be pardoned such a deterministic term – of events of this magnitude.

If they were merely the fanciful or voluntaristic whims of a few fanatics, they would soon die out. For this reason we can allow ourselves the use of the loaded word “necessity.” The role of historiography, here as in the case of other crucial themes, is anything but decorative. It cannot shirk the task of ensuring that we do not lose what the passage of time and increasing remoteness of events render ever fainter: the capacity to understand – as Trevelyan wrote – why the people in those circumstances behaved in that way.²² Whoever claims to have understood everything with hindsight cannot be taken seriously: this is typical of the extra-temporal lightness of liberal thought, the eternal judge outside the dimension of time.

The history of all revolutions teaches us that every violent rupture is healed sooner or later. The Russian revolution is no exception.

Epilogue

The term democracy had a short and very marginal life of just three centuries in ancient Greece, between 500 BC and 200 BC. It then disappeared from the Western world for a very long period, slowly re-emerging much later, until it was consecrated beginning with the French revolution (at least in what the English call the Continent). In the British Isles it retained a rather pejorative meaning until the end of the nineteenth century. As recently as two centuries ago Kant wrote in *Perpetual Peace [Zum Ewigen Frieden, 1795]* that democracy was the path that led to despotism. The monoculturalism that still characterizes the Western world has resulted in a lack of serious study of other ways of conceiving and practising politics (in the classical sense of the term) in civilizations different from ours. This often leads to the false dilemma “democracy or dictatorship”.

Raimon Panikkar, *The Foundations of Democracy*

Herodotus’s dialogue on forms of government is on a dramatic scale because *all* the arguments articulated by the participants destroy each other reciprocally. *Historically* Darius prevails, and, with him, the monarchic hypothesis. Herodotus knows this, and makes it clear. We learn it from him. From the point of view of the *argument*, however, there is no winner. Otanes’ arguments *against* the monarchy are not *refuted* in the end; quite the opposite: Megabyzus confirms that they are valid! When it is Darius’s turn to speak, he puts forward several arguments in favor of monarchy; but these are predominantly empirical (the strongest is that the other two systems of government also lead to monarchy sooner or later). He does not, however, refute *on its merits* what the first speaker, Otanes, says and the second, Megabyzus, confirms: that the monarch is a potential tyrant. Indeed, Darius himself, the defender of monarchy, begins by acknowledging that *all three regimes* are “excellent in theory.”

If anything, only one argument leans in favor of monarchy: the observation that the other two systems, when they degenerate, both lead to monarchy sooner or later. The entire discussion hinges on the “degenerative” factor: it multiplies the models by two and, at the same time, sets in train the *movement*, the constitutional “cycle” (the degeneration of the one leads to the establishment of the other). That this movement ends with monarchy is implied, but not demonstrated, by Darius.

Such discussions must have been common among the political elite in Athens; we need only think of the way the problem is continually presented in the dialogues in which Plato and Xenophon portray Socrates in conversation with a wide variety of people. Herodotus was not innovative in the material he dealt with but rather – as has been pointed out – in the disconcerting device of setting it in Persia. In Athens the established political system was not *publicly* called into question, especially in time of war. Therefore, from this point of view at least, the Persian setting was more reassuring. In any case, an *escamotage* [trick] is used: that of starting the discussion on a theatrical stage (and there too the author takes precautions). Euripides does this at least once, in *Suppliant Women* (perhaps written after 424), inserting an odd debate between the king Theseus, who in the patriotic Athenian legend was the founder of democracy, and a Theban herald who provokes him, coming into his presence with the question: “Who is the tyrant here?” In fact the question means something like: “Who is in charge here?” The conversation that follows is a perfect dialogue of the deaf: Theseus describes the bliss of a regime where “the people rule,” while the herald raises the indisputable problem of the people’s “incompetence” – a criticism of government by the people that Herodotus attributes to both Megabyzus and Darius. In Euripides too, the discussion ends without a winner or loser of the argument. The Greeks, or perhaps above all the Athenians, pushed this reflection to the utmost: the awareness that *political forms, as such, are irrelevant*. Aristotle was the most coherent advocate of the need to analyze the matter thoroughly when he uncoupled the concept of democracy from that of a numerical majority.

In his journal Babeuf often uses the formula “République une et démocratique” [“a single, democratic Republic”], whereas the usual Jacobin formula, even in public documents, was “une et indivisible” [“single and indivisible”]. “Democracy” was not common in the revolution’s political lexicon. Those men spoke more willingly of “equality,” “liberty,” “republic,” “fatherland,” and “virtue”; and they branded all other governments “tyrannical” and their opponents’ political approach “ambitious.” They also used “dictatorship” as a synonym of “tyranny,” without being aware of the historical significance of those terms. On September 25, 1792, Robespierre defended himself against the “charge of tyranny.”¹ When he was overthrown with the coup d’état of 9 Thermidor year II, the conspirators turned the convention against him by inveighing against the “tyrant.” It hardly needs to be recalled that the word “democracy” does not figure either in the American constitution or in those successively adopted by the French First Republic.

In his diary Tocqueville declared himself a defender of liberty and an opponent of democracy.² His book on America describes a phenomenon – American “democracy” – not to exalt it but, we might say, to accustom Europeans of his own class to the distressing inevitability of a process whose conclusion would be democracy. In England, until at least the end of the nineteenth century, the word had – as Panikkar notes – “a rather pejorative meaning.” Certainly, in Italy, Benedetto Croce – a thinker and politician who well represents (for some people even today) the liberal mentality – kept his distance from the word and even more from its use *in bonam partem*. He was well aware that “democracy” was not a political system but a form of relations between classes that was biased towards the “ascendancy of the demos” as Aristotle puts it. It is an indication of the shift produced by the harsh and instructive lesson of fascism that the Italian party which called itself, before fascism, the “popular party” resurfaced as the “Christian democrats.” The name had sprung from the conflict with fascist populism, and was therefore richer and more innovative than the description *républicain français* adopted by the Italian Christian democrats’ French counterparts. Soon, however, “democracy” regained the role – which it had had in the early 1920s in Germany and elsewhere – of a counterweight to “socialism” (or to “communism”), especially when the “socialist” regimes of eastern Europe asserted themselves.

This was an enormous propaganda gain for Western governments: to be able to appropriate that whole word for themselves. Meanwhile, they were in fact making great strides towards restoring the most uncontrolled free-market economy, and were by now making use of state bodies (some of them illegal!) that would stop at nothing in opposing “communism.” It was a gift from God for them to be able to call all this “democracy.”

This misnomer has permanently polluted the language of politics. In *Aristoteles über Diktatur und Demokratie*, his last work published in Germany before he went into exile, Rosenberg correctly points out, to make clear that “democracy” is not synonymous with “parliamentary system,” that the Russia of year I of the revolution was a “democracy,” whereas the France of the Third Republic, its contemporary, was an “oligarchy.”³ Indeed, a century earlier a master of constitutional liberalism, Karl Wenzelslaus von Rotteck, was already arguing along similar lines when he observed in the *Staatslexikon* that strictly speaking only one party – the democratic party – should govern in the constitutional state.⁴

The fact is that, precisely because it is not a *form* of government, because it is not a *type of constitution*, democracy may exist, or exist only in part, or not exist at all; or it may reassert itself within the most diverse political-constitutional *forms*.

This, at bottom, is clearly the meaning of Herodotus's enigmatic dialogue.

