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The End of Political Exceptionalism?

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> "No one any longer has any alternatives to capitalism—the arguments that remain concern how far and in what ways capitalism should be governed and regulated."
>
> Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*

The United States, as noted by Alexis de Tocqueville and Friedrich Engels, among many other visitors to America, is an "exceptional" country, one uniquely different in its organizing principles and social class structure from the more traditional status-bound post-feudal nations of the Old World (Tocqueville 1948: 36-37).[1] The term "American Exceptionalism," first formulated by Tocqueville in the 1830's, and since used in general comparative analyses, became widely applied after World War I in efforts to account for the weakness of working class radicalism in the United States. I have dealt with the first usage in a recent book, *American Exceptionalism* (Lipset 1996: 32-35, 77-109). In this paper and a forthcoming work, I discuss the second (Lipset and Marks 1999 forthcoming).

For students and practitioners of radicalism, "American exceptionalism" has meant a specific question: Why did the United States, alone among industrial societies, lack a significant socialist movement or labor party (Flacks 1998: 104-105; Klehr 1971; Voss 1993; Halpern and Morris 1997)?[2] This issue has bedeviled socialist theorists from the late nineteenth century on. Friedrich Engels tried to answer it in the last decade of his life (Marx and Engels 1938: 368; Engels 1892: 239; Engels 1986: 449).[3] The German socialist and sociologist Werner Sombart dealt with it in a major book published in his native language in 1906, *Why is There No Socialism in the United States?* The question was also addressed by the Fabian, H. G. Wells, in *The Future in America*, which came out the same year. Both Lenin and Trotsky were deeply concerned with the phenomenon, for it questioned the inner logic of Marxist historical materialism, as expressed by Marx himself, in the preface to *Das*

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[1] For evidence of the applicability of the concept, see Lipset (1996: 32-35, 77-109).

[2] For other efforts to deal with "socialist exceptionalism," see also Robert J. Fitrakis (1993) and Mike Davis (1988: 3-51).

[3] For a review of the literature by Marxists and others, see Lipset (1977: 31-149 and 346-363 (notes)).

Kapital, where he stated that "the country that is more developed [economically] shows to the less developed the image of their future" (Sombart 1976; Wells 1906; Marx 1958: 8-9).[4] And there is no questioning the fact that from the last quarter of the 19th century on, the most developed country has been the United States. The Communist International had a special commission to deal with "the American Question," attended by Joseph Stalin himself.

Given Marx's assumption, leading pre-World War I Marxists believed, as Engels noted in reiterating Marx's dictum in 1893, that the most industrialized capitalist country would lead the world into socialism (Sombart 1976: 15; Bell 1996). Sombert also emphasized the proposition: "If. . . modern socialism follows as a necessary reaction to capitalism, the country with the most advanced capitalist development, namely the United States, would at the same time be the one providing the classic case of socialism, and its working class would be supporters of the most radical of Socialist movements" (Quint 1953: 380).

This position became entrenched in orthodox Marxism. While still a Marxist, before he became the most influential revisionist of Marxist ideas, Edward Bernstein noted, "We see modern socialism enter and take root in the United States in direct relation to the spreading of capitalism and the appearance of a modern proletariat" (Moore 1970: 70). Karl Kautsky, considered the leading theoretician in the German Social Democratic Party, enunciated in 1902, "America shows us our future, in so far as one country can reveal it at all to another." He elaborated this view in 1910, anticipating the "overdue sharpening of class conflict" developing "more strongly" there than anywhere else (Moore 1970: 58, 102).

August Bebel, the political leader of the German Social Democrats stated unequivocally in 1907: "Americans will be the first to usher in a Socialist republic." This belief, at a time when the German party was already a mass movement with many elected members of the Reichstag, and the American Socialist Party had secured less than two

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[4] For Lenin's writings, see Harvey (1976: 81-96).

percent of the vote, was based on the fact that the United States was "far ahead of Germany in industrial development."

He reiterated this opinion in 1912, when the discrepancy in the strength of the two movements was even greater, saying that America will "be the first nation to declare a Cooperative Commonwealth" (Moore 1970: 77). The French socialist Paul Lefargue, Marx's son-in-law, paraphrased his father-in-law on the flyleaf of his book on America: "The most industrially advanced country shows to those who follow it on the industrial ladder the image of their own future" (Moore 1970: 91). Many other Marxists, such H. M. Hyndman in England, Maxim Gorky in Russia and Daniel DeLeon in the United States, also stressed the point.

The continued inability of socialists to create a viable movement in the United States was a major embarrassment to Marxist theorists who assumed that the superstructure of a society, which encompasses political behavior, is a function of the underlying economic and technological systems. Many late nineteenth and early twentieth century Marxists understood that their theory required them to believe that, "the United States, of all the countries in the world, [was] most ripe for socialism" (De Leon 1904: 133). Max Beer, whose fifty year career in international socialism included participation in the Austrian, German, and British parties, and who worked for the Socialist International, described the anxiety among European Marxist leaders created by the weakness of socialism in America, which they voiced in private discussions. They knew that it was a "living contradiction of . . .Marxian theory," and that it raised questions about the validity of Marxism itself (1935: 109-110).

