

POST-COMMUNIST ANTICOMMUNISM: AMERICA'S NEW IDEOLOGICAL FRONTIERS

Joel Kovel

In the eight years since *Socialist Register* devoted an entire issue to the phenomenon of anticommunism,¹ the scarcely thinkable has happened. Anticommunism has won. No longer the ideology of one side in a global struggle, it now stands uncontested astride its fallen adversary. What are the implications of this turn of events? What happens when there is no longer a Communism to hate?

The Cold War would be better called the 'Forty Years War,' since it was anything but cold for all the Caucasian fraction of its command **structure**,² and also because its intensely ideological character suggests comparison with the Thirty Years War, last of the overtly religious bloodbaths to have wracked the Western world. The ideological fervour with which the Cold War was waged was a throwback to pre-Enlightenment days, even though the Western side, spearheaded by the United States, professed to be fighting for Enlightenment virtue against Eastern barbarism. This claim was very successfully advanced, to the extent that the terms 'democracy' and 'freedom' came to be automatically associated with 'capitalism' in the dichotomous thinking which characterised Cold War discourse.

Anticommunism manifests an ideology, which is to say, a nexus of ideas configured by power.³ But ideologies are not spontaneous concoctions of the brain. They are produced and consumed, and have their own enduring institutional structure. The national security state which formed itself after the second World War in order to manage the fortunes of the American empire employed a rigid, Manichean logic of anticommunism in which all darkness lay on the Soviet side and all light on the side of the West. It reproduced this logic in the minds of its elites, and, combining itself with existing instruments of repression such as the FBI and new ones such as the CIA, disseminated it throughout society. For this task, the state apparatus used techniques of terror and co-optation to draw into its orbit dominant sectors of the media and academy, the artistic community and the churches. Thus much if not all of civil society became **anticommunist**.⁴ But if anticommunism has such a structure and is more than a simple reaction to Communism, then we must expect it to remain active after the collapse

of the enemy. In fact, given the deep-rootedness of the ideology and its spread throughout civil society, we would argue that it must persist beyond the expected flailings about of cold warriors and militarists seeking gainful employment in a post-Communist world.

The American Model

Anticommunism is not the reaction of capitalism to communism in the abstract but the ideological formation of a particular capitalism as it undergoes class conflict in its national setting. Each nation of the capitalist world therefore has its own anticommunism, though the anticommunisms are coordinated in a transnational campaign reflective of empire and the transnational character of capital *itself*.⁵ In this pattern, the United States has a special standing, because of the scale of its anticommunism, suggested above, but also because of certain peculiar qualities acquired by the ideology as it has been shaped in America. It is not that anticommunism in the United States is more fervid than other varieties, or more bloodthirsty. The anticommunist slaughter of **1965** in Indonesia, for example, wiped out perhaps a million lives in a few weeks, and though crucially abetted by the CIA, did not have the hallmarks of an American **operation**.⁶ In **1933**, General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez set into motion a comparable degree of carnage in response to a Communist-inspired insurrection in El Salvador, with heartfelt encouragement but only minimal material help from the United States.⁷ Many other examples could be cited, such as in Guatemala, where the regime, though installed and supported by the American security apparatus, carries on anticommunist repression with a naked ferocity which exceeds Yankee standards.⁸ No doubt the United States has directly killed more in its anticommunist crusading than other capitalist states – witness Korea and **Vietnam**.⁹ But it has done so differently, in a way which gives America special status in the annals of anticommunism.

Of the two characteristics which define this status, one is suggested by the use of the term, 'crusade,' to describe American anticommunist ventures. American anticommunism is characteristically done for a higher purpose. This is no mere embellishment disguising brutal conduct but an active component of the ideological complex itself. One might spell it out further: anticommunism, American style, cannot be separated from the redemptive quality which has marked national character since the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay set out to build a 'City Upon a Hill,' a New Jerusalem that all the nations might admire. This peculiar and very potent spiritual project of Puritanism was carried forward into the pursuit of empire as the ideology of Manifest Destiny, and internally as the Gospel of Wealth with its ethos of salvation through individualistic capitalism. When the time came to take up the challenge posed by 'Communism' in all its

many manifestations, Puritan spirituality, diabolism and all, was swiftly retooled for the challenge.

