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THE WEST GERMAN 68-ers
ENCOUNTER THE EVENTS OF 1989:
MORE THAN A NUMERICAL REVERSAL

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Introduction

This essay poses itself a straightforward task: to offer some answers as to why the West German left has--with virtually no exceptions--reacted with despondency, often bordering on hostility, to the monumental events transforming East Central Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989/90.¹ To be sure, the West German left was as surprised by the structural magnitude and alacrity of these epoch-making developments as the rest of the world. Nobody foresaw the appearance, let alone the far-reaching consequences of this .annus mirabilis, perhaps not even the subjects of this historic change themselves. Moreover, it is no secret that the transformations in Eastern Europe and the virtual disappearance of the Soviet bloc have caused substantial crises of identity for virtually all left-wing movements and parties in the West. Most of them have responded with some ambivalence, perhaps even trepidations concerning their own future. But none seemed as reticent, skeptical, critical, even outright hostile regarding these events as the West German left. One German observer astutely referred to this mood as an "anti-position."²

While there have been a number of excellent accounts of this anti-position and fine descriptions of its various manifestations, none of these contributions have attempted to give a comprehensive analytic answer as to why this has been the case.³ This is precisely what this paper attempts to do. Concretely, it will discuss a number of items which will demonstrate the uniqueness of the West German left among its counterparts in the rest of the advanced capitalist world. As

will be clear, all these items are inextricably linked to Germany's recent past, thus rendering the West German left's particularly negative reactions to the events of 1989/90 an integral part of modern German history. As such, the "Germanness" of these reactions cannot be denied.

The West German Left's Problems with Nationalism

If one had to point to perhaps the most consistent and arguably fatal Achilles heel of the European left's strategic thinking over the last 100 years, it surely would have to be the left's woefully inadequate understanding of nationalism as a major force and a powerful agent of collective identity. Hailing from the cosmopolitanism and international existence of the early socialists, as well as from Marx's correct assessment that modernization entailed an increasingly internationalized and global exploitation of labor by capital, leftist intellectuals by and large concluded that progressive politics had to be ipso facto international. Above all, international seemed always to mean a- or even anti-national. Whereas the left generally assumed identities derived from the "universalistic" realm of production to be progressive, it viewed identities stemming from the "particularistic" areas of geography and culture with suspicion. Most of the time the left viewed the latter identities as a priori reactionary. Only in the context of Third World liberation movements did the left ever accept nationalism as a legitimate and progressive expression of collective solidarity.

Specifically, the left accorded nationalism its Salonfaehigkeit mainly in the context of its struggles with the United States or its allies, i.e. when forces confronting American and/or capitalist hegemony used nationalism in support of their cause. Whenever conflicts arose which involved the Soviet Union as a repressor, the left either remained silent, sided with the Soviets, or--in its more liberal version--rallied to the cause of the oppressed, always emphasizing that the support accorded the anti-Soviet combatants was given for their lack of civil rights and autonomy, not their inability to express their national identity. This remained constant from the East Berlin uprisings of 1953, through the Hungarian revolt of 1956, the destruction of the Prague spring of 1968, the various Polish incursions in the course of the 1970s and Afghanistan in 1979.

In addition to these "generic" problems which virtually all lefts of the First World have exhibited for nearly one century, the German left has had to confront additional complexities in its dealing with nationalism which reflect key peculiarities of modern German history. Unlike in the British, the French and even the Italian left, nationalism with all its complexities played a crucial role already in the debates of the nascent socialist movement in Germany. With the processes of state and nation building incomplete, socialist politics in Germany became inevitably intertwined with issues pertaining to them. Should one attain social and political progress via a unified national German state, even under the aegis of a semi-feudal Prussia, as

the Lassallians argued, or was it better for the left first to support broad progressive, bourgeois-led coalitions whose task it would be to topple the reactionary aristocracy prior to constructing a united Germany based on the parliamentary principles of liberal democracy?⁴ Even though Bismarck's international and domestic triumphs rendered the debate moot by rapidly eliminating the second option, the role of nation and nationalism, as well as socialism's relations to them, had entered the left's world on a permanent basis. The particular acuteness of this topic in the case of the German left hailed from the fact that it had to confront two simultaneous problems in the complex formation of class and national identities. In contrast, socialist movements in Western Europe were by and large "only" faced with one of these problems.

Nationalism most certainly did not endear itself to the German left since even before the official institutionalization of the newly established nationalist German Reich, the state used the rhetoric of national interest to outlaw socialists. With nationalism becoming increasingly more rabid towards the turn of the century in circles generally hostile to the German left, nationalism's ambivalence and its pejorative meaning grew for socialists. It also became a major topic of programmatic and strategic debates. How were class and nation to be reconciled by socialists? Could nationalism be progressive under certain circumstances? If yes, which ones, where and when? While, for obvious reasons, never as keenly debated by German socialists as

by their Austrian comrades, Rosa Luxemburg's polemics on nationalism inside German social democracy simply have no West European counterparts.

