

Renaissance Dreams

The Black Death is a natural benchmark for the COVID-19 pandemic, the basic point being that after the catastrophe, each place will undergo reconstruction on its own terms, which is why remembering the Black Death offers relief (“This was not as bad”) and also hope (“Things will be OK”). Things will not simply go back to normal, of course, but the new normal will be in any case an updated version of what we left behind. In this account, agency is not lost, just awkwardly *quarantined* for a little bit. Light awaits us at the end of the tunnel. However, there is a counterpoint of reference: the pandemic that decimated the Americas in the aftermath of the arrival of Spanish conquistadores. As we know, things did not go back to normal at all.

All major pre-Hispanic cities were devastated, paving the road to an overseas kingdom whose power seemed more apt for dealing with such ravaging diseases.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic is far from being as devastating as either the Black Death or the European plagues brought to the Americas, yet the antipodal sequels of such extreme cases can help us make sense of the current politi-

cal reverberations. The most serious pandemic since the Spanish Flu a hundred years ago, COVID-19 has sparked the biggest international crisis since World War II. Facing the new coronavirus and its disruptive implications, China has outperformed the United States, making liberal democracy less glamorous in a collision where the future of world hegemony is at stake. Is it a shot of renaissance or a *conquista* that awaits us?

Pandemonium: The International Situation after COVID-19

Ramón I. Centeno

The Spanish arrival in Mesoamerica in the 1510s found a variegated collection of city-states, the most prominent of which was Mexico-Tenochtitlan—that is, the *atlépetl* (polity) of Tenochtitlan, located on the island of Mexico in Lake Texcoco. A hegemonic force on the road to building an empire, the Mexica ruled along with their neighboring junior partners of Texcoco and Tlacopan through the confederacy known as the Triple Alliance, the Aztecs. Otherwise a tale of

imperial consolidation, such a path was abruptly interrupted by the expedition of Hernán Cortés, the Spanish conquistador. He met polities resentful of Aztec power, and these managed to draw the Spaniards to their side. In this context, the archenemy of the Aztecs, the confederacy of Tlaxcala, became the military mastermind of a liberation war, co-led by the Spaniard adventurers, that besieged Mexico-Tenochtitlan.

The war did not have a winner yet when the smallpox carried by a Spanish soldier unleashed a furious virgin-soil epidemic, as deadly as the one that had already swept the Caribbean. “The Mexica warriors were greatly weakened by it,” according to a surviving noble of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in an account to Friar de Sahagún. Among the dead was Cuitláhuac, the Mexica leader that had been preparing a counterattack. A Spanish soldier elaborated in a letter to Charles V:

The pestilence of measles and smallpox was so severe and cruel that more than one-fourth of the Indian people in all the land died—and this loss had the effect of hastening the end of the fighting because there died a great quantity of men and warriors and many lords and captains and valiant men against whom we would have had to fight and deal with as enemies, and miraculously Our Lord killed them and removed them from before us. (Vázquez de Tapia 1953)

The epidemic crippled all sides of the war, except for the Spanish. The small military force led by Cortés thus acquired unexpected leverage and further mystical prestige in the middle of darkness. How were they immune to *cocoliztli*, the plague? Thrown into irreversible preeminence, the Spanish rise to power unraveled in the “New World” the greatest mass conversion to any religion of the millennium. A wave of Marian apparitions, the most famous of which was of course that of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, soon sprouted all over the land that had become known as New Spain. One apparition claimed, speaking in Nahuatl to a working-class man,

that she was the mother of all afflicted inhabitants of the land and that, as such,

I will listen to your weeping, your sadness, to settle, to remedy all your different needs, your miseries, your suffering ... Listen, put it into your heart, my youngest and dearest son, that what frightens you, what afflicts you is nothing. Do not let your face, your heart, be disturbed. Do not fear this sickness [*cocoliztli*] nor any other sickness which afflicts, which overwhelms. Am I not here, I, who am your mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? (León-Portilla 2000, 103, 133)

In contrast, the Black Death two centuries earlier precipitated the Renaissance in Europe. There, the survivors embarked on a linear sequence of processing loss in which the work of mourning ultimately led to a reconnection with life and new possibilities for love. This propelled a momentous reevaluation: if God had not impeded so much death, then mankind was lonelier than imagined, yet humans still had each other. The reconnection with classic Greek culture was in this sense an affirmation of life on earth over the afterlife of heaven. Art started switching its focus from the sacred to the profane, from God to human.