Leon Trotsky took cognizance of Marx's statement in a 1939 publication intended for a popular American audience. He reprinted the sentence from *Das Kapital* and then simply dismissed it with the comment, "under no circumstances can this . . . be taken literally" (1939: 38-39). Trotsky, of course, knew his Marxism and was well aware that the theory demanded the United States should have been the first on the path towards socialism. His comment suggests that the contradiction was much on his mind. His effort to dismiss it as a figurative statement indicates that he had no answer to the conundrum it posed.

In spite of the sorry record of organized socialism in America, it may, however, be argued that Karl Marx was right, that the most developed country "shows to the less developed the image of their future." Applying this generalization to the United States simply means that American culture, including politics, as it actually developed, not as Marxists hoped it would, reflects the logic of an economically and technologically advanced society. The never feudal United States has been the prototype of a bourgeois society. As Max Weber understood, it could become the most productive economy precisely because its culture thoroughly encompassed capitalist values. The ideal-typical capitalist man was an American, Benjamin Franklin. For Weber, "the spirit of capitalism" was best contained in the Pennsylvanian's writings (1958: 64-65).

The argument that American non-socialist politics would prove to be the model for the European left was presented in full flower in 1940 by Lewis Corey, an early leader of the American Communist Party, as Louis Fraina in a series of articles in *Workers Age*, the organ of a neo-Communist sect, the Lovestoneites. As summarized by Harvey Klehr, Corey foresaw in prescient terms that,

> Rather than being an exception, America was actually the model for capitalist countries. Only the positions in the race had been changed; European socialists could see in America the image of their own unhappy future. Far from being a unique or even only slightly different case, America was the prototype for capitalism. In a curious reversal of roles, it was now the European socialists who could look across the ocean to see the future of their own movement. American development was not different than Europe's; it was merely at a more advanced stage (1971: 130)[5]

As Louis Corey anticipated, the lefts of the other western democracies have increasingly become like the American non-socialist left. To a greater or lesser degree, they all reject statist economies and accept competitive markets as the way to grow and raise standards of living. The social democratic and labor parties are now socially and ideologically pluralistic. As noted, there have been serious discussions among some of the

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[5] The full discussion of Fraina-Corey is on 126-130.

leaders of European social democratic governments, Blair, Jospin, Schröder, and others, about a proposal to reconstitute the Socialist International into a new grouping of progressive left parties, in which the Democratic Party would represent the United States.

The change in the character of the European parties reflects in large part a transformation of economic and class structures, which moves them to resemble the United States described by Tocqueville and pre-World War I Marxists. The emphasis on *stände*, fixed, explicitly hierarchical, social classes derived from a feudal and monarchical past has declined greatly. The growth in the economies, with a resultant considerable increase in consumption goods, and more equitable allocation of education, has greatly reduced the differences in style of life, including accents and dress, among the social classes. The distribution of income and occupational skills has changed from a pyramidal shape, enlarging towards the bottom, which characterized the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to one that resembles a diamond, bulging in the middle. Left political parties now seek to appeal more to the growing middle strata than to the industrial workers and the impoverished, who are declining proportionately. In the United States, the prototype of structural developments in industrialized societies, the proportion of those employed in non-manual pursuits has increased from 43 percent in 1960 to 58 today. Workers in manufacturing have fallen from 26 percent to 16. Corresponding drop-offs for the United Kingdom are from 36 percent to 19; in Sweden from 32 to 19; for the Netherlands from 30 to 19; for Australia from 26 to 13.5. The declines have been less dramatic but definite for France, 28 to 20 and Germany, 34 to 29 (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The American system has always placed a lesser emphasis on class awareness and organization than the Old World societies; in any case, these have been declining on both sides of the Atlantic. Union membership, the predominant base of the left parties, has fallen in proportionate terms in four-fifths of the 92 countries surveyed by the ILO (International Labor Organization 1997). Between 1985-95, density declined by 21 percent in the United States. As of 1999, only 14 percent of employed American workers are union members, less than 10 percent in private employment. The losses in density in France and Britain have been even greater, 37 percent for France and 28 for the United Kingdom, while Germany fell off

by 18 percent (International Labor Organization 1997).[6] Like the Democrats, the European and Australasian social democratic parties have become more socially heterogeneous in membership and support. The correlations between class (economic) position and vote choice, lower in the United States than elsewhere in the industrialized world, have been declining in most developed nations in recent decades, as the distribution of economic classes and consumption levels have changed.

Some of the underlying forces giving rise to these developments have been specified by a number of neo-Marxist social scientists in discussing the emergence of "Post-Industrial Society," "Post-Materialism", and the "Scientific-Technological Revolution." Daniel Bell, a lifelong social democrat, has been the central figure in conceptualizing these changes in the West (Bell 1978). Radovon Richta (1969) and his associates in the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences projected similar developments in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

The consequent changes in class and political relations within industrially developed societies, much like the shifts in the politics of the Left between the United States and Europe, may be analyzed within the framework of an apolitical Marxism, that is, accepting the proposition that technological structures and the distribution of economic classes determine the political and cultural superstructures, without assuming that socialism will succeed capitalism. Many of the trends anticipated by Marx—a steady increase in the industrial proletariat, a decline in self-employment, incumbent in the growth of factories—have ended. Tertiary technological and service occupations rather than production jobs have been increasing rapidly. The number of students in higher education and of university graduates has grown many times. Alain Touraine, a leading French sociologist and left intellectual, suggests that the basis of power has changed as a result of these developments: "If property was the criterion of membership in the former dominant class, the new dominant class is defined by knowledge and a certain level of education" (Touraine 1971).