Nationalism continued to matter to the German left throughout the troubled Weimar years. While increasing its hostility to German nationalism which by then had become the virtual prerogative of the reactionary right, there were definite attempts by the left to use nationalism for its own purposes as in the case of the Communists' strategy of "national Bolshevism."⁵ While this and similar experiments were simply no match for the right, it is clear that nationalism played an existentially crucial--albeit largely negative--role in the German left's identity during the Weimar Republic. The German left's traditional aversion to nationalism received unprecedented support with Hitler's rise to power.

Hitler and Auschwitz not only changed German history but all the conventional parameters of nationalism. It is through the lasting legacy of this change that one has to analyze the West German left's uniquely troubled relationship to its own (i.e. federal republican) and German nationalism, as well as to nationalism in general. It is quite true that following the war and well into the 1950s, it was the German left--particularly the Social Democratic party (SPD)--which pursued a strategy of a single German state. In marked contrast to Adenauer's policy which aimed at Germany's integration into the West--even at the cost of unity--as the only possibility to overcome Germany's

errand ways of the past and guarantee a prosperous and democratic future for Germany and Europe, the German left believed that only a socialist Germany was a plausible guarantee against a recurring of fascism on German soil. This socialist Germany was to be demilitarized, pacifist and not belonging to any political alliance. Since the left's electoral bastions lay in what became the German Democratic Republic in October 1949, unification for the Social Democrats also had a pragmatic-instrumental dimension which should not be underestimated. Thus, although explicitly pro-unification and single-statist, the West German left pursued these policies more in the name of socialism and a fundamental restructuring of class power in Germany, than in the name of conventional nationalism. Paradoxically, those sentiments remained strong, though often subdued, in the officially two-statist christian democratic right.

With the "Westernization" of the Federal Republic's left complete by the late 1950s, the existing two-state solution became one of the fundamental ideological pillars of the West German left. Being a German nationalist in any way, shape or form simply became unacceptable for any leftist. With the belated discovery of the Holocaust in the course of the 1960s, any kind of German nationalism was discredited in leftist circles. Indeed, it was during this time--and not immediately after the war--that much of the West German left developed the notion that Germany's permanent division is one of the just costs exacted from the German people for Auschwitz. In no other West European left did

nationalism evoke such embarrassment and conflicted emotions as in the Federal Republic. Thus, it was de rigueur for West German leftists to root for Algeria in its soccer match against the Federal Republic at the World Cup in 1982. Similarly, one of the major cleavages between West German and French socialists was their different sensibility toward nationalism, particularly their own, but also--as we will see--those of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It would have been unthinkable for the West German left to welcome the deployment of a German nuclear force as a sign of the Federal Republic's national independence even from the much-hated United States similar to the French left's often enthusiastic approval of the force de frappe.

One of the major tenets of virtually all West German leftists was the complete acceptance of the German Democratic Republic as a legitimate German state. That this was the case is best illustrated by the left's complete misreading of what exactly happened on November 9, 1989. Well into the winter of 1990--in some cases such as major segments of the Green party, until the East German elections of March 18, 1990--the bulk of the West German left simply refused to acknowledge the fact that an undeniable majority of East Germans wanted--for whatever reasons--to have their country join West Germany, thereby ending a forty-year episode which defined the postwar European order. All kinds of explanations for this were given by the West German left, ranging from the evil machinations of Helmut Kohl to the slightly more elitist version that the East Germans obviously do

not know what is good for them if they sell their souls for Western consumer goods. Whence this assessment of the German Democratic Republic by the West German left? Let us now turn to this discussion.

The German Democratic Republic and Real Existing Socialism:
Unloved But Beyond Reproach

For the West German left, the GDR's legitimacy hails from many sources. Foremost among them is the universally held view within the West German left that for all the GDR's shortcomings it--rather than the Federal Republic--represents a true break with Germany's fascist past.⁶ By establishing the first socialist experiment on German soil under adverse domestic and international conditions, the GDR--in notable contrast to the FRG--came to terms with Germany's past simply by being socialist which, after all, was antithetical to capitalism, perhaps the single most compelling social arrangement favoring the rise of fascism. The establishment of socialism extended the GDR a "legitimacy bonus" in the eyes of the West German left which the latter bestowed on few other countries outside the Third World. The GDR's dictatorial ways and bureaucratic repression, although meeting with the West German left's disapproval, were simply no match for the system's true achievement, namely the abolition of private property. With this major step the GDR had obviously initiated a structural change which made it in the eyes of most

West German leftists qualitatively superior to any capitalist society. Even compared to social democratic success stories such as Sweden, for example, the West German left perceived the GDR as qualitatively more progressive. Of course it was flawed, but in its essence it was socialist which was certainly not the case with Sweden. Not only was the GDR socialist, but it was so on German soil: it embodied the legacy of Marx, Engels, Liebknecht (more son than father), Luxemburg, Thaelmann, Brecht in a country where Hitler had ruled not long ago. The GDR, though deformed, did represent--in principle and structure at least -- the good Germany.

The GDR's perception by the West German left is inextricably linked to the latter's political fate inside the Federal Republic as well as to the developments of West German politics at large. As in so many other things in the Federal Republic, the major watershed in the perceptions of and relations with the GDR occurred in the late 1960s.⁷ Until then, virtually all public discourse in the Federal Republic was engulfed by an anti-communism bordering on an article of faith if not outright hysteria. In no other European country did anti-communism play such a fundamentally system-affirming role as in the Federal Republic. Indeed, much of the West German left--led by the pro-unity, one-statist Social Democratic Party--shared this antipathy for everything communist; throughout the 1950s and much of the 1960s.