Instead, what has prevailed in the end – or rather as things stand now – is “freedom.” It is defeating democracy. This freedom is not, of course, for all, but for those who are “strongest” in competition, be they nations, regions, or individuals. It is the freedom Benjamin Constant asserted with the fable of “wealth” that is “stronger than governments,” and perhaps also the freedom defended by the members of the “Knights of Freedom,”⁵ the New York neo-Nazi association. Neither could it be otherwise, because freedom is disturbing in that it is either total – in all areas, including personal conduct – or it is not; and every obligation that favors the less “strong” is precisely a limitation on the freedom of others. In this sense, Leopardi's view of the unbreakable, inescapable connection between freedom and slavery corresponds to reality. Leopardi believes he has drawn this intuition from the writings of Linguet and Rousseau, but in fact it is a result, a pinnacle, of *his own* philosophy. Linguet and Rousseau do not go so far. It is a conclusion which has been fully realized only in our own time, and after the failure of courses of action and experiments that originated with Marx. Slavery is, of course, geographically scattered, cleverly dispersed, and concealed in the media.

Leopardi writes in the *Zibaldone*:

Philosophers and publicists have noted that the true, perfect freedom of a people cannot be sustained; indeed, it cannot survive without the internal use of slavery. (Thus Linguet, and I believe also Rousseau, *Contrat social*, book III chapter 15, and others. See also *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion*, chapter X, in the passage where he cites, in a note, a reference to the above passage in Rousseau, with two lines from this author.) *From this they deduce that the abolition of freedom is a result of the abolition of slavery, and that if there are no more free peoples, this is because there are no more slaves.* Taken strictly, this is false, because freedom has been lost for quite different reasons, which everyone knows, and which I have seen in a hundred places. *It would be much more true to say that the abolition of slavery has come from the abolition of freedom;* or, to put it another way, that both have resulted from the same causes, but in such a way that the latter preceded the former, both in its causes and in time. The *conclusion*, I say, is false, *but the principle of the necessity of slavery in peoples that are truly free is absolutely true.*⁶

To return to where we started: the good constitution-builders of Strasbourg, who applied themselves to writing a “European constitution” – a sort of caretaker for a condominium inhabited by the world's privileged – thought that involving Pericles was a mere rhetorical flourish. But inadvertently they

hit the nail on the head. Pericles is very uncomfortable when he uses the word democracy, and places all his emphasis on freedom. Without realizing it, they had turned to the noblest possible text to utter not a piece of edifying rhetoric but rather what *truly* needed to be said: that freedom has won – in the rich world – with all the terrible consequences this has, and will continue to have, for the rest. Democracy is postponed to some other era, and will be reinvented all over again by other individuals. Perhaps not by Europeans.

Notes

Prologue

- 1 H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*. III. *The Liberal Experiment* (1938), p. 917.
- 2 Reprint, ed. G. Galasso (1991), p. 45.
- 3 *Le memorie di Garibaldi* [*Garibaldi's Memoirs*] in the definitive edition of 1872, edited by the Royal Commission (National Edition of Garibaldi's writings), vol. II (1932), pp. 269 and 266.
- 4 D. Mack Smith, *Garibaldi: A Great Life in Brief* (1956, reprint 1982), p. 139.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 6 Lenin, "The Collapse of the Second International," in *Collected Works*, 4th English edition, ed. Julius Katzer (1964), vol. 21, pp. 205–59.
- 7 A. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* [*Prison Notebooks*], ed. V. Gerratana (1975), p. 1619.
- 8 J. G. Droysen, *Aristofane*, Italian translation by G. Bonacina (Palermo: Sellerio, 1998), pp. 168–9.
- 9 Michaud, *Biographie universelle* (Paris, 1811–28), vol. 44; 2nd edn. (1854–65), vol. 40, see under *Suard*.
- 10 *Correspondance générale de J.-J. Rousseau*, ed. Th. Dufour, vol. XVII (1932), p. 157; however, the text of this letter, published on the basis of the autograph rough draft, should be read in the critical edition of R. A. Leigh, *Correspondance complète de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. XXXIII (1979), p. 243.
- 11 Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens*, 22,3.
- 12 Appian, *Civil Wars*, II, 122, 514
- 13 Theodosius Diaconus, *De Creta capta*, 257.

1 A Constitution Imbued with Hellenism: Greece, Europe, and the West

- 1 Herodotus, *The Histories*, book III, *Persia* (Milan: Fondazione Valla, 1990), p. 297.
- 2 G. C. Lewis, *A Dialogue on the Best Form of Government* (1863).
- 3 Julius Schvarcz (1838–1900), politician and ancient historian, taught at the University of Budapest.
- 4 A. de Tocqueville, *Voyage en Amérique*, in *Oeuvres*, I (1991), pp. 243–4.
- 5 Quoted from the Italian translation of Pflugk-Hartung's *Weltgeschichte*, vol. I (1930), pp. 68–9.
- 6 A. Leroy-Beaulieu, “Le Centenaire de 1789,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* 93 (1889), pp. 860–904.
- 7 The quotation comes from the *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25, 1853 (= K. Marx and F. Engels, *India, Cina, Russia*, ed. B. Maffi [1970], p. 76).
- 8 A. de Tocqueville, *Scritti, note, discorsi politici* [*Writings, Notes, and Political Speeches*], ed. U. Coldagelli (1994), p. 13.
- 9 Lewis, *A Dialogue on the Best Form of Government* p. 61.
- 10 F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (1978), trans. Elborg Forster (1981), pp. 8–9: “I contemplate the idea of an infinitely longer history of the French Revolution.”

2 The Beginning: Democracy in Ancient Greece

- 1 Van Effenterre has suggested it regarding the *agora* of Mallia in Crete: *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia. Le centre politique: l'Agora* (Études crétoises 17, 1969).
- 2 S. L. Utcenko and I. M. Diakonov, *Social Stratification of Ancient Society* (1970).
- 3 Thucydides, VIII, 63, 5.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 48, 6.
- 5 A. Labriola, *Socrate*, new edition edited by B. Croce, Laterza, Bari 1909, pp. 9–10.
- 6 The expression is Arthur Rosenberg's, in *Demokratie und Klassenkampf im Altertum* (1921), Italian translation in *Il comunista senza partito* [*The Communist without a Party*] (Palermo: Sellerio, 1984), pp. 133–4.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- 8 It goes without saying that philosophical disagreement over slavery, considered against nature, continued, especially in Sophist thought (Hippias, Antiphon). See, for example, J. Vogt, *Sklaverei und Humanität im klassischen Griechentum* (1953), pp. 172–3.
- 9 M. N. Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*. 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946–8), no. 96.
- 10 *Ibid.*, no. 97.
- 11 K. Jander, *Oratorum et Rhetorum Graecorum nova Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1913), no. 32.

