

DOES SOCIALISM MEAN NEVER HAVING TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY?

KENNETH HENNING

The Adair Smith Institute
1930

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"A person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest than to labour as little as possible, whatever work he does beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance, can be squeezed out of him by violence only, and not by any interest of his own."

KENNETH MINOGUE

Adam Smith,
The Wealth of Nations, p365

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NOTES

Kenneth Minogue is Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics. He holds degrees from Sydney University and the London School of Economics, and formerly lectured at the University of Exeter. Professor Minogue is author of *After Virtue*.
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FOREWORD

By Dr Eamonn Butler

As the Berlin Wall crumbled, there seemed little doubt that the communist system itself lay also in ruins. Like so many other efforts to construct a brave new society on the blueprint of human reason -- many of them highly idealistic efforts -- it had failed because its architects had ignored or mistaken the fundamental principles of human nature, and had underestimated their power to tear the whole structure apart.

The Western critics of such prefabricated societies might well have expected the world to grant them a short period of uninterrupted relief, and perhaps even a little smugness, over their being proved right at last.

It was not to be. The dust was not even settling in Berlin when we were told, in a Chatham House paper of January 1990 and by prominent academic correspondents to the quality newspapers, that the system which had fallen was not true socialism (or communism, or even Marxism) itself but some carbuncular East European perversion of that design.

To those who understood the logic of F A Hayek's Road to Serfdom, that was a bitter moment. They took it to have been shown beyond reasonable doubt that all the despotism of the ruling classes, all the suppression of free speech, all the cruelty towards minorities and outcasts, and all the economic backwardness found behind the Wall were typical features of mature socialist societies. Societies based on the foundation of a grand communal vision naturally required that individual motives should be suppressed and redirected towards the achievement of that design. It should be no surprise that the worst get on top, because they are more effective at buttressing people into the approved shape. Those who knew their Hayek knew that what had fallen was no unique form of European tyranny that was being unjustly confused with real socialism by ignorant or malicious Western commentators. It was indeed the real thing.

In this essay, Professor Kenneth Minogue puts in context the claim that events in Eastern Europe leave the genuine blueprint of socialism quite unscathed. He argues that it represents just one more example of a familiar human frailty, the sad but common unwillingness of human beings to give up their most cherished beliefs and prejudices.

Faced by the annoying tendency of the facts not to support our comforting theories, we are all tempted to deny the facts rather

than change the theories. Thus plain but irritating facts are fudged and fogged, their substance and meaning redefined and reinterpreted so that our particular prejudices are not denied by them in their new form -- and may even be supported.

This habit of redefining terms to safeguard our prejudices may be so widespread in our daily life that we indulge it as relatively harmless. The real trouble comes when important events hang on the success or failure of our theories. In matters of political policy, forgetting the inconvenient facts which show our ideas to be in error can produce particularly vicious effects.

Having traced the origin and nature of these errors, Professor Minogue goes on to give us some current examples of the decrepit follies that litter this garden of forgetfulness. More will no doubt be built, and will hold up as long as their architects can keep patching the structure and convincing us that the multiplying cracks are really unimportant. But as each bold new political design is declared unsafe by the erosion of plain fact, should we not begin to doubt that any Wall can protect their preconceived social structure from reality?

It is the belief that Christ comes as a liberator and emancipates his elect from the restraints of the Mosaic law and the ordinary moral law. In many cases, antinomians get mixed up with quietism, which is the belief that, since we are aliens in this world anyway, what we do with the body never matters. This doctrine lay behind all sorts of remarkable historical episodes, the most famous being the Anabaptists taking over the town of Munster in 1534-1535. During the English civil war there were a lot of celebrated antinomians who believed that anything was permitted to God's elect.

Belonging to God's elect is a theological idea and you may well wonder why I should begin a discussion of new events with old ideas in theology. I would defend myself by saying that many ideas in politics cannot easily be understood because circumstances and events often confuse their real character. In religion, particularly in theology, these ideas are worked out with the utmost clarity, and what we might in commonplace terms regard as absurdity is much easier to detect.