Enter '68. West German public life experienced a fundamental

transformation "from above" as well as "from below" in both of which the GDR, communism, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were to play a decisive role. As to the changes "from above," the most important and lasting center on the Willy-Brandt-initiated Ostpolitik which in many ways has to be viewed as one of the decisive contributors to communism's collapse twenty years later. Secure in its explicitly reformist position in an increasingly prosperous Federal Republic, West German social democracy began a strategic initiative which completely contradicted its main tenets of the 1950s: Replacing their earlier anti-Communism with an acceptance of it, the Social Democrats began pursuing relations with the GDR, thereby giving further evidence to their apparently final departure from a one-state solution and their legitimization of two sovereign German states. The essence of the SPD's policy was what its intellectual architect, Egon Bahr, called "Wandel durch Annaeherung" (change through rapprochement). Ostpolitik's dialectic could best be summarized by the following quotation from Willy Brandt: "In order to shake up the status quo politically, we had to accept the status quo territorially."⁸ Following initial opposition to Ostpolitik from West Germany's conservatives, this policy became a bipartisan pillar of the Federal Republic's relations with the GDR and all of Eastern Europe, thus making Ostpolitik the most lasting and successful component of the social democrats' reform initiatives of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

As to the reforms "from below," it was the West German

student movement and the New Left which challenged virtually every convention and institution in the Federal Republic, including anti-communism and the postwar order. Critical of communism's reality in the GDR and Eastern Europe, the New Left was equally vocal in its opposition to anti-communism's repression as part of the Cold War atmosphere which built the Federal Republic. Explicitly dismissive of the old left's (i.e. social democracy's and communism's) bureaucratic, centralized and heteronomous qualities, the New Left and its legacy nevertheless transformed the characterization "anti-communist" into an epithet--a genuine "Schimpfwort"--in most West German intellectual circles by the mid 1970s. That the Social Democrats were not enamored with the rapidity and direction of the New Left's reforms and that they still feared being labeled "red lovers" in a society barely shedding its cold war past was best exemplified by their feeling compelled to pass the so called "Radical Decree" which was to screen all applicants to the civil service for communists and other "enemies of the constitution."⁹ There can be little doubt that the SPD-initiated Radical Decree was in good part a domestic pacifier for Ostpolitik.

The New Left's creative and euphoric movement phase of the late 1960s disintegrated in a number of directions by the early 1970s. Some new leftists began their "long march through the institutions," most notably the world of social democracy with its party, affiliated research institutes and ancillary labor organizations. Others formed the core of a number of leftist

organizations which--in opposition to the SPD and the establishment--adhered to a variety of orthodox Leninist positions. A minority even joined organizations close to the West German Communist Party (DKP) which had been re-admitted to the West German political scene in 1968 following a 12-year constitutional ban of communism at the height of the Cold War. While these worlds were very different from each other and were often consumed by bitter ideological rivalries, they also developed certain commonalities which clearly identified them as "the left." One of the shared values in this milieu was never to criticize the GDR and other Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, even if one disapproved of certain concrete measures and policies. In this world of the post-68 West German left, "real existing socialism" was without any doubt preferable to any capitalist arrangement, hence worthy of at least tacit--if not explicit--approval. This led to the shameful situation in which the West German left became perhaps the most solid Western supporter of the status quo in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s and 1980s publicly and consciously forsaking the plight of opposition movements.

Examples abound. Unlike in France, and to a lesser degree in Italy, where Alexander Solzhenitsyn's The Gulag Archipelago caused considerable consternation and soul searching among leftwing intellectuals, the West German left's response was a scolding of its French comrades for drawing the wrong conclusions about socialism and the Soviet Union from Solzhenitsyn's book.

Above all, the West German left decried Solzhenitsyn's nationalism and criticized the French for overlooking such an obvious shortcoming in their effusive praise of the author which seemed part of the French intellectuals' zealous quest for the discovery of liberalism and the shedding of their Marxist past. Teaching about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was repressed in one of the trade union movement's most important youth education programs. The trade union's youth organization refused to condemn the Soviet invasion even though this condemnation was to have occurred in a balanced way by having the Central American involvement of the United States criticized in equally harsh terms. A leading member of the printing, media and writers' union (currently IG Medien, formerly IG Druck und Papier) condemned union members who--as German authors--protested the dissolution of the Polish writers' union. He called them a "fifth column" which helped destabilize Poland by "offering resistance against the regime."¹⁰ Others in this union called KOR, the organization of Polish intellectuals explicitly formed to help workers and closely associated with Solidarity, "a questionable organization which transforms Solidarity into a political resistance movement."¹¹ Many railed against the "catholic-reactionary" nature of Solidarity, and one member even dared to compare Polish activists to Hitler's storm troopers, the SA.¹² It has been common knowledge that in certain West German unions members who tried to organize symposia in favor of dissident movements in Eastern Europe met with massive resistance on the part of the