A second specifically American feature is the degree to which anticommunism defines a politics of identity. In other countries, to be a communist is to be a certain kind of member of that society. Thus Chinese communists were Chinese people who happened to be Communists. One could be imprisoned or massacred for this belief, or be forced to live clandestinely, yet still retain one's national identity. Indeed, in a number of important instances such as Vietnam, Communists could claim to be the true nationalists and patriots. It has been just the opposite for the United States. Here, to be a Communist was to be *ipso facto* disloyal, a traitor pushed off the edge of society into an abyss of non-being. More significantly, since the actual role of the Communist Party in American history is, though not negligible, a minor one, any association, however remote, with the label of Communism becomes a mark of Cain. Jews, blacks, homosexuals, feminists, non-communist or even anti-communist leftists such as anarchists – whoever is out of line or 'alien' has been made to feel the sting. This mechanism became a powerful engine of conformism and the stifling of independent, critical thinking. The bizarre House Committee on Un-American Activities combined the signifier of Communism with that of 'Un-Americanism' during its thirty-year life span (from 1938 to 1968) and used the anxiety of the association to fuel a gigantic repressive apparatus. Anticommunism is therefore integral to the overall weakness and fragmentation of left politics in the United States. It is a much more effective, because internalised, means of repression, which succeeds mainly by severing the bonds between its victim and the body of society, rather than through the overt sanctions which define other varieties of anticommunism – though needless to add, these are plentiful in America as well. At the height of the inquisition, figures such as J. Edgar Hoover succeeded in instilling a positive connotation to anticommunism: one proved one's 'Americanism' not simply by avoiding Communism but by being anticommunist. It became an article of faith affirming one's membership in the body of **society**.¹⁰

In sum, anticommunism in America is no mere set of ideas. It has been, rather, the ideological aspect of a comprehensive structure of belief and inclusion, sharing certain features of religion. As would a religion, anti-communism bound the nation and its elites together and gave them a higher purpose through the evocation of an enemy called Communism. Rallying against Communism gave a boost to an uncompleted process of nation-building; while the repressive energy released through 'Americanism' made the struggle against the left all the more successful.

From an instrumental standpoint, anticommunism has succeeded wildly. Externally, the enemy has been vanquished; while internally, a nation welded together against Communism sees itself as identical with its

state and ruling class. In the process, the contribution of the working class to national identity has been sacrificed, and labour becomes a **near-negligible** political force." Anticommunism became therefore more than a mobilisation against the enemy; it has been the signifier of a whole society organised about its terms—the anticommunist society. A splendid triumph for business, no doubt. But at what cost? And what lies before this anticommunist society after its designated enemy has ceased to exist?

New Ideological Frontiers

We must qualify at the outset: the designated enemy has not entirely ceased to exist. The United States security apparatus still finds him here and there, and most of all where he has been for the past thirty two years, stuck in their throat in Havana. The dynamics of Castro-hating in the United States are still active, embedded in a nucleus of rabidly anticommunist exiles and the right wing of the Republican Party. They have never once stopped trying to strangle or decapitate the Cuban revolution, and even today, when Cuba is suffering severe miseries and is no longer a regional revolutionary influence, they still demand Fidel's scalp as tribute. Hence the well-known implacability of United States policy towards Cuba, joined wholeheartedly by the Free Press. Given the salubrious effect of a military escapade on Bush's flagging domestic political fortunes (a definite if minor cause of the Gulf War), one can never rule out an invasion, especially as the Soviets are no longer a regional factor. This remains unlikely, however, given the risks posed by fierce resistance; and in all likelihood, Castro and Cuba will be left dangling in the wind, a cautionary tale for those who contemplate stepping outside the order of things.

However, even where the triumph of capitalism seems unequivocal, the logic of anticommunism remains. That the Soviet Union has disintegrated undoubtedly diminishes some of the ideological pressures at the upper levels of the state apparatus and portends some cutting back of the Pentagon and the CIA. But anyone who counts on a major 'peace dividend' following the end of the Cold War had just as well believe in the tooth fairy. The structures remain in place, as do the basic contradictions that drive them and the prevailing mentality of the men in charge. Though the Communist as such no longer exists as a threat, the overall project to which communism was an antagonist and which anticommunism was designed to secure remains in crisis and in need of ideological buttressing. From another angle, there remain many very influential people whose living has depended on playing the various cards of anticommunism and who are not at all inclined to give up these habits of thought and expression. From the weapons **industries**, to Congress, to the command structures of the media and the academy, America is staffed by men and women schooled in anticommunist ways of thinking.

One zone where this remains important comprises the nations once under the aegis of the Soviet Union. So long as these remain less securely capitalist than Switzerland, anticommunism will have its **work cut** out. The experience of Stalinism, along with exposure to Western media and technocrats, understandably led to an infatuation with capitalist markets in societies emerging from Soviet control. For a while, then, all the Western propaganda system had to do was to congratulate itself and show images of ecstatic crowds pulling down statues of Lenin. As the bitter realisation began to sink in, however, that the future of the ex-Soviet bloc within the capitalist world system would be more akin to that of Mexico than West Germany, the tone had to shift. How to justify the fact that those released from the bondage of Communism would have to give up guaranteed rights to housing, employment and education, and their factories with recreation clubs and day care centres, for structural unemployment, inflation, gross differences in wealth and widespread **banditry**?¹² Only by continually drilling into the mass mind hosannas for deliverance from the devil Communism. As disillusion and despair set in across the former Soviet bloc, then, the post-Communist agenda for anticommunism develops. The beating of a dead horse replaces the call to crusade.