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[6] Ibid.

The neo-Marxists and technological determinist scholars have stressed the extent to which theoretical and scientific knowledge have become the principal source of social and economic change, altering social structures, values and mores, in ways that have given considerable prestige and power to the scientific technological elites. The emerging strata of post-industrialism—whose roots are in the university, the scientific and technological worlds, heavily represented in the industries spawned by computers, the public sectors and the professions—have developed their own distinctive values.

Ronald Inglehart, the most important empirical analyst of post-industrialism, points out that beyond the impart of technological innovations, the "post-materialist" value changes and the decline of class conflict are also functions of the growing climate of affluence in the last half-century. The generations that came of age during the second half of the twentieth century hold different values from previous cohorts. The latter were reared in an atmosphere of economic scarcity and experienced severe economic depressions. Survey data gathered by Inglehart over the past quarter of a century have shown clear generational effects as well as links to the massive growth in educational attainments, which have made the expansion in high tech and scientific pursuits possible (Inglehart 1971: 991-1017; Inglehart 1997).[7]

These developments have profoundly affected the political scene in the industrially advanced (post-industrial) North American, European, Australian and Japanese societies. Post-industrial politics have been marked by a decline in ideological conflict over the role of the state, accompanying the growth of market power in the economic arena. A better educated citizenry has resulted in increasing concern with non-economic or social issues—the environment, health, the quality of education, the culture, greater equality for women and minorities, the extension of democratization and freedom at home and abroad, and last, but far from least, a highly controversial more permissive morality, particularly as affecting familial affairs and sexual behavior. In some polities environmental reformers have taken the

[7] For further discussion see also Inglehart (1997).

lead in creating new Green parties generally allied in coalition with the new social democrats, as in France and Germany, or operating with them in the United States and Britain.

It is notable that much as the United States set a model for less statist more market oriented polities, more recently it has been in the forefront of post-materialist New Politics, which have travelled, so to speak, from Berkeley and Madison to Paris and Berlin. The French political analyst Jean-François Revel, writing in the early 1970's, noted that the "revolutionary stirrings have had their origin in the United States." The newer forms of movement protest, whether in Europe or elsewhere, are "imitations of the American prototype, or extensions of, and subsequent to it; European dissenters … are the disciples of the American movements" (Revel 1971: 6-7).[8]

Many political analysts, while recognizing major reformulations on the left within their own country, do not realize the extent to which these changes reflect common developments throughout the economically advanced democracies, that they cannot be explained by specific national developments or leaders. To point up the magnitude and congruences of these events, I will summarize the ways in which left politics in country after country have taken an "American" path. This, of course, does not mean that parties and ideologies are the same cross-nationally. Necessarily, there are important variations reflecting diverse historical backgrounds, the varying nature of political cleavages and the structural and demographic patterns which underlie them. But the similarities among the polities, as Tony Blair has stressed, are considerable. And he notes, "it's a perfectly healthy thing if we realize there are common developments the whole world over" (Harris and Barbash 1997: A27). The record on the left suggests that the United States has become less exceptional politically, as the European socialists and Social Democrats begin to resemble American Democrats.

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[8] See also Lipset (1985: 195-205).

The New Social Democrats

Following a meeting of European social democratic leaders with Bill Clinton in New York on September 24, 1998, Tony Blair proclaimed their new progressive "Third Way" doctrine:

> In the economy, our approach is neither laissez-faire nor one of state interference. The government's role is to promote macroeconomic stability; develop tax and welfare policies that encourage independence, not dependence; to equip people for work by improving education and infrastructure; and to promote enterprise. We are proud to be supported by the business leaders as well as trade unions. . . .
> In welfare and employment policy, the Third Way means reforming welfare to make it a pathway into work where possible. It promotes fair standards at work while making work pay by reducing the taxes and penalties that discourage work and the creation of jobs.
>
> Blair (1998: C7)

The 1997 British election, won overwhelmingly by the Labour Party after it had rejected its historic emphasis on public ownership, basically put an end to a century of socialist efforts to sharply reduce or eliminate private ownership of the economy.[9] Labour's leader, Tony Blair, has been deliberately stressing his agreement with the free market, smaller government, policies of Bill Clinton. Even before Clinton, Blair proclaimed: "The era of big government is over." He promised to "govern from the center." Blair reformulated his party's image, as New Labour, as a non-socialist party that is not committed to working with the trade unions. He emphasizes that he wants unions to cooperate "with management to make sure British industry is competitive." Peter Mandelson, the ideologist of the Blairites, proudly asserted that Labour is now "a market capitalist party" (Will 1997: C7).