3 How Greek Democracy came back into Play, and finally left the Stage

- 1 Available in Italian translation by Marco Revelli in *Putney: alle radici della democrazia moderna. Il dibattito tra i protagonisti della “Rivoluzione inglese”* [*Putney: At the Roots of Modern Democracy. The Debate among the Protagonists of the “English Revolution”*] (1997).
- 2 For the place occupied by the “ancient republics” in English political culture of the time cf. A. M. Strumia, “Autorità e potere: le repubbliche antiche nell’Inghilterra del XVII secolo” [“Authority and power: the ancient republics in seventeenth-century England”], in *I linguaggi politici delle rivoluzioni in Europa XVII–XIX secolo. Atti del convegno (Lecce, 11–13 ottobre 1990)* [*The Political Languages of European Revolutions from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century. Proceedings of a conference (Lecce, 11–13 October 1990)*], ed. E. Pii (1992), pp. 67–74.
- 3 *Putney*, Italian translation by Revelli, p. 75.
- 4 *La formazione degli Stati Uniti di America* [*The Formation of the United States of America*] vol. I, ed. A. Aquarone, C. Negri, and C. Scelba (1961), pp. 70, 114–15, 121.
- 5 R. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (2001), p. 13.
- 6 The account of the memorable session is reconstructed in *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, I série (1787–1799), vol. 84 (Paris: CNRS, 1962), pp. 276–83.
- 7 H. Bangou, *La Guadeloupe, I: 1492-1848 ou Histoire de la colonisation de l’île* (1987), p. 122.
- 8 Cf. Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, edited and introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright (1984), p. 164. On the Jesuit Vieira, the studies of Alfredo Bosi are fundamental.
- 9 As in the case of the émigré Laluzerne, who translated and wrote a commentary on the pamphlet in London in 1793.
- 10 *L’École Normale de l’an III. Leçons d’histoire, de géographie, d’économie politique. Édition annotée des cours de Volney, Buache de la Neuville, Mentelle et Vandermonde*, par A. Alcouffe, G. Israel, B. Jobert, G. Jorland, F. Labourie, D. Nordman, J.-C. Perrot, D. Woronoff, Dunod (1994), pp. 111–12.
- 11 Vol. I (1777), note to p. 107.
- 12 Bangou, *La Guadeloupe*, I, p. 180.
- 13 E. H. Carr, *1917: Before and After* (1969), p. 3.
- 14 *Marx-Engels-Werke* (1959), II, pp. 129–30
- 15 *Ibid.*, VIII, p. 116.

4 Liberalism’s First Victory

- 1 L.-A. Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Mémoires de M. de Bourrienne ... sur Napoléon, le Directoire, le Consulat, L’Empire at la Restauration* (1830), II, p. 359.

- 2 O. Blanc, *Les hommes de Londres. Histoire secrète de la Terreur* (1989), p. 61.
- 3 M. Duverger, *La Cinquième République: Achèvement de la Révolution française*. 5th edn. (1974), pp. 10–11.
- 4 B. Constant, *Oeuvres politiques*, ed. Ch. Louandre (1874), p. 259.
- 5 A.-V. Arnault, E. F. Bazot, A. Jay, E. de Jouy, J. Marquet de Montbreton Norvins, *Biographie nouvelle des contemporains*, XII (1823), pp. 368–9.
- 6 *Ibid.*, I (1820), pp. I–xvi
- 7 This extremely long document is in the archive of the foreign ministry, “Mémoires et documents” series, vol. 1802, year 1815, Fo 119, ff. 360r–366v. It was published by François Reymond, “Un manifeste inédit de Benjamin Constant,” in *Annales Benjamin Constant* 5 (1985), pp. 81–93.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 9 Constant, *Oeuvres politiques*, p. 281.

5 Universal Suffrage: Act One

- 1 P. Oddifreddi, “La democrazia impossibile” [“Impossible democracy”], *Lettera pristem*, no. 11 (March 1994), pp. 26–31.
- 2 K. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (1951).
- 3 Fisher, *A History of Europe* (1935), III, p. 874.
- 4 E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. Europe 1789–1848* (1962), p. 128.
- 5 *Marx-Engels-Werke* (1969), IV, p. 492.
- 6 It should be noted *per incidens* that Lenin pointedly took up and applied to Russia this hypothetical schema which Marx had applied to Germany. Doctrinal scholasticism and tactical intuition were to bring him the success that unexpected developments had denied to Marx.
- 7 A. de Tocqueville, *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848*, ed. J. P. Mayer and A. P. Ker, with a new introduction by Fernand Braudel, trans. George Lawrence and Danielle Salti (1989), p. 9.
- 8 In E. Lavis, *Histoire de France contemporaine*, vol. VI (ed. Charles Seignobos): *La Révolution de 1848 et le Second Empire (1848–1859)* (1921), pp 78–9.
- 9 P. Bastid, *Doctrines et institutions politiques de la seconde République* (1945), I, p. 288.
- 10 Letter to *Le Figaro*, April 14, 1864.
- 11 K. Marx, *The Class Struggles in France (1848–50)*, with an introduction by F. Engels, (1934), p. 139.

6 Universal Suffrage: Act Two

- 1 Cf. above, Prologue, p. 3 and note 7, p. 253.
- 2 *Oeuvres de Napoléon III* (1856), II, pp. 150–1

- 3 Tocqueville gives a brief profile of him in *Recollections* (1989), pp. 103–4
- 4 Indeed, immediately after his electoral triumph of December 10, 1848, he had appointed Léon Faucher to public works. Faucher had been a supporter of the *ateliers nationaux*.

7 Trouble for the “Old Mole”

- 1 The prince himself had been a recruit to the Carbonari just as, in his time, the emperor had been a Freemason and had surrounded himself with Masons. However, part of the unscrupulousness inherent in “Caesarism” is a readiness to betray. Years later, Felice Orsini’s bombs were also aimed at reminding the man who was no longer president but now emperor of the French of his former affiliation to the Carbonari.
- 2 Italian translation (1978), VI, p. 299.
- 3 Marx, *The Class Struggles in France (1848–50)*, p. 143
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 300.

8 Europe “on the March”

- 1 M. Siotto Pintor, entry *Elezione*, in *Enciclopedia italiana* (1932), vol. 13, p. 781.
- 2 N. Bobbio, N. Matteucci, and G. Pasquino, *Dizionario di politica*, 2nd edn. (1983), p. 785.
- 3 B. Croce, *Storia d’Italia dal 1871 al 1915 [A History of Italy from 1871 to 1915]*, ed. G. Galasso (1991), p. 334.
- 4 B. Croce, *A History of Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Henry Furst (1934), p. 281. The italics are not the author’s.
- 5 In 1860 Laurence Oliphant, an astute English secret agent, had voiced his opposition to “the practical working of Universal Suffrage as developed under a despotic [*sic*] form of government” in a pamphlet entitled *Universal Suffrage and Napoleon the Third*, published in London and Edinburgh. (I draw attention to the British Library copy: 8052.e.91.)
- 6 G. Mosca, *Sulla teoria dei governi [On the Theory of Governments]* (1884), p. 231.
- 7 G. Rensi, *Gli Anciens Régimes e la democrazia diretta [The Anciens Régimes and Direct Democracy]* (1902, reprinted 1995), p. 139.
- 8 G. Giolitti, *Memorie della mia vita [My life’s memoirs]* (1922, reprint 1967), pp. 43–4.
- 9 This was also the case with the Albertine Statute (1848), which remained in force for exactly a century (and from 1861 as a constitutional charter of the Kingdom of Italy).
- 10 The minister’s circular to prefects (February 11, 1852), and the mayor’s appeal to the voters of Vouzon are in vol. II of R. Rémond, *La vie politique en France* (2nd edn., 1986), pp. 164–5.

- 11 D. Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism* (1996), p. 11.
- 12 Conference held at the University of Andorra, published in Italy by Edizioni Lavoro, (Rome, 2000), p. 5.
- 13 C. B. Macpherson, *Burke* (1980), p. 71.