One can always count on *The New York Times* to lead in matters of this kind, and it is hard to find a week in which a post-Communist anticommunism does not figure prominently in its coverage. Here, to cite but one example, is a front-page article by Stephen Engelberg, dateline Warsaw, of October 24, 1991, and headlined 'Poland's Cure is Taking, but Side Effects Hurt.' Under a photo of a glittering department store which suggests Harrods or Bloomingdale's, Engelberg informs us that 'after 22 months of economic shock therapy, Poland's stores are bursting with goods, the once gray cities are splashed with brightly painted new shops and the private sector is growing at a dizzying rate.' The cities 'bustle with signs of economic rebirth, and local newspapers bulge with help-wanted ads.' But – oh, the tragedy of it all – this 'tough medicine . . . has caused some severe side effects that will sorely test the resolve of the new Government. . . .' Engelberg goes on to mention the 10 per cent unemployment (odd, in view of all the help-wanted ads) and the recession which could drive the Polish GNP 'down as much as 10 per cent below the already anaemic 1990 levels.' These he blames, remarkably, not on structural capitalist tendencies but on a 'crucial Communist legacy: a shortage of apartments is keeping workers who lose their jobs in the dismal **one**-factory towns from moving into the newly prosperous urban areas.' In sum, there is still all-good and all-bad in the world. Whatever is praiseworthy in Polish society comes from the almighty market; whatever is condemnable comes from the Communist past. Notably, this thesis is secured through the discourse of health and illness. Communism was a disease; capitalism is the cure, and anything which goes wrong through its agency is only a **side-**

effect. Sometimes cures hurt, but take your medicine, and you'll be all right in the morning.

Such thinking – and the policies compatible with it – is certain to be reproduced endlessly insofar as it remains necessary to justify the ways of God to Man. In this respect, anticommunism in some form will remain an ideological fixture so long as capitalism is crisis-ridden and even a glimmer of class struggle remains on the horizon. Not, that is, until the last worker wholeheartedly and once and for all accepts the rule of capital can the ideological apparatus rest its case. The mere passage of the aberration known as Communism, Soviet-style, is by no means, then, a sufficient condition for the withering away of anticommunism. The actuality of Communism, after all, was never the main issue for anticommunism. What counted ideologically was the symbolic fodder which could be made of it, and for this purpose, the ghost of a dead Communism is not much worse than Communism's living presence.

We have seen, however, that for the United States, one cannot simply talk about anticommunism as something foisted by elites upon a passive population. The ideology is both an instrumentality and something else – and this something has had certain spiritual qualities as well as being in some way part of the glue which holds the nation together. What happens in a post-Communist era depends, therefore, on what anticommunism in all its ramifications has done to America.

At the end of the cold war, the United States stands as the reigning military force and the world's sole superpower, indeed, strategically stronger than ever thanks to control over oil resources won through the Gulf war. Yet America is also unmistakably a society in decline. The giant economy stagnates, government is held in contempt, corruption and cynicism dominate public life, and public confidence in the future is the lowest since the depths of the great depression of the 1930s. Class differences are widening as real wages of workers steadily decline while millions of people who once thought themselves **middle-class**¹³ move downward into inferior, deskilled jobs. With increasing numbers of the poor being written off, major sectors of the country approach Third World status. An example: when I trained as a physician we took pride in the fact that tuberculosis, the leading cause of death in the nineteenth century, was about to be eradicated, thanks to powerful antibiotics and, principally, advances in public health. Today, lethal, antibiotic-resistant tuberculosis is reaching epidemic proportions in the rapidly-growing and AIDS-infested prison **population**,¹⁴ from whom it is soon to spread to the ghettos. Even before this happened, the life expectancy of black males in New York's Harlem had drifted below that of men in Bangladesh. Soon – who knows? – it will reach the level of Zaire. But this is forgotten by a white majority despairing about its own downward mobility, and increasingly subject to the logic of racism. As the American Dream – that vision of the self-made

man winning success in a land of infinite opportunity – evaporates, American society seems to be slowly disintegrating before our eyes.

What has been the role of anticommunism in this; and what are its implications for the post-Communist era? We may take up these questions at the level of means as well as ends.

Corruption of Empire

You were our heroes after the War. We read American books and saw American films, and a common phrase in those days was 'to be as rich and wise as an American.' What happened?

Vietnamese Communist officer to his American prisoner."