union leadership and fellow unionists. That this tacit approval of the communist status quo reached the highest echelons of the social democratic hierarchy was best exemplified by that bizarre--though telling--coincidence of December 1981 when Helmut Schmidt spent a sequestered weekend tete-a-tete with Erich Honecker in the latter's country house in the GDR while General Jaruzelski's troops imposed martial law in Poland. Worst of all, Schmidt did not find the events sufficiently disturbing to leave his meeting with Honecker.¹³ The East European dissidents' disappointment concerning this betrayal on the part of the West German left runs deep. This sentiment was best conveyed by the Czech intellectual Pavel Kohut in his speech to guests gathered in Berlin for the celebration of Willy Brandt's 76th birthday: "You will have to analyze it yourselves why you dropped us in the 1970s, why you--instead of allying yourselves with the beaten--preferred the beaters, or at best stayed neutral."¹⁴ There are no comparable feelings in Eastern Europe vis-a-vis any other Western left.

West Germany's Special Relationship with the United States

As a consequence of the Third Reich's destruction and Germany's broken national identity ever since, the United States assumed a very special role in the formation and weaning of the political reality known as West Germany, something the United States has not replicated anywhere else in Western Europe and perhaps not even in Japan due to that country's continued cohesion as one sovereign entity. The special texture of German-

American--as opposed to British-American, French-American, or Dutch-American--relations clearly lies in the broken nature of Germany's national identity and historical legacy. For just as in West Germany, so, too, has the United States continued to exert a hegemonic authority in military and political relations vis-a-vis virtually all West European countries since the end of World War II. Again, in a clear parallel with the German situation, the United States emerged all over Western Europe as the first and foremost economic and cultural power since 1945. And yet, American missiles and Coca-Cola embodied a very different symbolic--thus political--texture in West Germany as compared to any other West European country. Both have been appreciated or rejected by different people at different times in France, Britain, or Italy; in no instance, however, did American missiles or Coca-Cola play a key part in the post-World War II identity formation of the French, British, or Italians. One could take or leave either (as in the case of the French who decidedly opted for Coca-Cola and spurned American missiles as early as 1986) or both without any of the choices implying something beyond the manifest nature of the choices themselves. In other words, in contrast to the West German case, there never existed a meta level of understanding and experience beyond the manifestly political and cultural in America's relations with the countries of Western Europe. Without a doubt, the creation of the cold war and Germany's position as a frontline state in an antagonistically divided Europe made American penetration of the

Federal Republic's political, military, economic, and cultural life a lot more pronounced than anywhere else in the West. But more than geography, it was the broken continuity of German history and the ensuing uncertainty of German national identity which lent the United States willy-nilly a role in West Germany's post-1945 existence that in this form existed nowhere else in Europe. The United States has been qualitatively different toward the Federal Republic than toward any other political and military ally, just as Americanism as a sociocultural phenomenon has meant different things to post-World War II Germans than to other Europeans.

As already mentioned, nowhere in Europe was the belief in the evils of communism as essential to the formation of postwar political identity as was the case in the Federal Republic. Indeed, this commonly shared distrust and hatred of the Soviet Union and communism created an important bond between the United States and the Federal Republic, and formed a major pillar of what was to become the much-vaunted "specialness" of German-American relations. It bears mention, of course, that this "special" relationship was from its very inception profoundly unequal in America's favor which is not to say that the West Germans did not derive major benefits from it on all levels. But therein lay many of the problems which have since emerged. Had the United States only been repressive and exploitative vis-a-vis the Federal Republic, there would not have developed any conflict and ambivalence by the Germans towards the United States and

Americans. A relatively straightforward aversion would have arisen with little need for explanation and analysis. The United States, however, resembles a rich uncle with annoying foibles, much generosity, and definite demands who is admired and needed by an initially poor, young, and talented nephew. The nephew may even appreciate the uncle and emulate him. But would he love him? Would he accept him without any resistance and resentment always knowing--and being reminded of--the uncle's initial generosity with material and spiritual support? Would there not be constant jockeying for more control on the part of the uncle and greater autonomy on the part of the increasingly independent nephew? It is in this dynamic, unique to German-American relations in the context of postwar European history, that anti-Americanism attained a special quality in West Germany.¹⁵

Nowhere has this attained a more pronounced and acute reality than in the Federal Republic's leftist milieu.¹⁶ For the West German left, America is a priori politically dangerous and morally reprehensible by virtue of its power as the leading capitalist actor in a capitalist-dominated world. The West German left sees the United States as dominating, domineering, and intimidating due to its might and its willingness to use it without much restraint. By being the world's leading capitalist power, the United States--for the West German left--cannot but be imperialist, thus predatory, bellicose, and brutal. In addition to a structural critique of the political and economic arrangements in the United States and the profound skepticism

vis-a-vis America's very existence, the West German left also paid considerable attention to particular American policies which it saw as prima facie evidence for America's unsavory role in the world. Beginning with the Vietnam War and continuing with American assistance to Israel and the United States' involvement in Central America, the West German left had ample opportunities to have its general views about America empirically corroborated. Yet, the left's anti-Americanism attained a different quality in the course of the early 1980s. Starting with the neutron bomb debate in the late 1970s and accentuated by the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in 1983, the West German left began to see the United States as an evil and dangerous occupying power whose reckless policies were to lead to Germany's physical annihilation.¹⁷ The victims of American aggression metamorphosized from Salvadorian peasants to German housewives. Whereas in its pre-1980s anti-Americanism the West German left viewed the Federal Republic as a quasi junior accomplice to the United States in the two countries' joint quest to exploit the Third World, Germany (N.B. not just the Federal Republic) had in the left's eyes joined the Third World as one of America's most threatened victims at the height of the Euromissile debate. Thus opined a grafitto on a Frankfurt wall: "The FRG=El Salvador."