Even more notable is Blair's advice to labor organizations in a 1994 article in the *New Statesman* that "it is in the unions' best interest not to be associated with one political party." He argues that unions "should be able to thrive with any change of government or no change in government" (Blair 1994: 33). All of this is by the leader of a party largely founded by the

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[9] For a detailed description and analysis of the changes, see Giddens (1998).

unions and subsidized by them for all of its history. In effect, Blair said that the arguments against commitment to a party put forth by Samuel Gompers, the founding president of the American Federation of Labor, were right. During the 1997 campaign, the Labour Party released a special manifesto for business which promised that a Blair government would retain the "main elements" of Margaret Thatcher's restrictions on unions and would resist unreasonable economic demands. Blair noted in an interview that his administration will "leave British [labor] law the most restrictive on trade unionism in the Western world" (Druhan 1997)

The manifesto proclaimed: "Tax and spend is being replaced by save and invest." While the general election platform stated "healthy profits are an essential motor of a dynamic market economy," it also emphasized that the goal of low inflation requires that wage gains be held down (Baldwin 1997; Harris and Barbash 1997: A27-28). It is not surprising that Baroness Thatcher, at the start of the 1997 campaign, said "Britain will be safe in the hands of Mr. Blair." And speaking to a meeting of the Socialist International, Prime Minister Blair returned the compliment, saying, "There were certain things the 1980s got right -- an emphasis on enterprise, more flexible labour markets" (Harris and Barbash 1997: A28). One of Blair's first actions after taking office was to shift the power to control monetary policy and interest rates from the Treasury to the Bank of England. Another, launched after his first meeting with Bill Clinton on May 31, 1997, was welfare reform designed to sharply reduce the numbers on the dole by pressing single mothers to take paying jobs. He stated he would "be tough on the long-term unemployed who refuse jobs" (Prescott 1997). At this meeting, Clinton and Blair asserted that the "progressive parties of today are the parties of fiscal responsibility and prudence" (Mitchell 1997: 1, 3; Harris and Barbash 1997: A27-A28). The two leaders called for partnership with business to create jobs, replacing the "old battles between state and market" (Wigton 1997).

As Tony Blair has emphasized, the same pattern is evident "the world over." During the 1980's, the Labor governments of Australia and New Zealand cut income taxes, pursued economic deregulation, and privatized various industries. The Australian party made an "accord" with trade unions that resulted, as then Labor Prime Minister Robert Hawke

emphasized, in reducing real wages by at least one percent in each of the eight years that he was head of the government. He stressed that "the move in the share of the national income from wages toward profits . . . has enabled us to grow." The New Zealand story is similar. Returning to power in 1984, the Labour Party, in office until October 1990, ended "the tradition of taxation according to ability to pay," dismantled the welfare state and privatized many state enterprises. According to a report in a social-democratic magazine, Prime Minister David Lange argued that "social democrats must accept the existence of economic inequality because it is the engine which drives the economy."[10]

The story can be reiterated for the left parties outside the English-speaking world. The Swedish Social Democrats who held office from the early 1930's on--with brief interludes out of power between 1976 and 1982 and again between 1994 and 1998--reversed their previous wage growth, high income tax, and strong welfare state orientations and undertook several privatization measures as well. The late American socialist leader, Michael Harrington, reported critically that the government under Prime Minister Olaf Palme reduced the real income of those with a job while increasing employment, much like Hawke did in Australia (Harrington 1987: 130-131).

In Spain, before he left office, three term Socialist Prime Minister Felipe González converted his party -- Marxist in its initial post-Franco phase -- to support privatization, the free market, and NATO. He once noted in a near Churchillian formulation that a competitive free market economy is marked by greed, corruption, and the exploitation of the weak by the strong, but that "capitalism is the least-bad economic system in existence" (Gallagher and Williams 1989: 3). His economic policies were described by *The Economist* as having made his government "look somewhat to the right of Mrs. Thatcher's" (*The Economist* 1989).

The first major Marxist party in the world, the Social Democrats of Germany (SPD), rejected Marxism at their Bad Godesberg conference in 1959. American political scientist

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[10] For Australian and New Zealand references, see Lipset (1991: 184-185).

Russell Dalton commented on their program: "Karl Marx would have been surprised to . . . learn that free economic competition was one of the essential conditions of a social democratic economic policy." Speaking in 1976, Social Democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt precursored Australian Labor Prime Minister Robert Hawke in arguing that the interests of the workers required expanding profits, noting, "the profits of enterprises today are the investments of tomorrow, and the investments of tomorrow are the employment of the day after." The SPD's 1990 program noted in classical liberal fashion that within a "democratically established setting, the market and competition are indispensable" (Lipset 1991)

In 1995, the then SPD candidate for chancellor, and currently the chairman of the European socialists, Rudolph Scharping, emphasized that his party's historic assumptions have proven "wrong," stating, "We Social Democrats created an overly regulated, overly bureaucratic, and overly professionalized welfare state." Among other problematic policies, he pointed to social security, noting, "The intergenerational contract in its current form, whereby the present generation pays for current pensions and at the same time commits the next generation to pay for its pensions… can not stand. . . . I think putting an end to the wasting of public money is highly moral because such waste always occurs at the expense of third parties" (Scharping 1996: 53, 54-55).