The Means

New Deal social democracy and the war against fascism were necessities and not preferred options for the American elites. Nevertheless, they were also vehicles for a tremendous amount of good will which came **America's** way in the **1940s** and helped resurrect the rather tarnished ideal of the United States as the land of the free. Indeed, so taken was Ho Chi Minh with the democratic potentials of America that he actually approached United States officials to enlist their aid in his struggle against French colonialism.

Scarcely if ever in human history has a reservoir of affection been emptied so rapidly. For the American elites lost no time in their efforts to reverse these unwanted adversaries and alliances. Fascists were recruited into what was for them the real, anticommunist, war, and labour was **crushed**.¹⁶ The friend of self-determination became once more, and more strongly than ever, the gendarme of the status quo. The shocks of the **McCarthy** era and the formation of the national security state with its permanent garrison were manifestations of a violent about-face, which restored traditional bourgeois hegemony in the course of an expanded imperial role. We need not detail these events. What I want to highlight here is their essential moral contradiction, deriving from the fact that this bastion of reaction continued to see itself as an emancipator, and tried to foist this notion upon the world.

There is a background. The aggravated high-mindedness of American anticommunism continues the moral dynamic which has marked America since its Puritan origins, manifest as the need to feel virtuous and an inability to admit wrongdoing. "To this day, for example, the American government has never admitted fault for any of its escapades, from Hiroshima to Baghdad – in remarkable contrast to the willingness of Germany to admit guilt for the crimes of Nazism or the Soviet Union for those of Stalinism. Even Japan inches closer to an admission of national guilt than the United States.

But it is not simply a case of denial; a moral reversal is also involved. Characteristically, the American responds to wrongdoing by seeking some high, even transcendent ground upon which his aggression turns into a means of redemption. Here is a recent specimen, the response of pundit George Will to the invasion of Panama. Will, a confidant of Presidents and top Washington insider, wrote in his nationally syndicated column of December 25, 1989, three days after the Americans landed: 'This intervention [in Panama] is a good-neighbor policy . . . It punctuates a decade of recovery of national purposefulness . . . and a year of militant democracy. . . .' Dismissing Bush's rationale that the United States invaded to save American lives, Will continues: 'There is a richer, an unapologetically nationalistic case to be made . . . a constant of America's national character . . . has been a messianic impulse . . . It rises from the belief that national identity is bound up with acceptance of a responsibility to further democracy. Not the aggressive universalisation but the civilised advancement of the proposition [democracy] to which we, unique among the nations, are dedicated.'

The cold war represented an expansion of both ends of the moral dialectic. Heightened aggressiveness was conferred by super-weaponry and the exigencies of policing the empire against global insurrection; while at the same time a heightened demand to feel virtuous was conferred by the legacy of antifascism noted above and, critically, the logic of anticommunism itself. Once committed to the ideology, they also became its instruments. Anticommunism, with its absolute apportionment of good to the West and evil to the Soviets, trapped the security elites in an expanding vortex of violence and denial, each side of which implied the other as a response. Compelled to feel virtuous, they could only justify their aggression by worst-case analysis of the Communist adversary – which in turn only stimulated more aggression on their part. Lawlessness was built into this dynamic, since everything done in the name of anticommunism would by definition be removed from moral self-reflection.

Institutionally, the vortex gave birth to the CIA and the era of covert operations: relentless mayhem carried out with a democratic, smiling, nice-guy facade. From its very beginning, the security apparatus became a state within the state, utterly undemocratic in its purported defence of democracy and regulated finally by the logic of anticommunism. It was only a matter of time before elements of gangsterism appeared in the workings of the national security state. The result of this has been a growing split of schizophrenic proportions in the American state. While an increasingly captive press continues to bleat about the 'fundamental decency' and devotion to democratic rights of the United States, an increasingly lawless security apparatus works its will, bombing, invading, subverting international agreements, sneering at the World Court (which condemned the United States in 1986 for its war against Nicaragua), and so forth, confident that it can get away with just about anything."

But all the media manipulation in the world cannot stimulate authentic patriotic conviction after four decades of sustained criminality. There is simply no way to generate a sustained crusade out of such material. Note the qualifiers: 'authentic,' and 'sustained.' There seems to be little difficulty, given the strength of the propaganda system and the weakness of alternative views, to get people believing in America again, as George Bush so skilfully did during the Persian Gulf war. Bush then explicitly stated that Operation Desert Storm was going to overcome the 'Vietnam Syndrome' (as if objections to imperialist war were a disease). And the popular frenzy as the yellow ribbons were hauled out across America while the free world defended civilisation against **Saddam**, 'worse than Hitler,' Hussein seemed to prove Bush right. Even allowing for the unprecedented degree of cheerleading coming from the media and intellectual elites, the response was remarkable, especially given the high degree of doubt evinced almost up to the outbreak of war. In this respect, Desert Storm amply revealed the reserves of jingoism latent in the American heartland as well as the capacity to mount a crusade resembling the most ardent escapades of the wars against Communism.