9 From the Slaughter of the Communards to the “Sacred Unions”

- 1 A. Rosenberg, *A History of Bolshevism, from Marx to the first Five Years’ Plan*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow (1934), p. 18.
- 2 It was reintroduced after the fall of fascism. The Italian constituent assembly had produced a text (article 75) which prohibited (now that proportional representation had been reintroduced with the return of parliamentary democracy) subjecting electoral laws to referendums. A singular coup annulled this ban *in extremis*. See C. Salamone, “La parola smarrita. Sul testo dell’articolo 75 della Costituzione” [“The lost word. On the text of article 75 of the constitution”], in *Biblioteca* 1 (1990), pp. 19–23.
- 3 K. Liebknecht, *Militarism and Antimilitarism with Special Regard to the International Young Socialist Movement* (1907), trans. Graham Lock (1973), pp. 34–5.
- 4 *Marx-Engels-Werke* (1963), XXII, p. 251.
- 5 Cf Demosthenes, *Third Philippic*, 47–51.
- 6 To whom we are indebted for this assessment of the “good reasons” for genocide: “I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of ten are, and I shouldn’t like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth.” Cf. D. E. Stannard, *American Holocaust. The Conquest of the New World* (1992), p. 245, and D. Losurdo, “Il liberalismo non ha commesso genocidi?” [“Has liberalism never committed genocide?”] *Liberal* 16 (February–March 2003).
- 7 O. Bauer, *Tra due guerre mondiali?* [*Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen?*], trans. E. Collotti (1979), p. 94, in the chapter “The Crisis of Democracy.”
- 8 U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, “Das Nationalfest der Deutschen.” *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (January 27, 1918).
- 9 E. Meyer, *Der Staat, sein Wesen und seine Organisation*, in *Weltgeschichte und Weltkrieg*, Cotta, Stuttgart 1916, pp. 151–53.
- 10 *Marx-Engels-Werke* (1963), XXII, pp. 197–8.
- 11 O. Bauer, *Tra due guerre mondiali?*, pp. 89–90.
- 12 E. Vermeil, *The German Scene (Social, Political, Cultural): 1930 to the Present Day*, trans. L. J. Ludovici (1956), p. 182.
- 13 *Friedrich Engels politischens Vermächtnis* (1920), p. 24.
- 14 Liebknecht was again arrested and held for a long period during the war because he had distributed a leaflet that said this.

- 15 U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, “In den zweiten Kriegswinter (1915),” in *Reden aus der Kriegszeit* (1915), pp. 189–90.

10 The Third Republic

- 1 G. Bourgin, “Aperçu sur l’histoire de la Commune de 1871.” *Revue Historique* 55 (May–August 1930), pp. 88–96. He is also the author of the passage on the Commune in the entry entitled *Parigi (storia)* in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*, vol. 26 (1935), p. 340. Here, however, he prefers the term “many” shot dead.
- 2 The figure also appears in a widely used reference work: *Lexikon zur Geschichte und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert* (1974), I, p. 262.
- 3 F. Goguel, *Géographie des élections françaises sous la Troisième et la Quatrième République* (1970), p. 60.
- 4 Which is a significant indication that universal suffrage was by then widely seen as inoffensive and not threatening.
- 5 He writes: “the number of non-voters seems to be *incompressible*.”
- 6 One paradoxical consequence of this unilateral denunciation of the Concordat was that, since it was made after Alsace had passed to Germany, it could not apply to Alsace. When the region was returned to France with the military victory of 1918 it continued, despite having become part of the French republic, to come under the Concordat. Postwar governments did not dare to reopen this issue.
- 7 J. Bryce, *Modern Democracies* (1921), vol. I, pp. 259–60.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 267–9. The blight of the financial scandals that marked the Third Republic is mentioned in a later chapter (p. 300).
- 9 J.-J. Chevallier, *Histoire des institutions politiques de la France moderne (1789–1945)*, (1958), p. 402.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 535.
- 11 J. Jaurès, *Storia socialista della Rivoluzione Francese [Histoire socialiste de la Révolution française]*, trans. Giorgio Candeloro (Milan: Cooperativa del libro popolare, 1954), vol. X, pp. 133–35. The translation is from A. Mathiez’s new edition, Paris, 1939.

11 The Second Failure of Universal Suffrage

- 1 K. Schwabe, *Wissenschaft und Kriegsmoral* (1969), p. 161. Brandenburg was a vigorous critic of the Weimar republic. He died in 1946.
- 2 V. I. Lenin, *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in our Party* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951), p. 306.
- 3 Previous chapters have alluded to the ironic references scattered through Marx’s writings to the Jacobins, their childish “ancient” ideology, and so forth. The

- most substantial and bitter is certainly the chapter in *The Holy Family* entitled “Critical Battle against the French Revolution” (which, among other things, describes the revolution as “an event entirely in the eighteenth-century”). His interpretation of the Terror is also contradictory, as Furet observes: “the Terror performed the tasks of the bourgeois revolution” or “the Terror was the *provisional overthrow* of the bourgeoisie’s power” (F. Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution* [1988] p. 39). In a letter to Marx of September 4, 1870 (the year before the Commune) Engels is extremely harsh regarding the men of the Terror: “The fault of the terror regime of the year 1793 lies entirely with the bourgeois driven mad by fear and affecting patriotism, with the little philistine wetting himself with terror, and with the rabble of the sub-proletariat which looked after its own interests during *la terreur*” (Marx and Engels, *Opere complete* [*Complete works*], [Rome: Edizioni Riuniti, 1990], vol. 44, p. 54).
- 4 L. D. Trotsky, *Our Political Tasks* (August 1904), Italian translation in Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg, *Rivoluzione e polemica sul partito* [*Revolution and Polemic on the Party*], ed. G. Bedeschi (1973), pp. 334–5.
 - 5 E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923* (1950), vol. 1, p. 21.
 - 6 In February 1997 the operation appeared imminent. On July 17, 1998, the ranter-president Boris Yeltsin went and knelt on the tsar’s tomb and, perhaps because he was once a Soviet communist party official, asked “forgiveness” for the communists’ crimes. But at the opening of the Orthodox synod on August 13, 2000, the patriarch Alexis II suggested “opening a debate” on the figure of Tsar Nicholas II, before proceeding . . .
 - 7 L. D. Trotsky, *Millenovecentocinque* [1905] [1922], Italian translation (1976), p. 173. Trotsky here repeats an expression of Tocqueville’s.
 - 8 *Zemstvo*: an administrative body that looked after the interests of local people.
 - 9 F. Epstein, entry entitled *Stolypin* in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1936), vol. 32, p. 759.
 - 10 An idea borrowed from Engels’s correspondence (1894) with Danielson, the Russian translator of *Capital*.
 - 11 *Briefe an Karl und Luise Kautsky*, Berlin 1923 (letter of 15 April 1917 from Wronke prison); Italian translation *Lettere ai Kautsky*, Ed. Riuniti, Rome 1971, p. 264.
 - 12 In his memoirs Friedrich Meinecke writes of a “military pronouncement” (*Erlebtes 1862-1919*, Koehler, Stuttgart 1964), Italian translation, Guida, Naples 1971, p. 329.
 - 13 A. Rosenberg, *The Birth of the German Republic*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow (1931, reprint 1962), p. 267.
 - 14 Max von Baden, *Erinnerungen und Dokumente* (1927), pp. 630–1.
 - 15 However, he nobly relinquished the post.
 - 16 Turner, *Hitler’s Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (1996).
 - 17 Cf. the very recent study by Rüdiger Jungbluth on the “silent rise of Germany’s most powerful economic dynasty” (*Die Quandts. Ihr leiser Aufstieg zur mächtigsten Wirtschaftsdynastie Deutschlands*, 2002). Other recent books supply