The Chancellor elected in 1998, Gerhard Schröder, continues in this tradition. He sees the SPD as part of a "New Middle," rather than the Left (Apple 1998: A1, A10). John Vincour of the *International Herald-Tribune* notes the New Middle "is a place where words like 'risk,' 'entrepreneurial spirit,' and 'flexible labor markets' coincide with expressions of allegiance to social justice and fair income distribution" (Vincour 1998: 11-12). Schröder has promised to improve the German economy, reducing its high eleven percent unemployment rate, by lowering its "prohibitive labor costs," and "providing incentive for new capital investment." He noted in the election campaign that the SPD is "breaking with…statist social democratic attitudes…[W]e've understood that the omnipotent and interventionist state doesn't have its place in the current circumstances" (Vinocur 1998: 24). Commenting on the

1998 election, the editors of *Die Zeit* and *Die Welt* noted that the contest was "about nuances," rather than fundamental differences (Andrews 1998: A6).

In his inaugural speech after being inducted as Chancellor on November 10, 1998, Schröder stressed continuity with the previous Kohl government saying, "We do not want to do everything differently, but many things better." To help reduce unemployment, he proposed to lower corporate taxes from the maximum rate of 47 percent under Kohl to 35, and called for business and unions to cooperate in a formal "alliance for jobs" (*This Week in Germany* 1998A: 1-2; Drozdizk 1998: A22; Cohen 1998: A4). He also intends to foster private pension schemes, to encourage personal responsibility, and to concentrate state subsidies and spending on the "truly needy", while in the words of *The Financial Times* linking "fiscal policy with supply side measures, including deregulation and the opening of markets" (Atkins 1998: 2; *This Week in Germany* 1998C: 1).

In the past, Socialist parties created extensive welfare states that required a steadily increasing proportion of the Gross Domestic Product, in some cases reaching over one half, to go to the government. Today, however, the same parties recognize that they simply cannot compete on the world market unless they reduce government expenditures. Their electoral situation forces them to press for the support of the middle-class and affluent skilled worker and high-tech employee voters. Hence like Blair and Schröder, they seek to lower taxes, reduce welfare entitlements, and balance their budgets, but also to press for post-materialist reforms, cleaning up the physical, social and economic environments. And the proto-typical social democratic polity, Sweden, has sped up its efforts to restore the economy by privatizing 25 more enterprises (Burt 1999A: 2). Finland and Denmark are pursuing similar policies under social democratic leadership (Burt 1999B: 3).

The only current exceptions to the move away from state intervention among socialist parties are in Norway and to some extent in France, both favoring extensive welfare policies, but it should be noted not nationalization of industry. Norway can retain a belief in "old fashioned socialism" because of its abundant oil resources, which pay for its welfare state. The French left operates within a society in which *dirigisme*, a strong directing state, has

been as much a part of their culture's organizing principles as anti-statism has been of the American (Lichfield 1997).[11]

French uniqueness may be seen as the counter point to American exceptionalism. Both the right and left in France have approved of a powerful state, an emphasis going back to the monarchy, the Empire, and the Revolution. The statist orientation of the Socialists is a necessary reaction to the policies of the right. As the journalist Roger Cohen notes, "the Gaullist attachment to the state and rejection of market reform encouraged the Socialists to keep further to the left, to distinguish themselves." Or as an academic authority on French politics Ezra Suleiman emphasizes: "The right can't let go of the state, so the left stays left" (Cohen 1997: E5).

Yet, in an interview with *Le Nouvel Observateur* a month before the 1997 elections, Lionel Jospin, shortly to be Prime Minister, sounded like other European socialists in saying he favored a move away from "statism," with more decentralization and growth in individual initiative. He praised the extensive privatization measures carried through by François Mitterrand during his fourteen years as president. Nevertheless, the French socialists won in 1997 promising to deal with massive unemployment by creating 200,000 new jobs for young people, 25 percent of whom lacked work, and to protect the country's elaborate welfare state from budget cuts. Such policies could meet with approval in a country where the majority of the population told pollsters in 1997 that they feel good about "public service" (72 percent), respond favorably to "the state" (56 percent), and to the word "bureaucrat" (60 percent). Under the previous conservative cabinet, France had "the heaviest tax burden and the largest public pay roll in Europe".[12] In office, the Socialists have, however, reversed a number of policies, particularly seeking to cap welfare payments and control the budget deficit (Swardson 1998: A24).

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[11] On the shift to the right under Mitterrand, see Lipset (1991: 188).

[12] These discussions of the sources of French statism are largely derived from Swardon (1998b).

Lionel Jospin has taken to emphasizing the need to emulate the American economy. In 1998, he criticized leftist disdain for the level of U.S. job growth saying: "Contrary to what we have claimed and indeed believed, the jobs being created in the United States are not only, or even mainly, low-paid, dead-end jobs, but skilled ones in the service and high-tech industries." *The Economist* reports that he stressed that the French "could learn much about America's economic dynamism, the vitality of its research and innovation, its competitive spirit and capacity for renewal" (*The Economist* 1998: 50).[13]

Curiously, the model late 1990's country, frequently cited as such by the European social democrats and others, is the Netherlands. With an unemployment rate of 6.5 percent in 1997, far below the major Continental economies, and a growth rate higher than in Britain, France, and Germany, the Dutch under a government headed by a former union leader, Wim Kok of the Labor Party, have kept down "wages, inflation and interest rates, and . . . [eased] the rules for hiring and firing and for opening new businesses." Unemployment benefits have been cut, while the rules for sick and disability pay have been tightened. Thomas Friedman of *The New York Times* describes the policy as "U.S. style downsizing, privatizing, and loosening up of labor rules" (Friedman 1997: A35).