For example, the antinomian idea spread from religion into literature by way of sentiments of romantic love as worked out in terms of the chivalric code. It became the idea that Tristan and Isolde were by love elevated to a plane where the ordinary restraints of manners and morality no longer applied. That is the medium by which the idea spread further, into politics.

ANTINOMIANISM IN POLITICS

There is an old-fashioned prejudice that killing people is a rather bad thing to do: - seizing power and imposing a dictatorship upon the world is normally thought to be bad form. But when

DOES SOCIALISM MEAN NEVER HAVING TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY?

By Kenneth Minogue

Some of my more high-class readers may not recognize the allusion in my title. It comes from a book called Love Story by Eric Segal, the movie version of which was advertised with the slogan: 'being in love means never having to say you are sorry'. This is an easy way of getting me to my subject which is, of course, antinomianism.

The Antinomian Idea

Antinomianism is a Christian heresy which was alleged to have been invented by St Paul, though he denied it passionately. It is the belief that Christ comes as a liberator and emancipates his Elect from the restraints of the Mosaic code and the ordinary moral law. In many cases, antinomianism got mixed up with gnosticism, which is the belief that, since we are aliens in this world anyway, what we do with the body never matters. This doctrine lay behind all sorts of remarkable historical episodes, the most famous being the Anabaptists taking over the town of Munster in 1534-1535. During the English civil war there were a lot of celebrated antinomians who believed that anything was permitted to God's Elect.

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ANTINOMIANISM IN POLITICS

There is an old-fashioned prejudice that killing people is a rather bad thing to do; seizing power and imposing a despotism upon the world is normally thought to be bad form. But when

these events are redescribed as a "revolution" and are thought to be at the service of grand ideals, then they become interestingly antinomian.

Revolutionaries are on a higher plane than the rest of us. They have a licence to behave more or less any way they choose. We must never forget that ideas have consequences. And one of the ways in which revolutionaries often behave is to look down upon such rules as the elementary consistency of recognizing that they have been wrong in the past. The fact that it is a common vice might suggest that we would be best advised to ignore it.

Why should I be bothered about whether people say they are sorry or not? The answer is because I belong to a specific academic culture, and there are two reasons arising from that culture. First, being able to say that you are wrong is the very condition of any progress in knowledge at all. This is a point which philosophers of science have understandably made much of in the last sixty years, partly because there have been so many antinomians in politics, and also in the social sciences, where it has been extremely common for people to change their theories whenever reality threatened to falsify them.

Recantation is, of course, extremely painful, because our opinions are like spoilt children whom we want to indulge. We hate to give them up and adopt new ones. I had a colleague called Imre Lakatos, a philosopher of science, who had a marvellous set of terms for this. He described holding on to an exploded doctrine in terms of "monster-barring" and "concept stretching".

Monster-barring and concept-stretching

Monster-barring was simply redefining your terms so as to eliminate some ghastly disconfirming instance. It could be illustrated from the famous discussion by John Stuart Mill of the proposition that all swans are white, a proposition that had to be given up when in 1836 colonists settling in Western Australia discovered in the Swan River creatures who floated on water, had long necks, and feathers, and made noises like swans but which had the peculiarity of being black. The question arises: "Are these really swans?" You can bar these monsters from your theory by redefining a swan simply as a thing that has got to be white. It is a very popular move, and the "stretching" of concepts like "democracy" and "fascism" to cover things never before contemplated is no less common.

My academic culture disposes me to be meticulous, insofar as I can manage it, in observing when people have been wrong and when, on the other hand, they are to be caught out changing course in order to prevent a recognition that they have committed error.

Student enthusiasms

There is a supplementary reason too for my interest in recantation: having been in a university culture for a long time, I have watched student politics with a mixture of horror and fascination.

You will remember the days when students were thundering through our streets chanting: "Ho Ho, Ho Chi Minh" and admiring the Vietcong, the Khmer Rouge and various other dubious liberation movements. The students who did that only attended universities for about three or four years and then went out into the world. Most of them probably soon forgot those bizarre outbursts of enthusiasm. It would be false to say that they were in any way responsible for the boat people or Pol Pot and the year zero, or anything of that sort. Nonetheless they were unmistakably wrong, just as they were wrong again in political terms in their hatred of the Shah -- the lackey of the Americans -- whose downfall they greeted with immense joy. But none of them, so far as I know, has demonstrated against the despotism of the Ayatollah.