- important documentation: John Weitz, *Hitler's Banker: Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht* (1996), (a biography of Schacht); Wulf Schwarzwaller, *Hitlers Geld. Vom armen Kunstmaler zum millionenschweren Fuhrer* (1998).
- 18 Von Papen was tried at Nuremberg. In 1959 the Vatican awarded him the honor of “secret chamberlain.”
 - 19 According to the Stefani news agency “the ex-Kaiser declared himself highly satisfied by the victory of the national socialists, but personally he would have wanted Hugenberg’s party, which placed the question of the monarchy at the head of its program, to be more successful” (*Corriere della Sera*, March 7, 1933, p. 1).
 - 20 The October 31, 1922, issue of *Corriere della Sera* contains, on the front page, a long and enraptured account of Mussolini’s first day as president, and his meetings with the chamber and the senate. In particular, the daily reports, in a meeting with De Nicola, the president of the chamber, who was delighted to retain his post, “the question of electoral reform was touched upon.”
 - 21 Here are a few of them: Vittorio Cian, Luigi Gasparotto, Stefano Gavazzoini, Gioacchino Volpe, Arrigo Solmi, Alberto Giovannini, Carlo Delcroix, Sam Benelli, Ettore Viola, Giovanni Porzio, Antonio Salandra, Giovanni Gentile, Pietro Fedele, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, etc. (De Nicola, after accepting, resigned. Giolitti refused – in belated shame after his previous patronage of the “national blocs” which had been so obviously tainted. Apart from anything else, he had chaired the commission that had produced the monstrous electoral law.)
 - 22 PNF, *Dizionario di politica* [*Dictionary of Politics*], (1940, XVIII E. F.), IV, p. 415.
 - 23 For example, see *La Civilta Cattolica*, August 7, 1924 (vol. III, pp. 297–306), article headlined “La parte dei cattolici nelle presenti lotte dei partiti politici in Italia” [“The part Catholics should play in the present struggles between Italy’s political parties”].
 - 24 The text of this famous interview is in G. Bedeschi, *La fabbrica delle ideologie. Il pensiero politico italiano nel Novecento* [The Ideology Factory. Italian Political Thought in the Twentieth Century], (2002), p. 209.
 - 25 A. Rosenberg, *A History of Bolshevism*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow (1934, reprint 1965), p. 110. Lenin’s thinking on what he brutally termed “the pig-sty of bourgeois parliamentarianism” (*State and Revolution*, ch. 3, § 3) is fairly clear: “The way to escape parliamentarianism is not to destroy representative bodies and the electoral principle, but to transform these representative bodies talking-shops into bodies that truly *work*.” The whole context of this paragraph is bitter and centered on the emptiness of parliamentary “work” in comparison with that behind the scenes (chancellery, military command, bureaucracy, etc.).
 - 26 Bauer, *Tra due guerre mondiali?*, p. 184.
 - 27 R. Luxemburg, *Gesammelte Werke* (August 1914–January 1919), (1974), IV, pp. 353–65.

12 The European Civil War

- 1 The full text of Turati's speech was republished in *Avanti!*, issue of Sunday, January 21, 1990.
- 2 Collected in *The Unfinished Revolution: Russia 1917–1967* (1967); Italian translation as *La rivoluzione incompiuta. 1917–1967* (Milan: Longanesi, 1968); new edition (Milan: Bur, 1980), with an introduction by Vittorio Strada.
- 3 Deutscher, *The Unfinished Revolution*, p. 73.
- 4 *The German Catastrophe*, trans. Sidney B. Fay (1950). Here Meinecke writes, among other things: "Hitler's preaching against bolshevism, therefore, was a mask for his will to conquer... he either consciously or unconsciously preferred to see the Russians rather than the Anglo-Saxons in Berlin."
- 5 F. Braudel, *Il Mondo attuale [Le monde actuel]* (1963), Italian translation (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), p. 453.
- 6 The quotations are from the Italian translation *Nazionalismo e bolscevismo. La Guerra civile europea [Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus]*, (1988), pp. 37–54, 56–67, and 53.
- 7 F. Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (1961); Italian translation *Assalto al potere mondiale. La Germania nella Guerra 1914–1918* (1965).
- 8 The nationalist insurgents of February 6, 1934, who were stopped by force at Place de la Concorde, wanted to put Pétain and Laval in power: cf. William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (1969), p. 201 (evidence submitted by Léon Blum to the national assembly's commission of inquiry).
- 9 Renzo de Felice also regards this quotation as significant, mentioning it in *Mussolini il Duce. Gli anni del consenso [Mussolini the Duce: The Years of Consensus]* (1974), p. 553.
- 10 Harold Laski, professor at the London School of Economics, a Labor-supporting intellectual of Jewish origin, was one of Churchill's targets during the 1945 election campaign, which brought Labor to power. Churchill also had the poor taste to attack him for "racial" origins. *Democracy in Crisis* was translated into Italian by Laterza (1935) and aroused the interest of Croce.
- 11 The text appeared in a periodical – *Cahiers de la Révolution* – which cannot be found, and possibly does not exist. This was reproduced by *La Liberté* (a dubious Paris right-wing daily) on March 5, 1933, and the same day Italy's main fascist papers (*Popolo d'Italia*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Stampa*, *Il Messaggero*) also published it. Perhaps it was a pastiche based on what P. Cot had written in the *Europäische Review* in 1932 (Heft 11, pp. 743–9). None of this figures in the recent biography of Cot by Sabine Jansen (Paris: Fayard, 2002).
- 12 E. Bramstedt, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925–1945* (1965). It should not be a cause for surprise that, during the Japanese electoral campaign of 1994, the liberal-democratic party headquarters made use of a manual written by one of its leaders, Yoshio Ogai, entitled *Hitler's Electoral Strategy*.

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- 13 It is worth recalling the (documented) reference by Edmond Villey, a French Catholic scholar of political systems, to an indisputable and significant fact: that there was more of a “welfare state” in Prussia than under the Third Republic (*Les Périls de la démocratie française* [1910], p. 193).
- 14 The results, which clearly show the effect of the electoral system, were: socialists, 1,955,000 votes and 149 seats; communists, 1,502,000 votes and 72 seats; radicals, 1,422,000 votes and 109 seats.
- 15 Togliatti’s speech in February 1937 “to the special group of Italian comrades” who lived in Moscow: cf. A. de Agosti, *Togliatti* (Turin: Utet, 1996), p. 207 (which gives the exact sources).
- 16 W. Brandt, *Erinnerungen* (1989); Italian translation, *Memorie* (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), p. 125; English translation, abridged, with a new preface, *My Life in Politics* (1992).
- 17 *German Foreign Policy Documents, Series D* (1937–1945), vol. III, p. 286. The operation Goebbels describes in his diary (April 22, 1938) is not dissimilar: “our clandestine radio transmitter from eastern Prussia to Russia is creating an enormous sensation. It operates in Trotsky’s name, and is causing Stalin plenty of trouble” (J. Goebbels, *Diario 1938* [1994], p. 123).
- 18 Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (1961); 4th edn., revised and enlarged (2003); Italian translation, p. 447, note 1.
- 19 Quoted in P. Togliatti, *Opere* [Works], vol. IV.1: 1935–1944, ed. F. Andreucci and P. Spriano (1979), p. CVII.
- 20 J. Díaz, *Tres años de lucha*, published by the Partido comunista de España, Barcelona 1939, p. 390.
- 21 These reports from Spain were first published by F. Andreucci and P. Spriano, in volume IV.1 of Togliatti’s *Opere* (1979), pp. 249–410. The first of these two quotations comes from his concluding report (May 21, 1939), p. 405. The other comes from the first report (August 30, 1937), p. 264.
- 22 L. Trotsky, *Guerra e rivoluzione* [War and Revolution] (1970), (1973), p. 57.
- 23 W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (1948), vol. I, p. 325. The diplomatic context in which the “pact” was made is well described by Hugh Seton-Watson (*Eastern Europe between the Wars, 1918–1941* (1945), p. 397: “The Munich Agreement had excluded the Soviet Union from the company of European Great Powers, and had removed the strategic basis of the Franco-Soviet Pact. The negotiations in the summer of 1939 between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union were not sincere on either side. Russia had no reason to endanger her existence for the sake of two Powers who had abundantly proved their hatred of her, and who were not in a position to give her any military assistance in the event of a war, of which she would have to bear the brunt. The Polish Government, confident, if official and semi-official utterances may be believed, that the Polish Army would quickly occupy Berlin, would not consider ‘allowing’ the Red Army to come to its aid. Distinguished British journalists declared that an alliance with the Soviet Union would only be a hindrance the Allies.