In a "social pact" negotiated between the unions, then led by Kok, and the employers, which is comparable to the Australian "accord," labor agreed to limit wage increases to two percent a year. Whether produced by these policies or not, the subsequent near full employment economy in a "more competitive [Dutch] market" has led to an increase in income inequality, much as in the United States and other industrialized countries (Simons 1997: A6). The better educated and highly skilled are much more in demand in high tech economies than industrial workers and the less skilled. They are relatively much better paid while the others have been declining proportionately in income terms, although not in consumption standards.

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[13] Jospin's comments on the nature of new jobs in the United States coincide with reports from various Bureau of Labor Statistic Studies.

Far from the politically "backward" United States following the lead of the more "progressive" Europe, the Old World left is now becoming more like the American, as Corey anticipated. Hence, it may be reiterated that in political terms the United States has shown Europe the image of its future. This reflects the fact that as the latter countries reached new heights of affluence and mass consumption, they began, as Antonio Gramsci anticipated, to resemble the United States, socially less stratified, less status bound and much better educated. Consequently, their less privileged strata are much less class conscious than earlier.

The United States, therefore, is no longer as exceptional politically. Like other developed countries, it is divided among socially more conservative or traditional groupings, libertarian or classical liberal forces, religion based factions, environmentalist and other post-materialist tendencies, and anti-elitist populist segments. The strength and organizational forms of the latter vary from country to country, but none of them is socialist or seriously class oriented. The now non-socialist "progressive" left parties seek, as Adam Przeworski notes, to make capitalism more humane and more efficient (Przeworski 1985: 206). Or as the advisor of François Mitterrand, Regis Debray, points out, the objective of European socialist leaders is "to carry out the politics of the Right, but more intelligently and in a more rational manner" (Debray 1990: 27).

Still An Outlier

America, it should be recognized, still remains an outlier at one end of many international indices of behavior and values. It has higher rates of mobility into elite positions than any other nation; a larger proportion of its young people attend university, particularly graduate and professional schools, than elsewhere, making such upward movement possible. The economy is not just the most productive, it is the greatest job producer by far in the developed world. From the end of World War II to the present, the American economy has created many more new jobs than the entirety of Europe and Japan, and as Jospin notes, most

of them have been "good" ones, i.e. requiring skill and education, and being relatively well paid (Andrews 1998: A6).

The comparative picture is not as positive for the United States in other dimensions. American exceptionalism is double-edged. The country leads in the proportion not voting in national elections. Its prison population is greater in per capita terms than elsewhere in the developed world, as are its rates of violence. The nation is among the leaders in the unequal distribution of monetary income. The gap between that received by its upper one to five percent income group and the lowest five to twenty percent is greater than in most of Europe and Japan, though it has been growing in them too. This development is largely a result of the shift from factory to high tech jobs, which reward educated labor, while depreciating the level of the wages of less skilled manual and service workers, many of whom in the United States are Latino and Asian immigrants or African Americans, and in much of Europe are immigrants from the South. Functional illiteracy is higher in the United States than in Europe and Japan.

Many of these cross-national differences parallel variations in public attitudes. Americans, traditionally most favorable to motivating the lowly to try to "win," to encourage upward mobility, are more disposed to provide high incomes for important positions than Europeans and Japanese. Americans are more prone than others to believe there should be "greater incentives for individual effort," rather than that "incomes should be made more equal," while proportionately fewer Americans (56 percent) agree that, "income differences are too large," as compared to Europeans (66-86 percent) (Smith 1990: 22). Americans are more likely than Europeans to agree that "large income differences are needed for the country's prosperity." Nearly one-third of Americans surveyed justify inequality this way as compared to an average of 23 percent for seven European countries (Great Britain, Austria, West Germany, Italy, Hungary, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) (Kolosi 1987: 33). A review of American public opinion data over 50 years reports: "Surveys since the 1930s have shown that the explicit idea of income redistributing elicits very limited enthusiasm among the American public. . . . Redistributive fervor was not much apparent even in [the]

depression era. Most Americans appear content with the distributional effects of private markets" (Page and Shapiro 1992: 300).

Not surprisingly, the World Values surveys conducted in 1980 and 1990, like other polls, reveal that social democratic values are still much stronger in Europe and Canada than in America. They report, for example, that when asked to choose between the importance of "equality of income or the freedom to live and develop without hindrance," Americans are more disposed to the latter option; 71 percent felt this way compared to an average of 59 percent in Europe in 1990 (Inglehart 1990).

Americans are also more likely than Europeans to say that taxes are too high for middle income individuals. In spite of the shifts toward approval of a free market by European leftists, government remains much less intrusive in society and economy in the United States. As we have seen, these national variations have a long history. The major European countries provided important social services long before the United States, which did not enact pensions, unemployment or industrial accident insurance until the 1930s.