In this context the West German left added yet another favorable dimension to its already relatively benevolent picture of the Soviet Union and its East European allies. While still scorned for its bureaucratic centralism and excessive heteronomy,

the Soviet Union was perceived by the left in the Federal Republic not only as a socialist country but as a peaceful, defensive and reactive global power which naturally had to arm itself in its legitimate defense against the American aggressor.¹⁸ Only very unusual West German intellectuals such as Peter Schneider who have been explicitly using the events of 1989/90 to come to terms with their own past as leftists have now publicly confessed their bewilderment and shame when the Kremlin, following Gorbachev's accession to power, openly admitted to having deployed its own intermediate-range missiles as part of a premeditated offensive strategy against the West.¹⁹ This revelation should come as no surprise since the Soviet Union consistently escaped rigorous criticism by the West German left well before the Euromissile crisis.

The German Left's Excessive Etatism

In its communist as well as social democratic version, the German left has traditionally exhibited a greater degree of "state fixation" than any of its West European counterparts.²⁰ Developing without the substantial anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist traditions of the Latin lefts and not sharing the British labor movement's autonomy in civil society, the history of the German left has been inextricably linked with a strong state on virtually all levels: the state as creator of a nation; repressor; provider of welfare and protection; regulator and mediator among groups and classes; initiator of political reforms; guardian of an acceptable industrial relations system.

In the realms of the political economy--in notable contrast to issues pertaining to civil liberties--the West German left has by and large continued to view the state as good. One can detect a clear liking for a "verstaatlichte Gesellschaft" (a state-dominated society) which by and large enjoys a preference vis-a-vis any other social arrangement in West Germany's leftist milieu.²¹ This "state fixation" has led union politics in the Federal Republic--certainly a key carrier of progressive causes in the country--to be among the most "juridified" anywhere in the advanced capitalist world.²²

One of the corollaries of this "state fixation" has led to a deep-seated suspicion of the market. Crudely put, much of the West German left adheres to the notion of "state good, market bad" regardless of the issues involved. If the state remains associated with solidaristic measures and a structural propensity to foster collectivism, the market is seen as the state's exact opposite, undermining all solidarities and encouraging privatization. Above all, the market is associated with the furthering of individual choice and liberty, certainly among the most disdained concepts inside the West German left. Thus, it should have come as no surprise to Petra Kelly of the Green Party that few of her party colleagues and comrades in the West German left supported the Chinese students who dared challenge the Chinese communist regime with that ultimate bourgeois symbol, a replica of the statue of liberty.²³ Kelly compared the West German left unfavorably to the Italian which did in fact

demonstrate on behalf of the Chinese students' quest for liberal reforms in China. Much more characteristic of the West German left's antipathies towards any movement clamoring for individual liberties is the opinion of a leading intellectual and veteran of the West German student movement of the late 1960s cited by Kelly in her article: "We don't have a clear picture.. .what did the demonstrators mean by democracy? Did they have a clear program? One also has reservations about becoming engaged on behalf of the movement, since photographs from China showed violent students and demonstrators indiscriminately attacking tanks, vehicles and soldiers with rocks and rods." Another leading leftist simply resorted to racism and the worst kind of "First-Worldism": "What were the first three men called who were executed? One cannot even remember their names."²⁴

Conclusion

None of this is to say that the West German left will be spared soul-searching discussions in the coming years about socialism and its own past as it transforms itself from the West into the German left. These will be trying times for many individuals and a collective which deserves enormous credit for having made the Federal Republic by far the most humane, enlightened and democratic polity that ever existed on German soil. At this early juncture one can detect the roots for the following contradictory but also complementary lines of argument:

--Total denial: Socialism is superior to capitalism. The Soviet Union and its East European allies were socialist, regardless of their shortcomings. They were thus superior to the West in every possible way. Everybody will soon realize that the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe will be governed by various forms of neo-fascist and ultra-nationalist regimes beholden to crude consumerism and a market capitalism creating hitherto unprecedented social inequality, economic hardship and ethnic strife. Only socialism, whose defeat is temporary, could prevent these countries from returning to barbarism. This openly Stalinist whitewash which continues to sing the unmitigated praises of real existing socialism represents the voice of a small minority within the West German left.²⁵

--Partial denial: Much more prevalent are various interpretations which admit to some problems but continue to extol the socialist "project" and the moral--if not economic and political--superiority of socialism. The number of themes comprising partial denial is best characterized by the following quotation: "What did not exist does not necessarily have to be wrong; and: The opposite of something wrong need not by necessity be right."²⁶