- Thus, although the conclusion of the German-Soviet Pact of August was a shock to world opinion, it need not really have surprised anyone.”
- 24 *Annuario di politica internazionale* (Milan: Ispi, 1938), p. 41.
 - 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 399-402.
 - 26 Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe*, p. 170.
 - 27 There is an effective and honest account in ch. IV of Aldo Agosti's *Bandiere rosse. Profilo storico dei comunismi europei* [*Red Flags. History of Europe's Communist Movements*], (1999).
 - 28 The source is the Basel *Rundschau* of September 7, 1939. Cf. Brügel, *Stalin und Hitler* (1973), document no. 89.
 - 29 G. Dimitrov, *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, 1933–1949*, ed. Ivo Banac, English translation by Jane T. Hedges, Timothy D. Sergay, and Irina Faion (2003), pp. 115–16.
 - 30 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
 - 31 This is included in the collection of Trotsky's writings *Guerra e rivoluzione* [*War and Revolution*], (1973), pp. 149–99.
 - 32 Here, Trotsky's analysis is the same as Stalin's of September 7, 1939: “A war is on between two groups of capitalist countries – (poor and rich as regards colonies, raw materials, and so forth) – for the redivision of the world, for the domination of the world!” (Dimitrov, *Diary* [2003], p. 115).
 - 33 Dimitrov's instruction to those Comintern members who had changed their minds is identical: “The division of the capitalist states into fascist and democratic [camps] has lost its former significance.” (Dimitrov, *Diary* [2003], p. 117).
 - 34 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
 - 35 Cf. Agosti, *Togliatti* (1996), p. 251. Both these texts from August 1939 are missing from the collection of Togliatti's works edited by Spriano and Andreucci (vol. IV, 1–2).
 - 36 It should perhaps be pointed out, with regard to this complex and obscure period, that Togliatti himself, in his autobiography disguised as a “conversation with Marcella and Maurizio Ferrara” (*Conversando con Togliatti* [*In conversation with Togliatti*], [1953], pp. 283–4) completely omits his own stay in Moscow in May 1939.
 - 37 Agosti, *Togliatti* (1996), pp. 253–4.
 - 38 Rosa Luxemburg had circulated, from prison, *Junius-Briefe*.
 - 39 Dimitrov, *Diary* (2003), p. 182 (note of July 19).
 - 40 Nina Bocenina, *Memorie (La segretaria di Togliatti)* [*Memoirs (Togliatti's Secretary)*], (1993), pp. 20–3.
 - 41 Dimitrov, *Diary* (2003), p. 182. The original of this section of the diary is in Russian, a language of which Dimitrov did not have full command. The German translator's rendition of the expression is: “etwas Eigenartiges.”
 - 42 F. Tchouev, *Conversations avec Molotov*, preface by H. Carrère d'Encausse, Albin Michel, Paris 1995, p. 33. Molotov comments, in recalling that conversation with Hitler in October 1940: “He had a banal view of Soviet politics, and

showed that he had rather narrow horizons, but he wanted to drag us into an adventure. Then, when we were embroiled in it, his situation would have been easier and we would have been dependent on him, once England was at war with us. One would have to be too naïve not to see that.”

- 43 Quoted in Tasca, *Deux ans d'alliance germano-soviétique* (1949), p. 176. Original text in *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963* (1974), vol. VI, pp. 649–50.
- 44 G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), p. 209. See the edition by Bernard Crick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 189.
- 45 From the outset Stalin asked Churchill that a second front be opened in Europe (message of July 18, 1941): *Corrispondenza tra Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt, Attlee, Truman 1941–1945* (1985), I, p. 19. It was opened only at the beginning of June 1944, with the Normandy landings.

13 Progressive Democracies, People's Democracies

- 1 *La politica di unità nazionale dei comunisti* [*The Communists' National Unity Policy*] Naples, April 11, 1944; recently republished (1999) by Edizioni Robin, Rome.
- 2 “Commento sulla Costituzione dell'URSS” [“Comment on the constitution of the USSR”] in *Giustizia e Libertà* (Paris) July 1936.
- 3 M. Farbman, “Le plan russe,” *Europe* 25 (1931), pp. 526–7. The author goes so far as to assert that persisting with the NEP would have meant bringing about “le thermidor du bolchévisme.”
- 4 Second Letter to the Thessalonians, 3: 10.
- 5 The text is in the volume edited by Gabriella Valera: Theodor Mommsen, *I diritti fondamentali del popolo tedesco, commento alla Costituzione del 1848* [*Die Grundrechte des deutschen Volkes*] (Leipzig, 1849), (1994), p. 124: “§ 25: Property is inviolable. § 26: Expropriation can only take place for reasons of the public interest, only on the basis of a law, and upon payment of fair compensation.” Mommsen comments: “Naturally, there will always be expropriations, but now they can take place only with full compensation” (p. 75).
- 6 The text of the French communist party's draft and that approved on April 19, 1946, are in A. Saitta, *La Quarta repubblica francese e la sua prima costituente* [*The French Fourth Republic and its First Constituent Assembly*], (1947), pp. 203–33.
- 7 Italian translation by G. Manacorda (Turin: Einaudi, 1946), pp. 26–7.
- 8 The nationalization of mines, the Bank of England, railways and roads, gas, electricity, etc. All this was solemnly announced to the nation by George VI in his speech of August 15, 1945.
- 9 A. De Gasperi, “La Democrazia cristiana e il momento politico” [“The Christian Democrat party and the present political situation”] (1944), in *Discorsi politici* [*Political Speeches*], ed. T. Bozza (1965), pp. 15–16.

- 10 Christian Democrat party, headquarters, *Guida del propagandista* [*The Propagandist's Guide*], section 5, "L'economia orientata" ["The controlled economy"], by A. Fanfani (Rome: Edizioni Spes, 1946), pp. 19 and 21.
- 11 Piero Calamandrei, *Discorso sulla Costituzione* [*Speech on the Constitution*], January 28, 1955 (for the tenth anniversary of the Liberation). There is also an audio version for Cetra (Collana letteraria, edited by Nanni de Stefani). Calamandrei promoted *Commentario sistematico della Costituzione*, published in Florence in 1950, which is disjointed because of the great variety of contributors.
- 12 L. Basso, "Stato e cittadino" ["State and Citizen"], a talk given at the University of Milan on February 28, 1975, as part of the thirtieth anniversary celebrations of the Liberation, in AA.VV., 1945–1975. *Italia: fascismo, antifascismo, Resistenza, rinnovamento* [1945–1975. *Italy: Fascism, Antifascism, Resistance, Renewal*], (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), p. 419.
- 13 N. Bobbio, *L'ideologia del fascismo* (Milan, 10 January 1975), in AA.VV. 1945–1975. *Italia*, pp. 47–8. In other later writings, e.g. *Il futuro della democrazia* (1984), p. x, Bobbio tends to identify democracy with "majority rule."
- 14 In the draft the voters rejected on May 5, 1946, though, the reference was curiously to the constitutions of 1793, 1795 (Robespierre and Thermidor together!), and of 1848. The Third Republic, with its mediocre constitution (1875) was completely cut out.
- 15 P. Togliatti, *Discorsi alla Costituente* [*Speeches to the Constituent Assembly*], ed. G. Pallotta (Rome: Newton Compton, 1976), pp. 64–5.
- 16 *La Costituzione della Repubblica nei lavori preparatori della Assemblea Costituente* [*The Republic's Constitution during the Preparatory Work of the Constituent Assembly*], (1970), I, p. 575 (afternoon session of March 22, 1947).
- 17 P. Togliatti, *Discorsi parlamentari*, Edizioni Camera dei deputati [published by the Chamber of Deputies], (Rome, 1984), I, p. 75.
- 18 The NEP (new economic policy) had reintroduced capitalistic figures into Soviet society, hence the decision to make these potentially anti-socialist classes a minority politically.
- 19 Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* [*Prison Notebooks*], (1975), p. 1626.
- 20 Cf. W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*, (1953), VI, p. 198.
- 21 F. Fejtö, *A History of the People's Democracies: Eastern Europe since Stalin*, trans. Daniel Weissbort (1971), I, p. 33.
- 22 In 1918 it had collapsed long before enemy troops set foot on German soil.
- 23 See the horrifying record of events published by Jan Gross (New York University) in *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001). This book, published in Italy by Mondadori, forced a solemn, public, and self-critical reaction from the head of the Polish Catholic church, Josef Glemp.
- 24 It is interesting, from a historiographic point of view, how this agreement has been ignored, or almost, though no less worthy of note than the Nazi–Soviet