This is why I am preoccupied with people who were wrong in the past, and keen that they should face up to their errors. It seems to me very important for the destiny of truth in our civilization that we ought to press this question, even if it seems like triumphalism or insensitivity. For the errors we castigate were implicated in the evils of despotism.

NATURE OF THE ILLUSION

We may next ask: "Why is it that socialists have this rather antinomian view that being a socialist in some way elevates you above certain elementary manners and morals, such as recognizing the errors of the past?"

The way in which a socialist can persuade himself or herself of election to a higher level has both a positive and a negative side.

The negative side is undoubtedly a hatred of individuality. In our civilization in fact, you can trace in all sorts of people, and even in writers who are otherwise liberal, something of a contempt for the little doings of human beings. It runs interestingly through the discussion of America for example by Alexis de Toqueville, and I think I smell it in John Stuart Mill. There is a touch of the nineteenth century aristocrat about such liberals.

When in the 1980s radicals and socialists attacked consumerism, when they talked about the materialism and greed of our time, what they were really concerned with was not so much the vulgarity of McDonalds as the fact that we lack a grand collective project that involves every one of us, in which we all put our shoulders to the wheel and follow some leader. Instead

of doing these admirable things, most of us have pursued our own projects, and in this indirect way created the society we actually inhabit. The negative side of socialist knowledge, then, is this hatred of individuality. The positive side is being seduced by the charm of a grand collective project, which is what socialism is all about.

Socialists sometimes draw from these thoughts the implication that only idealists, namely fellow socialists, are truly human. The rest of us, who are not tempted by these grand collective projects, are interpreted as victims of false consciousness or ideology, or some other such defect of mind and character. One result is that socialists are often forced to redefine such political concepts as democracy.

Whose illusion?

Since I have reached a point in my argument where the question of names has arisen I should perhaps insert a footnote which says that "being a socialist" covers an immensely miscellaneous variety of things, and not every actual socialist will conform to the model that I am putting before you. I am concerned above all with communists and with other socialists perhaps only in some moods, but I am sure there is a strong tendency even among many people who are not actually communists, to believe that only idealists are fully human, and that only people who are fully human make the right decisions. The real test of democracy among many socialists is not whether people voted, but what they voted for -- the outcome. Thus quite recently when the Nicaraguan elections produced interesting surprises, a commentator the day after argued in The Independent that the election was won by the stomachs of the Nicaraguan people!¹

Edmund Burke in Reflections on the Revolution in France commented tartly about the Reverend Dr. Price exhibiting a similar contempt for the judgements of actual people:

"You will smile here at the consistency of those democratists who, when they are not on their guard, treat the humbler part of the community with the greatest contempt, whilst, at the same time, they pretend to make them the depositories of power."²

Again, a correspondent in The Times wrote within the last few weeks:

"Few people can doubt that if he held a plebiscite tomorrow Castro would win massive support from the Cubans despite the generalized disgruntlement at the shortage of goods in the shops".

The myths explode

Marxism is a view of reality entirely insouciant about the judgements of ordinary people, and it has created an entire encyclopaedia of curious beliefs. Let me cite two examples. One is the expression "late capitalism" which litters a great deal of academic discourse. Given events in the East, I think it will disappear almost overnight, even though libraries are full of books of Marxist analysis of modern society in which the condition in which we live is assumed to be that highly predictive thing.

In other words the very technicalities of this kind of pseudo-scientific discussion incorporate at least one assumption which has been unmistakably exploded. I do not know whether there is any way of barring this particular monster, but I would be surprised if the attempt is not made. I am reminded of the recent Spectator cartoon exhibiting the departments of a museum, which are: "Modernism; Post Modernism; and Out and Out Bullshit". This possibly captures my point more concisely than anything else.