But there was a catch: only the quick ~~fix~~ of a swift, overwhelming military victory could succeed in mobilising the American people. Bush knew well that the popular will could not be counted upon to support anything less. Had war lasted another month, and more significantly, had any kind of casualty level been suffered by American forces, the frenzy would have faded as quickly as it arose. The Gulf war had to be fought as a high-tech media extravaganza precisely because the rationale of sacrifice is gone, without which its actual motivation of naked imperial greed ('our oil under their soil') could no longer be rationalised. As no coherent framework of explanation could be sustained, Bush's glorious escapade was written on water. Now, nine months later, as this is being written, the great victory over the Saracens seems to have gone down memory hole. 'Can anyone recall,' writes Tom Wicker, official liberal of *The New York Times*, 'a disappearance more precipitous than that of the national celebration of Desert Storm, last winter's great victory in the Persian Gulf – the war whose fighting men and women, unlike those of Vietnam, were to be honoured and remembered?' No doubt Bush will do what he can to revive the chauvinism of Desert Storm as his re-election bid approaches, and he will get all the help he wants. But the empire has destroyed its own spirit.

The 'Vietnam Syndrome' is therefore still alive. Vietnam, like every aspect of the Cold War, involved a swindle. But there are swindles and swindles; some proceed by exploiting heartfelt belief, while others have to conjure that belief, then exploit it. The Vietnam war, at least in its beginnings, may have been the last occasion for the mobilisation of the crusading mentality, grounded in fears of Communism as a mortal enemy, and also in a residue of authentic pride in America. Soviet Communism

was never the enemy it was made out to be, but it was a real and powerful antagonist; and the United States was never the beacon of liberty it made itself out to be, but it had retained some legitimate self-respect as the defender of freedom against fascism. Vietnam squandered the remnants of that legitimacy. It was the war in which the true nature of the security apparatus surfaced, to stain, forever, its image as the benevolent protector of freedom.³⁰ This was a major reason the United States lost the war; and it was this actual loss and humiliation, so utterly foreign to a seemingly charmed country which had thought itself immune from the sufferings of history, which seared the lesson into the national consciousness as the 'Vietnam syndrome.' A mere victory over **Saddam** Hussein or his next surrogate is not going to undo the structural underpinnings of a declining imperial spirit.

The Ends

Exposed to the largest educational and informational apparatus in the history of civilisation, the average American remains astoundingly ill-informed and apathetic about the condition of the world.³¹ Of course this has a lot to do with the fact that information is processed by a propaganda system which is more likely to befuddle rather than enlighten the citizen. But there is a deeper aspect to the problem which is both cause and effect of the low level of political intelligence, and relates directly to the power of anticommunism in America.

The great waves of anticommunist repression were, we have observed, astonishingly successful, and most successful of all was that which took place during the Cold War. In reversing antifascism and social democracy, the elites set loose a peculiarly American reign of terror. Relatively few lives were lost, relatively few prison terms were handed out, and only a few thousand people lost their jobs. Yet the title of David Caute's book remains apt: a 'Great Fear' stalked America, an archaic, diabolising fear of internal pollution and betrayal. When the waves of repression subsided, left opposition politics had been crushed in the United States. Combined with 'post-industrial' changes in the nature of production, the triumph of anticommunism left America as the nonpareil specimen of capitalism. The dream of the bourgeoisie had come true: the proletariat had withered away; anticommunism had helped secure class struggle on the most favourable possible terms to business, leaving in its wake a largely **oppressionless** society characterised by the accommodation of labour to capital, the functional identity of the Democratic and Republican Parties, and the most threadbare left-wing politics of any nation in modern history. Reagan's triumph was made possible by this clearing away of opposition, which led the way to rampant militarism, deregulation, a further assault on labour, transfers of wealth from poor to rich, and unbridled corruption and

looting. And the collapse of Communism has seemingly sealed the process, confirming capital in its American heaven.

The results of this marked degree of hegemony are now becoming obvious as a series of disasters: industrially, where a get-rich-quick economy destroys its own base; environmentally, where the United States leads the world in the production of waste and the opposition to the regulation of pollutants; in health policy, where the legacy of the crushing of 'socialised medicine,' i.e., some degree of humanity and distributive justice in taking care of people, leads to a fabulously cruel and irrational health **system**;²² and of course, militarily, thanks to the famous military-industrial complex. But there is also a kind of intellectual climate resulting from the loss of tension which conditions all the other aspects and needs emphasis.