- pact, and motivated by similar reasons: Sweden's desire to remain neutral and outside the conflict.
- 25 "To reach the point of insurrection it was necessary to accustom the masses to the prosaic, frightful reality of armed combat. This was the aim of antifascist and anti-Hitler terrorism, and for this reason it did not remain the sole preserve of the communists, whose leading groups, the famous GAP, were the first to be equipped," writes a leader of the CLNAI, Leo Valiani (*Tutte le strade conducono a Roma* [All Roads Lead to Rome], [1947], p. 172).
- 26 Cf. *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), September 17, 1994, p. 29.
- 27 A. Gambino, *Storia del Dopoguerra dalla Liberazione al potere DC* [History of the Postwar Period from the Liberation to the Christian Democrats' coming to Power], (1975), p. 479. The exact words Togliatti said to Rodano were: "These were the best results we could have achieved. This will do." Togliatti was the only member of his party who had his finger on the international pulse.
- 28 The text is reproduced in *Europeo* (Rome), no. 11 (March 17, 1990), p. 16.
- 29 Interview with William Colby, reported in *l'Unità* (Rome), May 1, 1996, p. 14.
- 30 Togliatti's letter to Stalin, dated January 4, 1951, is contained in the collection edited by Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, *Dagli archivi di Mosca* [From Moscow's Archives], (1998), pp. 417–20.
- 31 The shorthand record of the conversation between Secchia and Stalin on December 14, 1947, is in the same collection, pp. 289–93.
- 32 The full text of the speech is in *Relazioni Internazionali*, no. 43 (October 25, 1952), p. 1128.
- 33 Quoted by Fejtő, *A History of the people's Democracies*, I, p. 215.
- 34 On the process that led to the liquidation of the communist party secretary himself, Rudolf Slansky, in Prague in 1952, see the book written by the only scholar who was able to work on the proceedings of the inquiry, in 1968–9: Karel Kaplan. *Relazione sull'assassinio del segretario generale* [Account of the Assassination of the General Secretary], (1987).
- 35 In this sense, Togliatti's "official" comment on the electoral failure of April 18 is interesting (interview with *l'Unità*, Milan edition, July 2, 1948): "The 18 April election was not a free election ... There was brutal foreign intervention to force the voters' will." Immediately afterwards, he explains that the shift in allegiances made itself felt primarily among the "mass in the middle, wavering and politically inactive."

14 The Cold War: Democracy in Retreat

- 1 In 1944 a Republican senator and 12 deputies had tried to accuse the Roosevelt administration of being part of a vast conspiracy to "sell our democracy to the communists."

- 2 Chaplin also happened to be condemned as a “communist” and a “Jew” to boot, by George Orwell, who included him in a list of 135 names of people he reported to the authorities, among them Isaac Deutscher and Edward Hallett Carr.
- 3 The text is in the ISPI’s *Annuario della politica internazionale*, vol. XII (1955), p. 324.
- 4 *Pravda*, May 10, 1945.
- 5 A. Fontaine, *History of the Cold War*, trans. D. D. Paige and R. Bruce. 2 vols. (1968–70), I, p. 265.
- 6 M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. M. B. Petrovich (1962), p. 139.
- 7 E. Collotti, *Storia delle due Germanie [A History of the two Germanies]*, Einaudi, (1968), p. 174.
- 8 T. H. Tetens, *The New Germany and the Old Nazis* (1961), p. 37.
- 9 On this point, the social democrats under Kurt Schumacher had also, from the outset, opposed setting the eastern frontier at Potsdam (cf. E. Collotti, “La socialdemocrazia tedesca, 1945–1964,” in *Occidente* 10 [1954], pp. 465–6). Only when Willy Brandt became chancellor did this position change.
- 10 *Annuario di politica internazionale* (ISPI), vol. X (1953), p. 267. In a totally changed situation, such as the present one, the EDC would be the backbone of that “European military force” which the USA dislikes and Europe sadly lacks.
- 11 E. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (2002), Abacus edition p. 207.
- 12 The source for this is the volume *La gangrène*, published by Editions de Minuit and in the bookshops on June 18, 1959. The daily *Le Monde* reported the book’s contents on its front page. That same evening (again, in deference to the immortal principles of 1789) the book was seized by the police. The reaction to this measure was confined to a few newspapers such as *L’Aurore* and the Catholic *La Croix*. The public prosecutor issued a communiqué which in essence announced that the numerous witnesses who had supplied the evidence in the book were charged with “reconstituting a dissolved organisation” (that is, the Algerian FLN). Michelet, the minister of justice and former deportee at the time of the German occupation, dissociated himself from the attempt to cover up the police’s involvement, in which the minister Michel Debré was personally complicit. A hundred or so university teachers risked their jobs by publicly protesting over the *gangrène*. They should be thanked for their clear-sightedness. Pierre Vidal-Naquet was one; he has produced writings of lasting value on these events.

15 Towards the “Mixed System”

- 1 M. Duverger, *La Quinta repubblica, compimento della Rivoluzione francese [La Cinquième République, achèvement de la Révolution française]* (1989), Italian translation with an introduction by Nilde Iotti (Rome: Edizioni Camera dei deputati [published by the Chamber of Deputies], 1989).