Again, many of us are extremely sensitive to the way in which economic experts of various kinds have over the decades cried up the economic achievements of the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. These supposed achievements have for the most part been described in terms of fantasy percentages by which production this year has exceeded production last year. The communists of Eastern Europe and their academic fellow travellers are the greatest fiction writers since the late Baron Munchausen. Many of these economists foisted upon us quite precise doctrines which need to be remembered and analysed, especially because these are the obvious people to set themselves up as experts on the economies of Eastern Europe. They will powerfully determine a lot of the policy which the West will adopt towards the East.

Lest we forget!

Do you remember, for example, that within the last ten years we were reading that East Germany had achieved a higher per capita income than Great Britain and was beginning to push ahead of other capitalist countries? This was I suppose the last gasp of the Khrushchevian belief that "we will bury you". What would the lovers of "command economies" do if they did not have a dream? But where now are those dreamers who ought to be recognizing that their dream had no relation to reality? Indeed, as we contemplate the horrible pollution of Eastern Europe, their dream must be recognized as a nightmare.

THE GARDEN OF FORGETFULNESS

A great deal of monster barring and concept stretching does go on, and has been going on lately. If we are ever to learn from

experience, we can hardly be alerted to too much of it.

The Peace Process

Consider for example the CND case, which is a very pure instance of refutation by events. You will remember the hysteria worked up in 1983 about the siting of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Western Europe. The hysteria was such that the whole country expected to be blown up imminently because (so Bruce Kent and CND were asserting) these missiles would dangerously and possibly fatally increase East/West tension. They were wrong. As we now know, it did not increase tension and we may plausibly adopt the causal hypothesis that it was precisely Western readiness to match the build-up of missiles in the East by an equivalent build-up of missiles in the West to any degree necessary, including of course the initiative of "star wars", that finally persuaded the leaders of the Soviet Union of the hopelessness of their situation.

In other words, I take the CND position in 1983 to be quite precisely refuted. Is this the position of Mr Bruce Kent? By no means -- how humiliated people feel when they discover they are wrong! His view is the remarkable one that what he wanted all along was peace, and peace in a sense seems to have come about, and therefore he brought it about; it was the triumph of CND policy.

This is a very interesting sequence of thoughts for us to wander around and to sniff, and taste, and consider. It interestingly illustrates the fallacy of post hoc, ergo propter hoc. From another point of view it illustrates what Freud called "the omnipotence of thought", that is, the argument that we thought peace thoughts and peace has come about, therefore it is our thoughts which have actually brought about this result.

One is reminded of a story from the greatest of all political philosophers, I refer of course to Aesop about the fly on the axle wheel. The fly sitting there as the cart goes along on a dry and dusty road and says: "Look what a dust I am raising here".

Galbraith rides on

Let us move on to John Kenneth Galbraith, another economist who was famous for his theory that communism and capitalism were converging. It did not really matter whether you made motorcars in Magnitogorsk or Michigan, the technology was so similar that the conditions of life must be steadily converging. He stood on the Berlin Wall and said: "Looking in either direction it really makes no great difference". Has John Kenneth Galbraith recanted? By no means. A blissful amnesia allows him to continue pontification of a kind which would be shameless were we to assume his memory remained intact. He recently argued that the

main problem of the present time is how the military industrial complex in America will reconstitute the absurd threat of Soviet expansionism which had kept them going for the last forty years. Indeed, what he diagnosed was: "The evident end of any plausible case for believing in Soviet expansionism as regularly, and one thinks by some gratefully, it has been called". That has the true Galbraithian ring. So as far as John Kenneth Galbraith is concerned, what is true now, that is to say that the Soviet Union does not seem to constitute a threat, has always been true. The past has completely crumbled and disappeared into an Orwellian memory hole. The present is simply projected against the past and people who took a different view of different circumstances are mocked for lack of realism.

Hobsbawm's fatalism

Let me move on to a third figure who is intellectually a good deal more serious than any of the people I have so far mentioned: Eric Hobsbawm, who actually is a communist and who has recognized a good deal of the reality of the collapse of communism. He says that the communists of the past are people he does not want to dissociate himself from, which is admirable. He recognizes a further fact that when communists got to power they were not as morally admirable as they had been before they had power. The fact, he observes, that some of these people themselves have ended up becoming either executioners, or the victims of executioners, merely adds one more twist to the tragedy of the twentieth century. This is in some ways a grand and dignified statement, but it has precisely the antinomianism that interests me; it is not, he is saying, that these people were morally responsible for going to the bad; it is fate which determined their actions.