We have noted already that anticommunism produces an identity of the nation with its business elites. Repression of the contribution of labour to society leads to that homage to capital which has become so axiomatic in America that any serious criticism of society, much less, advocacy of social transformation, is seen as quixotic. Another kind of repression emerges at this point, not simply of Marxism, but of that which Marxism stands for: the notion that history is the story of class struggle, which gives human events a dynamic and a structure. In anticommunist America one is not to think thoughts such as these. One arrives instead at the flaccid sense that history is over, and that it never meant very much anyhow. A profound weariness and cynicism occupies the place where **critical/dialectical** thinking used to occur. Since the underlying structure which makes society intelligible is erased, society becomes a mystery, its various phenomena merely strung together like the words of a game of Scrabble, and as easily forgotten. Thus even factual understanding of the world is lost.

The security apparatus in the era of **Reagan/Bush** may be said to have undergone something of a 'postmodern' mutation. The effect was obvious in Reagan, whose peculiar relation to truth was conditioned by his career as actor and huckster for General Electric. However, Bush's rather similar, albeit more unconvincing, behaviour indicates that we are dealing with structural changes having to do with the convergence of politics and mass culture rather than individual variations.

Reagan's peculiar psychology helped make true whatever the **image-makers** decreed as suitable to the needs of the apparatus. As Michael Rogin has written, two seemingly antithetical elements – amnesia and spectacle – are conjoined in the postmodern politics of **empire**.²³ Each fluidly transgresses the truth and becomes necessary for the other. Forgetting makes spectacle possible and spectacle makes forgetting possible. And both operate to carry anticommunism forward into a postmodern mode where the actual presence of the Communist enemy becomes a minor incidental. History is drained of meaning, including the history of anticommunism, in this age of photo opportunity and special effects, of

terrorism industry⁷⁴ and loyalty industry. In the informational economy history becomes just another raw material for commodification. As in a Disney theme park, it becomes excavated, extracted, processed, cycled and recycled ceaselessly until it turns into a kind of symbolic plasma. With wars fought as video games and enemies manufactured like hit tunes, Bush and his successors will have a free hand to synthesise as many incarnations of Communism as they please.

But none of it can take hold, not because Communism was the 'real thing' so far as demons go, but because anticommunism has debilitated the collective mentality of America. Anticommunism defined a feasible, if grotesque, state religion during the heyday of the American empire; but it also destroyed the basis of social reason, thus exemplifying Gramsci's aphorism that when the old order is dying while the new one cannot be born, society itself becomes irrational. If people can recover neither memory of the past nor imagine a future, they remain imprisoned by a present defined by sensation and spectacle. Increasingly unhappy with this state of affairs yet forbidden to think in terms of real alternatives, they vote out the incumbents in office in a kind of generalised disgust, or sink bitterly into a new isolationism, a sentiment exploited by the ultra-right Patrick Buchanan in his bid for President.

Something must be set forth to replace the ideological focus on Communism, in order to organise the inchoate frustration of a society which offers no hope beyond the fantasies conjured by Hollywood and Madison Avenue. For all the liberal facade, America has always needed the devil, and never more so than now. It is by far the most punitive society of the Western world, with the highest rates of incarcerations, long sentences, and, of course, executions; yet politicians never cease inveighing against 'being soft on crime,' or pressing for harsher penalties. A rational, humane policy towards drug abuse is unthinkable in this climate – how could it be, when dope fiends and **narco-terrorists** are demanded by the apparatus?

Because anticommunism also defined a politics of identity (think only how it facilitated the integration of Eastern European nationalities into American society, or aided the integration of the armed forces), it served as a kind of social glue as well as a spiritual ideal. The loss of its rationale serves to catalyse the disintegration of America, much as the loss of the Communist ideal fosters tribalism in what used to be the Soviet bloc. In each case, fascist potentials are raised as the usual scapegoats are paraded forth. Leading the way in America are attacks on blacks (as beneficiaries of affirmative action), women (who face reversal of abortion rights), gay people (who are suffering increasing numbers of violent assaults), and, remarkably, Jews. I say remarkably, because it seems that American Jewry had so embourgeoisified and ingratiated itself, through Israel, with the national security state, as to have finally achieved its dream of safety. But it seems also as if there is never to be full immunity against the anti-semitic

plague. As financial institutions collapse, talk of Jewish bankers and their conspiracy is heard once more, and the foul David Duke has been able to do what had been thought unthinkable – actually recreate Nazi ethos as a viable political option in America, gaining no less than 55% of the white vote in his losing race for the Louisiana governorship, despite an unprecedented campaign against him which broadcast his fascist record into every home in the state. But Duke is only exploiting a path laid down by George Bush, who made viciously racist smears respectable in his campaign against Dukakis.