In the Americas, processing loss flowed through a cultural switch in which mourners sought solace in the religion of the outsiders immune to the cataclysm. Far from a reinvention of the Old World as in the Renaissance, the Conquista was the collapse of another “Old World”—which is the true meaning of the “discovery” of the “New

World.” Contrary to the aftermath of the Black Death, epidemics in the Americas aroused subservience rather than emancipation. The loss, a cosmocide, was never really overcome and henceforth imbued the indigenous question with a spirit of melancholy—proof of an incomplete mourning—that lasts to this day.

Farewell to American Redemption

Trump’s scrapping of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and his protectionist reform of the North American Free Trade Agreement must be contrasted with Xi Jinping’s (2017b) speech in Davos: “We must remain committed to developing global free trade and investment, promote trade and investment liberalization and facilitation through opening-up and say no to protectionism. Pursuing protectionism is like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air.” This ironic role reversal in which the head of the Chinese Communist Party defends the liberal global order from the illiberal course of its architect, the United States, illustrates the current situation. Not so long ago, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Pax Americana revived its original pre-Cold War vision of “a liberal-capitalist order of free trade stretching around the world, in which the United States would automatically—by virtue of its economic power and example—hold first place” (Anderson 2015, 151). In more recent times,

however, the economic dynamism of China has challenged the “harmony” between the general and the particular—that is, “The general interests of capital secured by the national supremacy of the United States.” As Anderson reckons, U.S. supremacy “is no longer the automatic capstone of the civilization of capital” (153). The main distinguishing feature of U.S. foreign policy since World War II, the coalition of isolationist and interventionist impulses, has been held together by threads: what can now ensure that the costs of American foreign policy will report internal benefits that, in turn, will reinforce U.S. hegemony?

With the fall of communism, the ultimate revolutionary threat, why would capitalism still care about democracy? Why would contemporary Tocquevilles need to master democratic vaccines after three decades of the end of the revolutionary plague?

If American primacy is no longer the natural result of a liberal world order sponsored by Washington, the only way to keep the privileged position of the United States is to alter such an order to produce the same outcome. Trump’s reaction

to this picture has been clear: the costs of U.S. world ambitions are too high for an economy in distress. If South Korea and Japan want U.S. military presence in their countries to deter China and North Korea, they will have to pay for it. If Europeans want U.S. military presence to deter Russia, they will need to give more money to NATO and stop expecting that Washington fixes everything. As Trump (quoted in Blake 2016) said to Hilary Clinton: “We cannot be the policemen of the world. We cannot protect countries all over the world where they’re not paying us what we need.” In this, however, Trump was only taking to a logical conclusion the “anti-free-rider

campaign” put forth by Obama (quoted in Goldberg 2016): “We don’t have to always be the ones who are up front.” It will not thereafter be easy to restore America’s prestige among its allies east and west of Eurasia.

Pushed by the economic imperatives brought about by the global financial crisis of 2008, the illiberal turn of U.S. imperialism has marked the end of a postwar cycle. This outcome, however, is intertwined with the concurrent end of an older cycle that connects the French Revolution with the fall of the Soviet Union. The defeat of revolutionary politics was of such depth that it caused anthropological damage that Traverso (2016) has defined as the “collapse of utopian expectations.” This fact, universally acknowledged as a defeat of the Left—notably, by the liberal celebration of the “end of history”—has ironically encouraged the deterioration of liberal democracy, the main political shield created against revolution.