In the same interview in The Independent he made another interesting statement which is worth our attention. He said: "The paradox of those original revolutions was that in terms of social change they were considerably less revolutionary than not making a revolution (state economic planning for example), but in doing so they froze everything else. So the decline of religion is far more notable in non-socialist states such as England or Australia or Italy, but in Eastern Europe and I suspect the Soviet Union, as soon as the sheet of ice which has been put over everything cracks the mammoth comes alive again." This is a striking recognition of the fact that revolutions are basically reactionary.

Recent public comment is, then, a wild garden of forgetfulness, of monster-barring and concept stretching, of the righteous running for cover. Let me end by giving you a good example of another interesting evasion.

Denying the relevance of Eastern Europe

This example attempts to set up a conceptual barrier to protect socialism from being in any way implicated in the collapse of socialist practices in Eastern Europe. It is a passage from an academic article in The Journal of International Affairs:

"It is important to understand that Soviet-type systems have next to nothing in common with socialism as this was defined in the West. Socialism has traditionally involved commitment to equality, social justice, respect for the individual, widening choice, and access to the decision-making processes that govern the life of a community.

"Soviet-type systems" [which is what these monsters are now being called in order to detach them from the sacred name of socialism] "have had nothing in common with any of these ideals; their connection with the socialist agenda has been two-fold. First, they have used the state as an instrument of social engineering which has been an acceptable device to Western socialism as well, but have done this without any regard to society. Second, they have used the language of socialism entirely devoid of its content as a means of legitimation at home and abroad."³

You would not gather from this description that the Soviet revolution and the revolution made in all these other countries, was made by people no less intelligent than this writer or indeed any contemporary socialist. Nor would you gather that they were just as passionately filled with the idea that only a socialist revolution could redeem mankind as the socialists of today. Nor were they one whit less sincere. The notion suggested by the writer is that these are completely separate animals from the socialism with which you and I are familiar is the most perfect example of a monster-barring stratagem that I can find even in this crowded field.

FAREWELL TO RATIONALISM

The real subject of my polemic is, of course, a version of what just after the 1945 war Michael Oakeshott referred to as "rationalism"⁴. Rationalism as he understood it was the substitution of technical activity for the thing called politics. Oakeshott described it at one point as "the pursuit of perfection as the crow flies". Instead of, as in ordinary politics, the politician having to weave his way down country lanes, suddenly hit a highway, swing off to the left and possibly change the direction of his journey, the rationalist politician was a figure who wants to thunder straight across the terrain with high technology.

The folly of ignoring the human condition

The great image of rationalism in Oakeshott is the Tower of Babel. You may remember that sometime after the great flood, when with great rapidity, the sons of Noah spread whole new tribes of people across the earth, the inhabitants of this area decided to build a grand tower which could solve all of their problems. The great thing about this tower was it would protect human beings against visitations of punishment from God, especially things like floods. God took a very dim view of these rationalists and punished us all by striking them with an incomprehension of each other's tongues. This is the notional origin of the different languages of the world, which are for the purposes of this story, taken to be a punishment.

The Tower of Babel is the central image of the rationalism which has continued to afflict the human race, but has afflicted it especially in modern times when technical power has so increased. What is wrong with rationalism and what comes out clearly in the Biblical story, is that it is an attempt to deny the very human condition itself. It is the attempt to put oneself in a position of supreme invulnerability, and this is something not only impossible to human beings, but unmistakably a form of folly in anybody who attempts it.

Rationalism's allure

In looking out over this rather confused panorama of political opinion at the beginning of the nineties, which we are still obviously trying to make sense of, the point of my remarks is to give some sort of orientation.

I would make two concluding points. The first is that there is a great difference between living under socialism on the one hand and struggling to achieve socialism on the other. Struggling for socialism is a dramatic and interesting form of life, and it is one of the options of life available in capitalism.