Along with this has come a new wave of attacks on the defenders of the scapegoats. Artists attempting to voice the forbidden find themselves facing the Yahoo mentality as at no time since the 1920s. And at the universities, where the few remnants of an emancipatory consciousness can be transmitted to the younger generation, a new McCarthyism arises, its object no longer the Communist as subversive, but the grotesquely named 'politically correct,' that is, those who insist on anti-racism, **anti**-sexism, and anti-homophobia as political principles. 'Are you now, or have you ever been, politically correct?,' becomes a new watchcry. As with Communism, the presumption is that the Politically Correct are, if not dominant in universities, strong enough to make a real bid for power, and moreover, that their intolerance constitutes an actual threat to liberal society. Remarkably, the Politically Correct are considered the **Mc**-Carthyites, out to intimidate and repress decent conservative Americans. Thus ex-Marxist historian Eugene Genovese wrote in the *New Republic*, 'As one who saw his professors fired during the **McCarthy** era, and who had to fight, as a pro-Communist Marxist, for his own right to teach, I fear that our conservative colleagues are today facing a new **McCarthyism** in some ways more effective and vicious than the **old**.'²⁸

One does not know whether to laugh or cry when faced with such reasoning, which by seeking to defend liberal society only succeeds in putting another nail in its coffin. **Marx's** judgment that when history repeats itself, it returns as farce, seems particularly apt here – except that there is nothing funny about this farce. The facts of the matter are that American universities remain largely in bed with the state and corporations, and that the assault on political correctness is transparently a reactionary thrust against the growing multiculturalism of America.

Whether this multiculturalism will succeed in forging a revolutionary subject is quite dubious given the erasure of the vision of the whole by anticommunism. Even so, it will be fiercely attacked, not for the actual threat, but because the dominant Right is unappeasable. No matter how hegemonic its domain, no matter how burnt-out and pathetic its opposition, the Right cannot rest, must find enemies and subversives. This is not because the right is paranoid in any psychological sense. It is due, rather, to the very nature of its success. The monstrous swindles of **anticommu-**

nism have made it impossible to name what was ailing the system and what could rise against it. As fundamental inequities in wealth and power grow, and as, therefore, the potential for resistance continues to mount, so, too, must a shadow-play of life-and-death struggle between the defenders and disturbers of the order be perpetually enacted.²⁴

Marx and **Engels** long ago described a Communism in its infancy as the 'spectre' haunting Europe. Now the spectre outlives Communism itself, attached to all sorts of peculiar phenomena. As ever, these phantoms will be used to organise consent to capitalist rule. Yet as a declining America flounders about to impose its New World Order, an opening is still available through which potential resistance can be turned into actual resistance. What ultimately determines the persistence of anticommunist dynamics in a post-Communist era is the fact that what came to be called Communism after 1917 was an aborted socialist alternative and not true socialism. So long as capitalism organises society, no effort will be spared to keep this truth down. That is not in question. The question, as ever, is whether truth can awaken in the hearts and minds of the people, that they may rebuild a viable socialism and begin making history again.

NOTES

1. Ralph Miliband, John **Saville** and Marcel Liebman, eds., *Socialist Register 1984: The Uses of Anti-Communism*.
2. According to testimony of former Defense Secretary Robert **McNamara** before the Senate Armed Services Committee on December 3, 1990, as many as 22,000,000 people died in over 150 armed struggles since the Second World War.
3. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London, 1991), has a thorough discussion of the ramifications of the term.
4. For general studies of the heyday of anticommunist repression in America, see Cedric **Belgrave**, *The American Inquisition 1945-1960* (New York, 1989 [1973]); David Cauter, *The Great Fear* (New York, 1978); for the press, see James **Aronson**, *The Press and The Cold War* (New York, 1990 [1970]); for a survey of cultural repression, see Stephen Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, 1991).
5. See, for example, Reg Whitaker, 'Fighting the Cold War on the Home Front: America, Britain, Australia and Canada,' *Socialist Register 1984*, 23-67.
6. See William Blum, *The CIA - A Forgotten History* (London, 1986) p. 217-222, for further references. For recent revelations see Kathy Kadane, 'Ex-agents say CIA compiled death lists for Indonesians,' *San Francisco Examiner*, May 20, 1990; Ralph **McGehee**, 'The Indonesian Massacres and the CIA,' *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, 35 (Fall 1990), 56-58 (also reporting the latest efforts at cover-up). The *New York Times* called the coup 'one of the most savage mass slaughters of modern political history;' while *Life* wrote that the violence was 'tinged not only with fanaticism but with blood-lust and something like witchcraft.'
7. For an eyewitness account, see Roque Dalton, *Miguel Marmol*, trans. Kathleen Ross and Richard Schaaf (Willimantic, CT, 1987).
8. The memoirs of Rigoberta **Menchú**, for example, detail an astounding degree of sadism by the Guatemalan army as it has repressed Indian uprisings, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, ed., **Elisabeth Burgos-Debray**, trans., Ann Wright (London, 1984). The current Serrano regime, like every other, came into office pledging to end political violence. Yet according to the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission, 700 political killings have taken place during his first ten months in office. Allison Martin, 'Guatemalan bishop: No justice, no peace,' *Guardian*, December 11, 1991, 13.