The first part of the statement denies that socialism ever existed anywhere in the world, most certainly in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Whatever system ruled those countries--Stalinism, bureaucratic repression, state-led accumulation, modernization from above, a deformed workers' state--it most certainly was not socialism. Hence, as the Greens' Jutta Ditfurth

argued at a panel discussion at the Humboldt University in East Berlin, there simply is no need to re-examine socialism's validity as a model, because it was not socialism that was defeated in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union since these systems were never socialist.²⁷ This exoneration of socialism is extremely widespread in virtually all facets of the West German left. It is often accompanied by a quasi-religious extolling of socialism, not so much as a political and economic reality, but as a moral mission. As a leading West German leftist intellectual told me over the telephone, "one is simply a more righteous person if one is a socialist." It is interesting that people with such views continue to seek making socialism into an orderly "science" superior to capitalism's chaos even though none of science's most elementary qualities (such as falsification, for example) and all of religion's (unquestioned adherence to dogma) pertain to their political approach and general Weltanschauung.

The second part of the above-mentioned quotation warns against any extolling of capitalism simply by virtue of socialism's ostensible failure. This faute de mieux embracing of capitalism as the lesser of two evils --understandably so prevalent among East European and Soviet intellectuals²⁹ --need not worry the author of those lines in the German case. Most German leftists have remained completely immune to capitalism's lure throughout these momentous events and will hardly concede anything positive to it in economy or politics. Much more prevalent, however, will be the debate concerning the next line

of argument.

--The frenzied search for the elusive "third way": Everybody seems on a treasure hunt for the elusive "third way" combining the humane collectivism and solidaristic protection of the socialist model with the efficient accumulation and allocation, plus the individual liberties, of a market dominated capitalism. A number of points constantly appear in this ubiquitous debate: First, there is a woeful absence of empirical examples. With the Yugoslav economy in total shambles and the country on the verge of political disintegration, nobody extols the Yugoslav model as the much-vaunted panacea along the third way. Second, there is still the assumption that real existing socialism--of the GDR variety in particular--created a certain solidarity among people, and a serenity and humaneness in interpersonal relations which ought to be (re)introduced into the brutal, commodified and rat-race-dominated West with its individualistic and pushy "Ellenbogengesellschaft" (elbow society). Third, everybody wants to go "beyond social democracy." Systems such as Sweden's or Austria's for example are always mentioned in a "yes, but" mode. Of course the Federal Republic--let alone any other Western country--never serves as a model for anything. Lastly, there still continues the search for the all-encompassing solution, the total transformation of politics and economics, the definitive answer, the new--and completely moral--human being.

The latter point is particularly surprising as well as disappointing coming from a left which has arguably included

perhaps the most effective and powerful new social movements anywhere in the world. It may go to show that despite these movements' insistence on being neither left nor right but ahead--in other words in being quintessential representatives of "post-modern" politics--they are actually much closer to the traditional left than they might like to admit. The greenish subculture of the Federal Republic maintained a surprisingly strong reddish hue over the years. Despite the many post-modern claims to the contrary, Socialism with a capital "S" still possesses a powerful spell over the German left.

Instead of its moping, it behooves the German left to rejoice about the following immense improvements in European and global politics to which paradoxically--perhaps even unbeknown to itself--it contributed through its activism of the 1970s and 1980s: the end of the Cold War meaning the beginning of an era of true peace and integration in Europe, not just an extended cease fire; the end of Germany's division; the long overdue liberation for the left of having to bear the millstone of Stalinism and Soviet-style despotism around its neck whenever the word "socialism" is mentioned in any context; the extension of liberal democracy from Portugal to the Ural mountains for the first time ever in European history.

Thus, the German left should forget about salvaging anything "socialist" from Eastern Europe and the German Democratic Republic. Those who argue that these societies were not socialist should be consistent: they really weren't. Contrary to widespread

belief among the West German left, most everything in the GDR turned out disastrously, including the much-vaunted day care centers.³⁰ The solidarity in the GDR was based on shared misery and scarcity, exactly the opposite of the socialist view which envisions the creation of a solidarity based on personal choice and abundance. Above all, the left in the Federal Republic should give itself credit for having created 1968 which has proven to be so woefully absent in the world of real existing socialism. Instead of living socialism (small s) through the emancipatory struggles which transformed the Federal Republic and other Western societies "from below," the GDR and its East European cohort were decreed Socialism (capital S) "from above" which led to a wholesale state-run "emancipation" that treated citizens like wards, thereby amounting to no emancipation at all. Just look at how "salonfaehig" racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, authoritarianism and all other bad "isms" remained through forty years of real existing socialism after the left had made them all but unacceptable--though far from nonexistent --in the West, including the Federal Republic. The left in Germany has to come to the bitter realization that the GDR and real existing socialism have bequeathed nothing positive for the left at all. Sad--and incredible--as this may sound, the experiences of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe can only serve as negative examples and warnings for Western leftists in their continued legitimate and necessary struggle to improve the human condition. If anything, the long overdue Leninist debacle, will soon enhance

the validity of socialism as an emancipatory project. Whether socialism will ever become the hegemonic system of an advanced industrial economy with a democratic polity nobody can tell. It is perhaps better that way.