- 2 Duverger, *La Repubblica tradita* [*Demain la République*] (1958), Italian translation with an introduction by Giuseppe Maranini (Milan: Edizioni Di Comunità, 1960).
- 3 Duverger, *I sistemi politici* [*Institutions politiques et droit constitutionnel*], Italian translation (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1978), pp. 281–91.
- 4 Duverger, *La Quinta Repubblica* (1989), p. 88.
- 5 The sample studied by Jean-Marie Mayeur in a doctoral thesis (1981) and summarized in a talk to the congress of the École française de Rome, “Le élites in Francia e in Italia degli anni Quaranta,” *Italia contemporanea* 153 (December, 1983), pp. 117–25 (especially 125) may be representative. It gives the social makeup of France’s second constituent assembly (1946). It may not be surprising that 30% of the communist deputies were of working-class origin, but it is remarkable that no less than 12% of the MRP (Catholic party) were too.
- 6 As a technique, this device was analogous to Hitler whipping up the rage of the “starved” people against the Jews who “starved” them.
- 7 The “last resort” argument is now the following: “proportional representation encourages competition between parties that belong to the same coalition” (Angelo Panebianco, *Corriere della Sera*, July 23, 2003, p. 1). This is an odd observation given that prearranged coalitions almost never exist where proportional representation is in place; quite the opposite: each party runs for itself and tries to appear for what it is. “Bulletproof” coalitions instead become indispensable under majority systems. This is where we see the disconcerting spectacle of *conflict* within a coalition (for the control of safe seats or to “run” in the second round, and so forth).
- 8 In presidential elections, which are the most important in the United States of America, several limiting or correcting mechanisms combine. The electoral system is a second-tier one (voters elect the voting delegates, via a majority system; moreover, voter certificates are not sent to citizen – citizens must collect them).
- 9 Letter to Mario Segni of May 7, 1987, published posthumously in the daily *La Repubblica* (Rome), June 2, 1997, p. 30.
- 10 As John Major did towards the end of his last term in office.
- 11 Karl Popper, in Duverger’s view.
- 12 M. Duverger, *La Quinta repubblica* (1989), pp. 89–90.
- 13 R. A. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (2001), p. 44
- 14 E. Noelle-Neumann, *La spirale del silenzio* [*Die Schweigespirale: öffentliche Meinung, unsere soziale Haut*], (2002), pp. 263–5.
- 15 *O Estado de São Paulo*, July 17, 2003.
- 16 If we consider that – as the study of one of the most stable and politically “informed” electorates, that of West Germany, has shown – on average only some 4–6% of the electorate change their minds, it is easy to see how influences that *shape* not just the *opinions* directly but the *values* of the electorate can be decisive. For an extreme case, cf. E. Noelle-Neumann, *La spirale del silenzio* (2002), pp. 279–83.

- 17 *Dialogo di Tristano a di un amico*
- 18 AA.VV., 1945–1975. *Italia* (1975), p. 48.
- 19 G. Mosca, “La sociologia del partito politico nella democrazia moderna” [“The sociology of the political party in the modern democracy”] (1912), in *Partiti e sindacati nella crisi del regime parlamentare [Parties and Unions in the Crisis of Parliamentary Government]*, (1949), p. 35.
- 20 The word “slavery” needs to be stripped of its dramatic connotations. The slavers of the United States at the time of the civil war were right to say that the condition of a worker in Manchester was far worse than that of a slave on a plantation. It is the struggle for “democracy” that has improved the lot of the Manchester worker, who before was a slave in practice. Now that condition is the lot of a “reserve force” of people who are barely visible or even displaced in remote regions. The word “slavery” is pertinent because even the personal freedom and *habeas corpus* of these new slaves are limited and altered. In the classical world, too, there were different types and conditions of “slavery,” and the word was used without a shudder of disdain by the great jurists, who constantly speak of it in that monument of “Western civilization” that is Roman law.
- 21 H. Carrère d’Encausse, *Le Pouvoir confisqué: gouvernants et gouvernés en URSS* (1980), pp. 40–1.
- 22 A. Gerschenkron, *Continuity in History and other Essays* (1968), pp. 4–5.
- 23 “Golpe di Eltsin” [“Yeltsin’s coup”] was the headline in the *Corriere della Sera* of September 22 that year.
- 24 © Project Syndicate: *Corriere del Ticino*, July 17, 2003.

16 Was it a New Beginning?

- 1 L. Trotsky, *The Imperialist War and the World Proletarian Revolution* (May 26, 1940) in *Guerra e rivoluzione [War and Revolution]*, (1973), pp. 160–3 and 175 (an attack on Gandhi who “refuses to create difficulties for Great Britain in the course of the present severe crisis”).
- 2 Letter to the congress, a continuation of the notes of December 24, 1922: “These two qualities in the two most eminent leaders in the current Central Committee may lead to schism, and if our party does not take measures to prevent it the schism may happen suddenly.”
- 3 Later published in the French Trotskyist periodical *La Cloche*.
- 4 *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman (1932–3); Italian translation (Milan: Mondadori, 1969), pp. 1196–7.
- 5 M. Essad Bey, *Stalin*, Italian translation (Milan: Treves, 1932) pp. 315–17.
- 6 Quoted by G. Luti in the preface to the Vallecchi edition of *Tecnica del colpo di stato [The Technique of the Coup d’état]*, Florence 1994, p. 24: the sentence appears almost identical to the beginning of chapter I = VIII in the Italian edition.

- 7 F. Perfetti, in the postscript to C. Malaparte, *Tecnica del colpo di stato* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), p. 206, states that the order of the French edition (1931) had been “manipulated” by Grasset.
- 8 E. H. Carr, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926–1929* (1969), vol. III, chapter 39.
- 9 *Storia del partito comunista (b) dell’URSS*, Italian translation (Naples: Ricciardi, 1944), p. 362.
- 10 L. Trotsky, *La mia vita* [*My Life*], Italian translation by Ervino Pocar (1930), pp. 472–5.
- 11 Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Italian translation, pp. 1196–7
- 12 Trotsky, *La mia vita* (1930), pp. 282–7.
- 13 I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky 1921–1929* (1959), pp. 450–75.
- 14 L. Feuchtwanger, *Moscow 1937: My Visit Described for my Friends*, trans. Irene Josephy (1937), p. 140.
- 15 A. De Gasperi, *Discorsi politici* [*Political Speeches*], (1956), pp. 15–18.
- 16 A story has been circulating in post-Soviet Russia (drawn, apparently, from the unpublished memoirs of the physician who was treating Stalin’s mother shortly before her death in 1937). She was asking – perhaps no longer in full possession of her faculties – why he lived in Moscow rather than in his native Georgia. She also asked him directly: “Who are you now?” Stalin reportedly answered with a question of his own: “Do you remember the tsar?” (*La Stampa*, August 14, 1992, p. 18).
- 17 Quoted by A. Rosenberg, *A History of Bolshevism*, trans. Ian F. D. Morrow (1934, reprint 1965), pp. 258–9.
- 18 I. Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (1969), pp. 794–5. In the same context, clearly also thinking of Peter the Great, he writes of Stalin: “He has driven barbarism from Russia by barbaric methods,” but adds: “given the means employed, the barbarism driven out through the door has partly re-entered through the window.”
- 19 *Enciclopedia Italiana*, XXXII (1936), p. 460. The entry was written before the Spanish civil war, when the fascists once again spoke of international Bolshevism controlled from Moscow.
- 20 I. Balbo, *Da Roma a Odessa sui cieli dell’Egeo e del Mar Nero* [*From Rome to Odessa, under Aegean and Black Sea Skies*], (1929), p. 105.
- 21 Dimitrov, *Diary* (2003), pp. 120–1.
- 22 “Men were what they were, not influenced by the delayed wisdom of posterity, and they acted accordingly” (G. M. Trevelyan, *England under Queen Anne* [1930–4], vol. I chapter 3).

Epilogue

- 1 M. Robespierre, *Oeuvres complètes* (1958), IX, p. 14.
- 2 Cf. above, pp. 18–19 and note 8, p. 254.

- 3 A. Rosenberg, “Aristoteles über Diktatur und Demokratie,” *Rheinisches Museum*, ns 82 (1933), pp. 339–61 (= *Demokratie und Klassenkampf*, Ausgewählte Studien, ed. H.-U. Wehler [1974], pp. 103–25: the reflection referred to in the text is on p. 119).
- 4 “Indeed every party can govern, but by rights only the democratic party” (Supplementbände IV [1848], p. 232, entry *Parteien*).
- 5 Some of their exploits were mentioned on an Italian radio news bulletin of August 8, 1999 (Gr 1, 8 a.m.).
- 6 Regarding this passage, see the commentary by Aldo Corcella, “La libertà senza l’uguaglianza”: Leopardi, le società antiche e l’India, in *Studi sulla tradizione classica, per Mariella Cagnetta* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1999), pp. 193–211.

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