9. According to Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, *The Limits of Power* (New York, 1972), 614–6, the United States killed more than 3,000,000 people in Korea. A similar number were killed in Indochina.
10. During the HUAC inquisition of Hollywood, Chairman J. Parnell Thomas responded to Ring Lardner Jr's refusal to testify as follows: 'It is not a question of our wanting you to answer that. It is a very simple question. Anybody would be proud to answer it – any real American would be proud to answer it – any real American would be proud to answer the question, "Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" Any real American,' Eric Bentley, ed. *Thirty Years of Treason* (New York, 1971), 187.
11. See Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* (London, 1986).
12. Both economically and criminally – thus, street crime has increased five-fold in Prague since the capitalist accession.
13. It is an article of faith for vast numbers of Americans to identify themselves as 'middle class,' a term pertaining to status and income rather than Marx's notion of class as a form of praxis related to ownership and control of the means of production. Thus the bulk of American proletarians, reasonably well-off and without real class-consciousness, think of themselves as middle class. The effect may be considered an outcome of anticommunism's stifling effect on class conflict. See also Benjamin DeMott, *The Imperial Middle* (New York, 1990).
14. I have been told recently that Governor George Deukmejian presided over a quadrupling of the prison population of California during his three terms of office. In the country as a whole there are currently more African-American men in prison than in college.
15. Stanley Karnow, *Washington Post*, October 24, 1965.
16. See Christopher Simpson, *Blowback* (New York, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), for documentation of the extent and unseemly haste of United States recruitment of Nazis into its war against Communism.
17. To be sure, Puritans had a heightened awareness of sinfulness. However, this was directed away from the practical reality such as expropriation of Indian lands, and couched in the discourse of diabolism and original sin. Thus Puritans would flagellate themselves endlessly about how they had fallen away from God, while insouciantly justifying their extermination of the subhuman and diabolical Indians. See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown, CT, 1973).
18. And indeed it can. An apotheosis of sorts came recently with the dropping of **murder** charges (by a Reagan-appointed Federal court) against Oliver North and John Poindexter, architects of the Iran-Contra scandals, along with the merest slap on the wrist for Elliott Abrams, (suspended sentence plus 100 hours of Community Service[!]) self-confessed perjurer before Congress for his role in the same.
19. December 19, 1991, **A31**.
20. The Korean War was no less genocidal but it was much more successfully kept out of **view** – in part due to the better-defined character of the lines of battle, and in part due to the relatively open expansion of television coverage in Vietnam (a lesson the state was to take to heart in Grenada, Panama and Iraq, in all of which coverage was tightly controlled). See Jon Halliday, 'Anti-Communism and the Korean War,' *Socialist Register* 1984, 130–163.
21. One **instance** among the numberless, which I chanced to hear over the radio: asked on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor what it was they thought of first when the name, Japan, was mentioned, a group of High School seniors responded, 'Tienamin Square.'
22. It is not often **realised** how directly anticommunism played a role in the health care crisis. However, as Paul Starr describes it, 'compulsory health insurance became entangled in the cold war, and its opponents were able to make 'socialized medicine' an issue in the growing crusade against communist influence in America.' For example, 'a House subcommittee investigating government propaganda for health insurance concluded that "known Communists and fellow travelers within Federal agencies are at work diligently with Federal funds in furtherance of the Moscow party line."' Then there were incidents in the Senate such as the **following**: 'In his **introductory** remarks the first day, Senator Murray, the committee **chairman**, asked that the **health bill** [put forward by **President Truman**] **not** be described as socialistic or communistic. Interrupting, Senator Robert **Taft** of Ohio, the

senior Republican, declared, "I consider it socialism. It is to my mind the most socialist measure this Congress has ever had before it." Taft suggested that compulsory health insurance, like the full employment act, came right out of the Soviet constitution. When Murray refused to allow him continue, Taft walked out, announcing that Republicans would boycott the hearings.' And that was all for national health insurance. Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, (New York, 1982), p. 284,283.

23. Michael Rogin, "'Make My Day!': Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics,' *Representations* 29 (Winter 1990), 99-123.
24. See Edward Herman and Gerry O'Sullivan, *The 'Terrorism Industry'*, (New York: Pantheon, 1989), for a discussion of how discourse on terrorism is produced according to these principles.
25. Quoted in Christopher Phelps, 'The Second Time as Farce: The Right's "New McCarthyism,"' *Monthly Review*, 43 # 5, October, 1991, 39-57.
26. This tendency will be reinforced by the immanently anticapitalist logic of the ecological crisis, which remains intractable so long as a profit-driven system reigns. As a result, the tide of red-baiting already laps at the green and environmental movements.