It will never be sufficiently remembered that liberalism admitted democratic features only as a reluctant adaptation to the pandemic of revolutionary furor sparked by the French Revolution. Tocqueville thus raised two rhetorical questions: “Do we really think that after destroying feudalism and vanquishing kings, democracy will retreat before the bourgeois and the rich? Will it stop now that it has grown so strong and its opponents so weak?” Forced to deal with the “frightening spectacle” of a world infected with the Jacobin virus, liberals like Tocqueville urged elites “to educate democracy,” the “main task” of the time.¹

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lutionary threat, why would capitalism still care about democracy? Why would contemporary Tocquevilles need to master democratic vaccines after three decades of the end of the revolutionary plague? Indeed, the case for preemptive care is not as seductive as the heroic rescue of a world on the verge of apocalypse. No wonder “the end of history” as a demoliberal paradise on earth, the last utopia, was a short-lived one. The imperialist celebration would sooner rather than later end in diletantism. The last euphoric outburst was in Iraq, the last war in which U.S. imperialism attempted to win over the “minds and hearts” of an invaded country, as Bush Jr. said, to demoliberal regime change. Clinton had the Yugoslav wars while Bush’s father had the earlier Iraq War, which to his dismay remained an unfinished mission that the son would eagerly resume and complete. In contrast, the Obama years signaled a retreat from democracy promotion à l’américaine. Needless to say, the military apparatus did not contract, but the project “to remake the world in the American image”—as Anderson (2015, 24) sums up the spirit of American grand strategy—had lost appeal, which was manifest in Obama’s détente toward Cuba and Iran.

Trump has left behind the aim of redeeming the world. Instead of Bush Jr.’s baroque nurturing of a democratic Iraq open to foreign investment after invasion, Trump’s revisionism leans toward a minimalist approach: “We should have taken the oil.” This demoliberal insouciance fueled by revolutionary recession means that world elites have less incentives to admit/develop democratic features. Take Russia, whose capitalist restoration left behind any serious democratic

¹By “democracy” the French aristocrat understood both a movement and a political regime. He despised the former as a plebeian threat and praised (reluctantly) the latter as a response insofar as it was elite shaped.

claims and formed the first of the “new authoritarianisms”: a new outbreak of oligarchic rule freed from the need to cook up democratic delicacies for the people.

Given this constellation, it is easier to see why China poses a threat to Pax Americana. If the road to prosperity can bypass democratic transition, why bother following the American example? If political success must put up with one-sided U.S. protectionism, why should anyone celebrate American leadership? If anything, COVID-19 has accelerated these previous trends.

Catalysis in the Battle of COVID-19

“Only when the tide goes out do you discover who’s been swimming naked,” the American oligarch Warren Buffet once said, as if prophesying how the United States would pop up in the buff. It was still early in 2020, in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when Trump assured he had it “totally under control” after offering “tremendous help”—CDC pandemic help—for China: “We’ve got tremendous expertise” (Peters 2020; Chiacu and Shalal 2020). Xi Jinping, for his part, refused the offer even as closed doors ringed the alarms and he convened the Communist Party’s top leadership, reasoning that the new coronavirus was “a major test of China’s system and capacity for governance” (Wee 2020). At that point, U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross was already rejoicing at Amer-

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ica’s triumph over China in the trade war: “I don’t want to talk about a victory lap over a very unfortunate, very malignant disease,” he said, but “the fact is, it does give business yet another thing to consider ... I think it will help to accelerate the return of jobs to North America” (Campbell 2020).

Within the next two months, however, textbook American hubris turned into perplexity in front of a dramatic inversion of roles. China was now delivering sanitary assistance to the rest of the world while the United States dealt with internal

political dislocation in the midst of the out-of-control spreading of infection. The grand-strategy establishment went from foreseeing “cataclysmic change” in China to calling Xi Jinping “a forceful and triumphant leader on the world stage” (e.g., Pei 2020; Yanzhong 2020). In a candid yet melancholic appraisal,

Richard Haass (2020), president of the Council on Foreign Relations, grasped what was at stake: “COVID-19 will not so much change the basic direction of world history as accelerate it.” Being accelerated was nothing less than a “Post-American World” where *The Land of the Free* had lost its Hollywoodian glamour:

Long before COVID-19 ravaged the earth, there had already been a precipitous decline in the appeal of the American model. Thanks to persistent political gridlock, gun violence, the mismanagement

that led to the 2008 global financial crisis, the opioid epidemic, and more, what America represented grew increasingly unattractive to many. The federal government's slow, incoherent, and all too often ineffective response to the pandemic will reinforce the already widespread view that the United States has lost its way. (Haass 2020)

In the meantime, to be sure, Haass supposed that “not China or anyone else, has both the desire and the ability to fill the void the United States has created.”