The paradox is that the drive for Socialism is essentially a preference for travel over arrival. When socialism is actually achieved the result is boredom, and the reason for this boredom is the socialist conception of human beings as organisms. The point of a socialist society is to supply the needs of these organisms -- material needs, needs for drama, needs for control, and all the rest of it -- and this leads to a world in which nothing has any significance except the satisfaction of supposedly organic drives. That is one of the reasons why socialist errors are peculiarly intractable. Without some version of socialism, many people would not be able to engage in the favourite pastime of hating the civilization in which they live, and enjoying hating it. James Cagney was marketed by Hollywood as "the man we love to hate." Capitalism is the system many people love to hate living under.

Finally, the central point of the socialism I am concerned with is that it is a form of seduction by the charm of a grand collective project. A bit of contemporary jargon is the idea that certain leaders in politics have a quality called "charisma" -- which really means a sort of charm. The reason they have charisma is because they have a grand project and there are always in the world large numbers of people of relatively empty minds who are desperate for the invitation to "come aboard". If these people did not have a grand collective project to join, they would have to think something up for themselves.

project. We all know what militant enthusiasm and it seems to be that thinking has got this in terms of warfare -- and the trouble with any 'ism' is that when it runs out of warfare it runs out, because you cannot maintain that sort of spirit.

Kenneth Minogue: War is indeed the image of all grand collective projects because it gives you an instant hierarchy of value. You know that some things are more important than others and the problems of choice completely disappear. Socialism is of course a form of war and even when it is not a military metaphor, the basic one is "struggle" but there is also the war against poverty and the war against class -- all sorts of wars. I think that when I talk of grand collective projects I am always really thinking about war, and any project of this kind would very easily metamorphose itself into the imagery of war.

Chris Tasse: I have been cutting the newspapers and magazines and collecting fine examples of socialist responses to the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. Shifting the blame, they tell their critics "see you have got to find another enemy" and "how wicked of you to be triumphalistic". The objection there seems to be that you arrive for opposing them are wicked, and even though their project had resulted in failure, they refuse to accept that our critics could have been decent and accurate and we are just looking for excuses to deny.

Kenneth Minogue: I do agree with that. The point about socialism is that it has an egalitarian surface but a profoundly elitist inner-structure. The elitist inner-structure is the distinction between those who understand the ideal -- the ideal of how human beings should live -- and the rest of the community which needs to be moulded and shaped in that direction. And anybody who does not understand this will be interpreted in exactly the way that you suggested, as having a bestivist, and at worst very bad, motives indeed.

Michael Grenfell: While I am very sympathetic to a lot of what you said, I have a nagging doubt about applying these ideas to all socialists and all types of socialism. In fact you were mainly talking about communists. I think of socialists like Austria and even the Scandinavian countries where there is freedom of speech and freedom of the press, which cannot really be characterized as totalitarian, but they were certainly to be characterized as socialist to some extent. They have a great deal of nationalisation, extensive welfare states, and they would

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Victor Serebriakoff: During the last war, I suddenly discovered the whole nation had suddenly changed: we had a grand collective project. We all know about militant enthusiasm and it seems to me that mankind has got this in terms of warfare; and the trouble with any 'ism' is that when it runs out of warfare it runs out, because you cannot maintain that sort of spirit.

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Chris Tame: I have been cutting the newspapers and magazines and collecting fine examples of socialist responses to the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. Shifting the blame, they tell their critics "now you have got to find another enemy", and "how wicked of you to be triumphalistic". The assumption there seems to be that our motives for opposing them are wicked; and even though their project had resulted in failure, they refuse to accept that our motives could have been decent and honourable and we are just looking for enemies to decry.

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Michael Grenfell: While I am very sympathetic to a lot of what you said, I have a nagging doubt about applying these ideas to all socialists and all types of socialism. In fact you were mainly talking about communism. I think of societies like Austria and some of the Scandinavian countries where there is freedom of speech and freedom of the press, which cannot really be characterized as tyrannies, but they must certainly be characterized as socialist to some extent: they have a great deal of nationalization, extensive welfare states, and they would

probably call themselves socialists. What do we say to them?