Notes

1. In this essay the West German left comprises all Old Left groups to the left of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) such as the Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (DKP) and the broad legacy of the "68ers and the New Left. Thus, it includes all the factions of the Green Party ranging from the "Fundamentalists" on the party's rejectionist or maximalist wing through its mediators in the middle, the so called "Aufbruch" group, to the party's accommodationists known as "Realists." The West German left also encompasses all facets of the so called "new social movements" (feminists, peace activists, anti-nuclear demonstrators) who defined the agenda of progressive politics in the Federal Republic throughout the late 1970s and much of the 1980s. Lastly, I will also count a good part of the West German trade union movement and the Social Democratic Party as belonging to the left. Definitely as a consequence of 1968 and its subsequent legacies, a number of trade unions such as IG Metall and IG Medien--those I have elsewhere termed "activists"--have been very much part of all aspects of leftist politics in the Federal Republic. The same pertains to the left-wing of the SPD.

2. Sven Papke, "Links und kleinmuetig? in Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte, Volume 41, Number 7, July 1990, pp. 463-474; Papke uses the wonderful German term "Missmut," best translated as ill-humoredness, despondency, sullenness, discontent as a section heading for the part of his paper where he describes the concrete reactions by the West German left to the events of 1989/90. He also uses the phrase "Noergelei der Intellektuellen" which could be translated as the grumbling, grouching, nagging--in short the "kvetching"--of the intellectuals. The title of Papke's essay translates into English as "left and dejected."

3. In addition to Papke's fine piece, they are Walther Mueller-Jentsch, "Entzauberung eines historischen Projekts: Der Sozialismus ist im Osten gescheitert und im Westen von der Zeit ueberholt" in Frankfurter Rundschau, August 1, 1989; Norbert Roemer, "Politik sozialer Partnerschaft--Stellungnahme zur gewerkschaftlichen Sozialismus-Debatte" in Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte, Volume 41, Number 4, April 1990; pp.217-225; Wolfgang Kowalsky, "Zur Kritik linker Deutschlandpolitik" in Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte, Volume 41, Number 4, April 1990; 226-232; and above all Peter Schneider, "Man kann ein Erdbeben auch verpassen" in Die Zeit, April 27, 1990 and reprinted in Gorman Politics & Society, Number 20, Summer 1990, pp.1-21.

4. Werner Conze and Dieter Groh, Die Arbeiterbewegung in der nationalen Bewegung: Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie vor, waehrend und nach der Reichsgruendung. Stuttgart: Klett, 1966. This debate is somewhat reminiscent of the "dependencia" controversy of the late 1960s and early 1970s in which the issue was also the

establishment of progressive politics in the Third World, mostly Latin America: Should progressive forces in these countries advocate the forging of interclass, i.e. national, alliances in order to diminish these countries' dependence on the neo-imperialist First World, even if these alliances include openly reactionary elements such as Junker-like landholders for example? Or should progressives advocate a social revolution at home first in order to eliminate the domestic forces of reaction before embarking on the larger national mission of dealing with the outside world? It is not by chance that the German situation evokes this debate since Germany exhibited characteristics in its state and nation building which resembled those often encountered in the Third World.

5. Louis Dupeux, *National Bolchevisme: Strategie communiste et dynamique conservatrice*. Paris: H. Champion, 1979.

6. To emphasize the structural characteristics and capital-dependent nature of the Nazi regime, as well as to show the ubiquity of many of its features, the West German left has consistently preferred to refer to this epoch in German history by the generic "fascist" instead of the specific "National Socialist" or "Nazi." I have argued elsewhere that this seemingly innocuous terminological issue served the West German left as a convenient distancing mechanism from the particularities of the Nazi--i.e. German--as opposed to the generally fascist crimes. This has had very deleterious effects on the West German left's understanding of Jewish nationalism and the state of Israel. See Andrei S. Markovits, "Germans and Jews: An Uneasy Relationship Continues" in *Jewish Frontier*, April 1984; pp.14-20.

7. It might be a consequence of personal bias, but I for one am convinced that it would be virtually impossible to exaggerate the importance of 1968 as a watershed for virtually every development in the Federal Republic's private and public life. If one had to summarize the difference between the FRG and the GDR in one word, I would not hesitate for one second in blurting out "1968." It is not by chance that a former head of the conservative Konrad Adenauer Foundation referred to 1968--disapprovingly one might add--as a much more decisive caesura in recent German history than 1945.

8. Willy Brandt, *Begegnungen und Einsichten: Die Jahre 1960-75*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, p. 64 2.

9. For a recently published fine study on the Radical Decree, see Gerard Braunthal, *Political Loyalty and Public Service in West Germany: The 1972 Decree Against Radicals and Its Consequences*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.