When the pandemic hit Europe, Žižek (2020) rushed to predict the fall of capitalism, while Han (2020) glimpsed just the opposite: its reinforcement. The irony is that both were wrong/right as each one referred to his own “capitalism,” Žižek sensing the decay of Anglo-European capitalism and Han grasping Asian capitalism's rise. Indeed, the West dawdled in the first worldwide turmoil of the century. It is not that authoritarian regimes can take “draconian” measures that more democratic regimes cannot, as proved by the flawless responses of South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. But only China was in the position (and had the desire) to capitalize on the amusing disarray emanating from Washington, D.C.

Just in April, the United States lost 20.5 million jobs, increasing its unemployment rate to (at least) 14.7 percent—devastation unseen since the Great Depression (Schwartz, Casselman, and Koeze 2020). Over the next month, amid growing criticism from his neglectful initial response

and under the looming threat of “permanent damage” to the U.S. economy if the lockdown continued, Trump used China as a scapegoat, blaming its “incompetence” for causing “this mass Worldwide killing.” By then, Trump had just accused the World Health Organization, in a public letter, of an “alarming lack of independence” from China and demanded an investigation of that country's initial response, threatening to permanently cut off all funds to the organization for “so clearly not serving America's interests.”² Released in response to a \$2 billion donation from China to the WHO to combat the coronavirus, this letter made crystal clear who induced by consent and who by coercion. Before the end of May, Trump had cut U.S. ties with the WHO.

China, of course, could boast superiority over the West. Official Chinese media conceded that some “experts made some misjudgments at the early stage of the outbreak,” yet “China was right in almost every step it took starting from the Wuhan lockdown.” In contrast, “President Donald Trump really doesn't seem to be taking people's lives seriously,” and the United States overall “has done very poorly in its fight against the epidemic.” As a result, “The US has become more frenzied than ever before,” especially against China (Hu 2020a, 2020b).

In the fall of 2017, Xi Jinping (2017a) told the delegates to the 19th Congress of the Communist Party, gathered in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, that China's one-party system—a system of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”—offered an option for “countries and nations who want to speed up their development while

²The alert of “permanent damage” came from Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin in a Senate hearing on 18 May. The same day, Trump posted the WHO letter and, two days later, his charge of China's “incompetence.”

preserving their independence.” Far from good old Comintern proletarian internationalism, from which the Chinese revolution originated, the soft-power policy of leading by example is a recalibration of the “pacific coexistence” (with capitalist forces) doctrine of the Soviet Union. However, for the Soviets such an attitude was a defensive and nationalist one compounded, in the last decades, by economic decline. While also nationalist, the Chinese approach is assertive in that it seeks to translate current economic ascendancy into a duplet of building “world-class” armed forces by the mid-twenty-first century to underpin the foreign-policy goal of “preserving world peace and promoting common development.”

If ambiguous, China’s international prominence has already filled vacuums left by traditional Western powers. In a meaningful episode at the outset of the pandemic, after being denied aid by the European Union, Serbia’s president Aleksandar Vucic (quoted in Vuk-sanovic 2020) complained that “European solidarity does not exist,” calling it “a fairy tale on paper.” Accordingly, he concluded that “the only country that can help us is China.” A few days later, Vucic welcomed an airplane from China carrying medical devices, security equipment, and Chinese medical experts.

Other states, however, fear getting caught in a U.S.-China crossfire, such as the Asian middle powers who “do not want to be forced to choose

between the two,” as expressed by Lee Hsien Loong (2020), prime minister of Singapore. Overall, Pax Americana has lost predictability, which has led thinkers of U.S. hegemony to diagnose “the end of grand strategy” and prescribe “policy made on a case-by-case basis” (Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller 2020). Long-term imperial planning is growing moot.

Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics

Unlike others in Europe, the Inquisition in Spain took on a totalitarian character that burgeoned after the conquest of Granada in 1492 and the ensuing forced conversion to Catholicism or expulsion of large Muslim and Jewish minorities (Saxonberg 2019). The new state arising from the unification of the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile resorted to Catholic intransigence as a tool to homogenize the embryonic Spanish nation. Opposed to the Protestant Reformation—the epitome of the Renaissance—Inquisition Spain both paved the way to the Counter-Reformation and sponsored it. The regime that landed on the shores of the Americas and embarked upon Hispanicizing it was no apostle of the Renaissance but its antithesis.

One of the casualties was Tlaxcala, hitherto a remarkable exception in the Mesoamerican political record. While sharing the same Nahua language and culture of the Mexica, the Tlaxcaltecas bypassed the monarchic path and

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developed a republic instead (Fargher et al. 2011). In his report to Charles V, Cortés (1866, 68) likened their form of government to that of “Venice and Geneva or Pisa, as there is no over-all ruler.” From the beginning, however, Cortés (and those who later succeeded him) compelled his republican ally to adopt some type of monarchic (if indigenous) rule (Fargher, Blanton, and Heredia Espinoza 2010). In this sense, when the Spanish forces rose to irreversible overall preeminence after the *cocoliztli*, Tlaxcala could not resist a regime change in tune with (and subordinated to) the Spanish Crown, and hence a republican experiment was cut short.

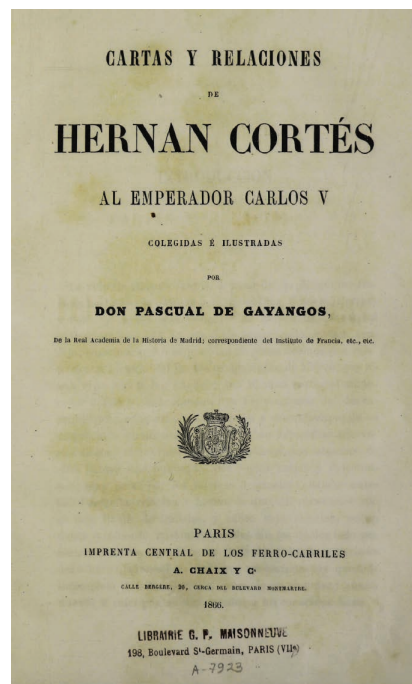
As for today, no renaissance is breaking through the COVID-19 pandemic either. Inquisition Spain was counter to reformation just like China was counter to proletarian democratization due to its Stalinist roots that paved the way back to capitalism. Although Zhou Enlai had a point when he found it too early to assess the implications of the French Revolution, today it is not too late to accept that no “French” reverberations are currently at work. Hitting in the middle of a postutopian impasse, the pandemic has struck world elites with the rise of a nondemocratic, non-Western power. In other words, China’s achievement has demonstrative effects that have cornered the old mantra of liberal democracy being the best possible of regimes. In this context, it is no surprise the dictatorial path taken by the presidents

of Hungary and the Philippines, whose emergency powers seem anything but short-lived.³ This atmosphere explains anxious interventions such as those of Amartya Sen (2020a, 2020b) that implore India to remain true to democracy and resist the temptation of imitating Chinese-style “governance.”

Beside losing its democratic appeal, Pax Americana is also losing its liberal drive. The United States is resenting the rise of powers other than itself within the bounds of the order it built and in which it was supposed to thrive like no one else. Like an angry child, Trump has already exited some elements of such an order—such as the WHO, UNESCO, and UNHRC—and has withdrawn from further commitments such as the TPP or the Paris Agreement on climate change. The paradox is striking: the main capitalist state is growing disenchanted of a liberal international order whose staunchest advocate today is a state led by the Communist Party.

The success of China in the world economy, for its part, bears witness to the fantasies of liberal ideology, for China’s ascent would have been impossible save for a communist revolution and centralized economic planning. In this sense, China’s rise can be read as a glorious defeat of twentieth-century revolutions. While the Soviet Union fell altogether, China is living proof of the potential of socialist transitions.