Kenneth Minogue: That is another part of the forest, and it belongs to a talk about the breakdown of the welfare state and its assumptions. Socialists come in two forms: tigers and pussycats. Clearly, social democracy is a vast spectrum of devices which involve public determination of certain individual preferences and goods. It would be foolish to be hostile to every device of this kind. Nothing pleases me more than being able to present myself as a moderate outflanked on either the right or the left, and in this particular case I should say that there are clearly problems with Austria and Sweden and the kind of social democracy they have; but they are certainly not the melodramatic problems which I have been talking about today. We must distinguish between a revolutionary liberating and socially transforming project, and a merely reforming one.

Dennis O'Keefe: I have always thought that nominally independent socialists are more closely linked to actual Marxist culture than they want to admit. Not only practically and inspirationally, but in terms of the network of attractions that these ideologies cherish. Would you agree that there will be deep intellectual problems for them now that the Marxist ideology is in tatters?

Kenneth Minogue: Yes, there will, but I think the thing about grand collective projects is that, like buses, there is always another one coming along. One can see that the environment is a possible project and not too far off I detect safety and security as a future vehicle for increasing bureaucratic control. This is an immensely complex subject and I have been talking in terms of ideals, but you can construe the question in terms of policies. It is not merely that people have ideas which present explanatory difficulties. Almost independently of ideas, there are institutions which have particular interests, there are bureaucracies which are growing and looking to exploit emerging opportunities for expansion. There is a quite another world apart from intellectuals who have intellectual problems, and we ought not to forget it.

You are therefore right, but, along with straightforward revolutionary communists, anarchists, liberators, and people of that sort, there are very large numbers of people who now seek to transform society not by open revolution but by the backdoor of bureaucracy and the power of the judiciary. That I think is where most social transformation is now originating, and it can pretend to be relatively untouched by the collapse of Eastern Europe. That is why I brought in the theme of rationalism at the end. Marxism is almost a caricature of rationalism and its absurdities in theory and its horrors in practice are so gross that the problem is that the discrediting of Marxist revolutions is not altogether easy to transfer to much milder versions of rationalism, and that I think that is what you were getting at in your comment.

Lord Bauer: Will you accept the idea that the unifying characteristic of socialists is that they prefer collective action to individual decisions?

Kenneth Minogue: Yes, but I would comment that not everybody who prefers collective decision on some points is necessarily a socialist. Every state is a form of collective decision-making.

Lord Bauer: Yes, and it is hard to distinguish between the academic culture and a socialist culture. Is the distinction really sound even remotely in modern life?

A stream of publications has come from the top universities over the years -- Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Cambridge and LSE -- telling us all about the phenomenal achievements of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, tremendous achievements due to government monopoly of all resources and the command economy. It is too easy to refute this by pointing out that you get imploring letters from Eastern Europe asking for razor blades, cotton thread and everything. How is that reconciled with the phenomenal growth rate? The World Bank published a report quite recently on Rumania. It said that the Rumanian economy grew at a compound annual rate of 9.8% over thirty-five years. Work this back to the starting point and it means that incomes there were too low to sustain life. These are the absurdities that the academic culture maintains. Your contrasting of the socialist and the academic-scientific culture does violate common observation.

Kenneth Minogue: You would have to say that socialism and the academic world intersect with each other pretty thoroughly. But it is obvious -- if only from the example of you and me -- that not everyone in the universities is a socialist!

Ken Irvine: Collectivism emerges not just from ideological sources, but from a piecemeal drift in policy -- from the nationalist vision of a Scottish assembly, through to an elitist state keeping out immigrants, to a European collectivist vision whereby we feel it better for Europeans to buy from (nationalized) British suppliers than from (private-sector) foreign ones. Perhaps we are not looking closely enough at what is a threat and what we are asking people to say sorry for.

Kenneth Minogue: Yes, the wolf in sheep's clothing problem is an important point. All that I can deal with as an academic is what people say, and their remarks might conceivably be judged as wrong. No doubt the interpretations human beings have are often foolish, but that is a problem a little beyond my competence. We can only find some amusement in these things -- and run for cover when they get out of hand. But we had better not have another try at building the grand tower in which we would be safe, for there is no safe refuge from the real world.

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