Americans are more prone to believe they live in a meritocracy. The greater American commitment to opportunity is also reflected in the findings that citizens in the United States have been more disposed than Europeans to favor sizeable expenditures for education. "In fact, education has long been an area in which most Americans want government to spend more money" (Page and Shapiro 1992: 133). As Robert Shapiro and John Young note, these attitudes stem from "Americans views and values concerning individualism and the equality of opportunity, as opposed to equality of outcomes for individuals" (Shapiro and Young 1989: 59-89). Yet American students in elementary and high school test lower in international comparisons than their peers in other developed societies.

Contemporary America is the outcome of processes which began with an egalitarian (meritocratic) and individualistic revolution (Lipset 1990: 8-13, 22-36). The United States remained through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the closest example of a

classically liberal society that rejected the assumptions of ascriptive elitism, of statism, of Tory Bismarck/Disraeli *noblesse oblige*.

The societal variables which reduced the potential for socialism and class consciousness in pre-World War II America were the anti-statist value system, the socially more egalitarian social class structure, and the individualistic Protestant sectarian orientation. The emphasis on egalitarian social relations, the absence of a demand that those lower in the social order give overt deference to their social or economic superiors and the stress on meritocracy, on equal opportunity for all to rise economically and socially, stem from an exceptional past and present. The country is characterized by the absence of hereditary privilege, of an ascriptively legitimated upper class and fixed lower classes derivative from feudalism, and from the fact that America was formed as a new settler society, as well as the elaboration of the Revolution born libertarian and egalitarian ideology. Tocqueville noted these elements in the 1830s. He was, of course, aware of enormous variations in income and power, and of a strong emphasis on the attainment of wealth (Tocqueville 1948: 51). But he stressed that, regardless of steep economic inequalities, Americans did not require the lower strata to acknowledge their inferiority, to bow to their betters.

Society and politics, of course, have changed greatly in America as in Europe. The 1930s produced a qualitative difference from previous eras. Historian Richard Hofstadter wrote, they introduced a “social democratic tinge” into the United States for the first time in its history (Hofstadter 1972: 308). The Great Depression resulted in a strong emphasis on planning, on the welfare state, on the role of the government as a major regulatory actor, and even on income redistribution.

The 1930s led to a kind of Europeanization of American politics as well as of its labor organizations. Class factors became more important in differentiating party support (Lubell 1965: 55-68). The conservatives, increasingly concentrated among the Republicans, remained anti-statist and pro laissez-faire, although many of them accepted an activist role for the state in response to the depression and war. Statist proclivities, however, gradually declined after World War II as a result of long term prosperity that helped to refurbish traditional values.

A consequence of these developments has been a reemergence of the classical liberal ideology, i.e. what Americans call conservatism. The class tensions, enhanced by the depression, lessened as reflected in a great decline in union membership since the mid-1950s, and lower correlations between class position and vote choices. Even before Ronald Reagan entered the White House, the United States had a lower rate of taxation, a smaller budget deficit, a less developed welfare state, and many fewer government owned industries than other industrialized nations.

To what extent is it still possible to speak of American exceptionalism? It is obvious that the United States and the rest of the western world have changed greatly over the past two centuries. They have all become more productive, industrialized, urbanized, and better educated. The central state has become more powerful. As noted, the post-feudal elements that existed in many European countries have declined enormously. In social structural terms, the latter are becoming more like America. To reiterate, their left parties have given up socialism.

The changes that have occurred, obviously, still leave many differences. The United States, Canada, and Europe continue to vary along lines that flow from their distinctive national traditions. And the United States remains the least statist western nation (Rose 1985).

Conclusion

The political divisions of modern democracy, conceptualized since the French Revolution as between the Left and the Right, remain. The Democrats and Republicans, the Social Democrats and Conservatives, still provide choices on the ballot, although their ideological bearings and internal factions are changing (Furet 1998: 79).

The party systems will continue to be seen as a variant of the democratic class or status struggle. Cleavages linked to stratification, of course, do not exhaust the correlates of left or right positions. Issues revolving around morality, e.g., abortion, family values, civil rights, gender equality, multi-culturalism, immigration, crime and punishment, foreign policy, and supra-national communities, move individuals and groups in directions different from those linked to stratification position. But basically most of these matters can be related to social ideology, which in turn correlates with religion and education.

There can be little doubt about the prospects for the continuation of the 200-year-old American political system. The Democrats, founded under Jefferson, have existed since 1796 with a base among the "out" groups, the less privileged, the status deprived, and the less religious. The intelligentsia have been found in the non-business linked party ever since Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans. The more socially conservative, more business oriented parties have had different incarnations, Federalist-Whig-Republican, with similar more privileged "in" group constituencies in each format. The Republicans, today, draw on libertarians and social and religious conservatives, as well as economic conservatives comprehending classical Hayekian liberals. (The major exception to these generalizations occurred around the slavery and race issues.)

Socialism apart, the traditional differences between the Right and the Left remain. The Right emphasizes liberty, freedom from state coercion, and equality of opportunity to all individuals, although the communitarians among them do not despair of the state. The Left stresses equality of respect to all individuals and the need to increase opportunity by enlarging or guaranteeing group rights and security for the less privileged, whether workers, the aged, or minorities. Still, the party differences revolve around the uses of state power. The Left is more disposed than the Right to use public authority to deal with problems. The American Right is suspicious of state power, and sees freedom and individual rights being undermined in the context of efforts to foster group rights and opportunities. European, Japanese, and Canadian conservatives (Tories) have more benign or positive views toward the uses of governmental power, although much like the social democrats, their enthusiasm for statist policies has waned in recent years.