10. As quoted in Schneider, "Man kann ein Erdbeben auch verpassen," *German Politics and Society*, p. 6

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. Everything that I wrote about the West German left's view of nationalism in the First World and Eastern Europe pertains a fortiori to religion. Religion to most leftist intellectuals in the Federal Republic is little more than the "idiocy of rural life" and "false consciousness" which conceal the "objective interests" that define the essence of politics. As such, religion--together with nationalism--is merely a sleight of hand by the ruling classes which leftists correctly perceive and then dismiss as obfuscation. With certain exceptions such as Latin America's "liberation theology" and the beginnings of the Shiite revolution against the dreaded Shah and his secret police (Savak), German leftists have continued to feel uncomfortable when religion enters politics. They thus run the risk of misinterpreting its position in a country's political landscape and branding it "reactionary" much too prematurely. I will never forget the numerous discussions I had with West German leftists inside the SPD, the trade unions, the Green party and any of the many "new social movements" who refused to support Solidarity in Poland since they found it "reactionary" by virtue of the central role accorded to Catholicism in the movement. One person made it clear to me that he could not support anybody who--like Lech Walesa--had pictures of a Madonna (in this case of Czestochowa, not of Hollywood) on his office wall.

13. Friends who attended a demonstration on that Sunday in Frankfurt protesting the imposition of martial law in Poland were very surprised by the low turnout in a town known for its political activism and social engagement on the part of its sizable and readily mobilized leftist subculture. Accepting some anarchists and Trotskyites, the bulk of the left stayed home. Most certainly this would not have been the case had it involved Nicaragua or El Salvador.

14. As quoted in Schneider, "Man kann ein Erdbeben auch verpassen," p.8.

15. Much of the above analysis relied on my previous research on German-American relations as well as Americanism and anti-Americanism in the Federal Republic. See, Andrei S. Markovits, "Anti-Americanism and the Struggle for a West German Identity" in Peter H. Merkl, ed. The Federal Republic of Germany at Forty. New York: New York University Press, 1989; pp. 35-54; and idem, "On Anti-Americanism in West Germany" in New German Critique, Number 34, Winter 1985; pp. 3-27.

16. For a particularly egregious example of this attitude and conviction, see the journal Prokla's editorial "Aufgeklarte Blindheit; Plaedoyer fuer einen linken Antiamerikanismus" in Prokla, Volume 19, Number 74, March 1989; pp. 2-10.

17. The usage of language associated with the Holocaust was unmistakable. Thus, judging by the West German left's rhetoric, Americans were ready to do onto Germans what Germans had done onto the Jews in the Holocaust.

18. Jeffrey Herf, Soviet Power, German Neutralism and the Politics of the Euromissiles. (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

19. See Schneider, "Man kann auch ein Erdbeben verpassen," p.4.

20. On the useful concept of the German left's--particularly social democracy's and the labor movement's--"state fixation," see Bodo Zeuner, "Solidaritaet mit der SPD oder Solidaritaet der Klasse? Zur SPD-Bindung der DGB-Gewerkschaften" in Prokla, Volume 6, Number 1, 1977; pp.1-32.

21. On the issue of "verstaatlichte Gesellschaft," see Christianne Reymann, "Fuer manche Linke bricht ein Haus aus Selbsttaeuschung zusammen" in Frankfurter Rundschau, October 21, 1989.

22. On the notion how "juridification" has on the one hand helped West German labor attain many important reforms and positions of power while at the same time stymieing its radical potentials, see Andrei S. Markovits, The Politics of the West German Trade Unions: Strategies of Class and Interest Representation in Growth and Crisis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

23. Petra Kelly, "Wiegen die Menschenrechtsverletzungen Pekings weniger schwer?" in Frankfurter Rundschau, August 3, 1989.

24. Ibid.

25. For a representative statement see Hermann L. Gremliza, "No deposit, no return" in Konkret, December 1989; p.8. Parts of the Hamburg left have developed in this direction. In addition to Konkret's repeated voicing of this opinion of total denial, one also hears this line from former Green superstars Rainer Trampert and Thomas Ebermann.

26. Karlheinz Hiesienger, "Wider die Politik persoenlicher Denunziation" in Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte, Volume 41, Number 7, July 1990; p.459.

27. In mentioning the well-known Ditzfurth incident, Peter Schneider comments it in the following brilliant way: "Wonderful. Our images intact, we can carry on as usual. Exhibiting the same determination, a young SA-fascist could have said in 1945: The collapse of the Third Reich does not effect me in the least, since true fascism has not even begun to be implemented anywhere in reality." Schneider, "Man kann auch ein Erdbeben verpassen", p. 10.

28. Steffen Lehndorff, a supposedly converted i.e. "critical" West German communist still is trying to make Marxism into a better science. See Steffen Lehndorff, "Fuer manche Linke bricht ein Haus aus Selbsttaeuschung zusammen," in Frankfurter Rundschau, October 21, 1989. Schneider demonstrates impressively how any kind of challenge to existing beliefs, any kind of admission of error, or any kind of opinion change, have negative connotations in German culture in general, and its leftist subset in particular. German culture, so Schneider, frowns on inconsistency. One should not change one's mind. In the leftist milieu concepts such as "revisionist," "renegade," "deviationist" are full of religious meaning. Schneider, "Man kann ein Erdbeben auch verpassen," p. 3.

29. For understandable reasons of the dialectic at work, Margaret Thatcher has become the new heroine in certain intellectual circles in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. While this is not a pleasant prospect, there is very little chance that it will endure to the point where Thatcherism will become the main mode of rescuing these countries out of their current misery.

30. We know from a number of sources that the GDR's day care centers were immensely authoritarian in terms of imposing very early toilet training on the children and requiring them to become obedient to the Party's wishes and commands.