Still, the meanings of the terms Left and Right are changing. As we have seen, the parties of the Left have reconstituted themselves as liberals in the American sense (not the European). To that should be added their emphases, on post-materialism, environmentalism, equality for women, minorities and gays, and cultural freedoms. The Right is moving in varying degrees towards classical liberalism or libertarianism. One stresses group equality and economic security, the other equality of opportunity and the weakening of state power. Logically, the Right should also support personal freedom, along the lines favored by nineteenth century liberals. The links, however, between the new economic conservatism and religious traditionalism have fostered cultural conservatism with respect to sex, the family, and style of life. Given the complex variations in the political cleavage structure, it is difficult to specify a consistent pattern differentiating the Left and the Right.

The confusion in linking ideological concepts to policy is illustrated by the different meanings attached to "neoconservatism," a term which arose in the United States, that is applied in a very different way outside the country's borders. In America, the label was formulated by some leftist intellectuals to discredit a group of hardline anti-Communists who were on the left on domestic issues, e.g. social democrats, Trotskyists and liberals. Most were originally Democrats and many still are. They identified with Hubert Humphrey - Henry Jackson - Pat Moynihan Democrats, George Meany - Lane Kirkland trade unionists, and the Social Democrats USA led by Sidney Hook and Bayard Rustin. The Republicans tried to win over those labeled neoconservatives but those they did were invariably used in foreign or defense policy positions, or in education and intellectual policy realms. They were kept out of economic and welfare policy, since most remained more to the left in these matters.[14] But in Europe where this background somehow is largely unknown, the assumption exists that neoconservatives are seen as new conservatives, because they reject the Tory statist emphases which have defined traditional conservatism, that they are Reagan-Thatcher conservatives, but most are not.

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[14] For a more detailed discussion and documentation see Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*: 193-202.

No major tendency, left or right, retains a belief in a utopia, in a solution for all major problems by dramatically reconstructing society and polity. These post Cold War conditions bode well for democratic stability and for international peace. It has become an undocumented truism that democracies do not wage war against each other and most of the world is now democratic. While extremist movements and parties exist, all of them are weak, at least in the West. The strongest, Le Pen's National Front in France, is supported by 15 percent of the electorate. No other is close to this level. There are no charismatic leaders; there is also little political enthusiasm. Youth, who as Aristotle wrote, "have exalted notions . . . [who] would rather do noble things than useful ones. . . . doing things excessively and vehemently. . . ." are necessarily frustrated (McKeon 1941: 1404).

Will this situation change? Of course it will, since economies, and consequently societies, never remain in a steady state. The inner dynamics of market systems produce reverses in the business cycle. Such possibilities and Russia's political instability once more threaten the west. The Asian collapse has replaced the Asian miracle. France's move to the left in 1997, and LePen's support on the right, not only have been facilitated by the country's statist values, they constitute a response to an unemployment rate of 12 percent. Demographic variations, e.g., the growth in the proportion of the aged, the decline in the number of the young, and the increase in single motherhood, affect the financial underpinnings of social security and medical systems, as well as the crime and deviance rates. The rise of new major players in the international arena, such as China, can and will result in new trade disequilibriums. But all these prospects and more are for the future.

The little anticipated end of the Cold War seemingly gave America and its ideology an almost total victory (Lipset and Bence 1994: 169-210). The country is now the *only* superpower. As noted, its economy is the most productive. As Revel emphasizes, the major successful recent movements for egalitarian social change and for improving the quality of life, feminism, environmentalism, civil rights for minorities, and gay rights, diffused from America, much like the democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century. The developed world has been more successful than ever in satisfying the consumption desires of mass society, including manual workers and the intellectual strata.

All this should make for more conservative and smug societies. Yet the standards by which western countries now judge themselves are derived from the French, American and Marxist revolutionary creeds. These proclaim: “all men . . . [now people] are created equal,” and agree with the goal of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” But all polities must fail to live up to utopian objectives, even the classically liberal ones, libertarianism and egalitarianism. Americans still lean more to the libertarian side, Europeans to the egalitarian. Both tendencies favor freedom for all and strong juridical restraints on state power. Americans prefer an egalitarian, competitive, libertarian society with an effective but weak government. They will not attain these objectives in any absolute sense, but they will keep trying. It may be noted that socialists from Marx and Engels to Gramsci, Crosland, and Harrington have acknowledged that socially, though obviously not economically, the United States is closer to their ideological goal of a socially classless and weak state society than any system they knew in their lifetime. Leon Samson, a left wing American Marxist, concluded in the early 1930's that American radicals were unable to sell socialism to a people who believed they already lived in a society which operationally, though not terminologically, was committed to egalitarian objectives, property relations apart. Americans and Europeans must deal with racism, sexism, severe income inequality, corruption, dirty environments, and downturns in the business cycle. But America still has an ideological vision, the American Creed, with which to motivate its young to challenge reality. And Europeans are increasingly committed to a similar social vision, derivative in large measure from the French Revolution and social democracy. The United States is no longer as exceptional politically, though it still remains more unique socially in enough senses to continue to speak of American exceptionalism.

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