³ The recession of democratization has many faces and is not new. I mentioned the Russian case earlier, but since the regression of the Arab Spring into an authoritarian renewal in the Middle East, other democracies have fallen in the Third World, such as Nicaragua and Venezuela in Latin America. Of course, many others have deteriorated without collapsing. Again, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified previous trends.



The pragmatic introduction of market-socialist features in the late 1970s—having already been in play in Yugoslavia—showed that postcapitalist economics had room for experimentation beyond the dogmatic Stalinist-style micromanagement. However, the lack of (workers’) democracy bent that trial-and-error path into the interests of a top bureaucracy that could benefit from it, and that contained the seeds of a new bourgeoisie. In this other sense, it is a no-brainer that China is no agent of world revolution.

Just like Spain five hundred years ago in Mesoamerica, China today has emerged as the polity worthy of praise and emulation in the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chinese, moreover, can claim merits unlike the Spanish *conquistadores*, who were just immunologically lucky. This drama has unfolded as the world has witnessed the paralysis and self-ridicule of the White House in front of the same threat. In today’s predicament, not only is U.S. supremacy vis-à-vis China’s at stake but so also is the long-term appeal of liberal democracy. Posttotalitarian China is succeeding at showcasing itself not only as a serious global player but as a model polity. Moreover, China’s victory in “the battle of COVID-19” has taken on an overnight global character, unlike the vicissitudes of Europeans throughout the Americas, whose script of sword-disease-religion took centuries to reach

every corner.

Of course, it goes without saying, neither is China subjugating the United States nor is it an outsider to our constellation, in contrast to the relation of Spain with the Mesoamerican world. Notwithstanding, in both cases a pandemic put a world under the grip of an oppressive aftermath. As this essay earlier detailed, the extreme devastation of the sixteenth-century plagues in the Americas conditioned an extreme outcome:

The extreme devastation of the sixteenth-century plagues in the Americas conditioned an extreme outcome: the rise of a foreign totalitarian empire. Likewise, in today’s world, the relative rise of China eased by a less destructive pandemic is not negligible. The U.S.-China standoff has put democratic impetus (even more) on the defensive, both by disbelief flowing from the West and by counterexample from the East.

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Fortitude

Rather than crying the increasing bourgeois belittlement of democracy, we should retrace what our age means by “democracy” in order to avoid getting caught on the same side—just differing in degree, not kind. By giving a blow to European monarchies, the French Revolution unleashed the rise of another form of government, the republic. In Machiavelli’s seminal framework, the republic conflated oligarchy and democracy, in the classic Greek sense. That today

we equate republic to only one of the terms, the latter, can be read as the success of the bourgeoisie in making us believe that there is democracy at play. In fact, what we today call democracy corresponds to what the ancient Greeks called oligarchy, government by the rich. Elections, which in our times epitomize democratic rule, were seen rather differently by Aristotle (1984, 1988; translation modified), who made the common-sense observation (for his age) that “it is held to be democratic for offices to be chosen by lot, oligarchic to have them elected.” The former was deemed democratic due to the confidence that the poor can govern, while the latter was oligarchic, for only the rich would have the means to prevail in elections.⁴

In his recommendations for avoiding revolutions, Aristotle warned oligarchies “to be very careful with the poor” and urged them to make the poor feel included in government: “And it is advantageous both in a democracy and in an oligarchy to assign equality or precedence to those who participate least in the regime—in democracy, to the rich, in oligarchy, to the poor—in all other respects other than the authoritative offices in the regime” (Aristotle 1984, 1988; translation modified). Translated to the age of capitalism, if the proletariat is given a choice between politicians of the bourgeoisie, is that really a choice? However, as Anderson (1976, 55) insisted in his classic work on the subject, rather than a mere *aggiornamento*, the reality of such a choice has profound effects “because the masses typically consent to this State in the belief that they exercise government over it.” How can this propensity not exist when the framework—that is, a set of liberties—that enables the choice is

a conquest of the masses? So far, the dilemma remains: either the masses move forward or any advances will be lost, as long warned by calls for “the independence of the workers,” or else they will “be reduced once more to a mere appendage of official bourgeois democracy” (Marx and Engels 2006).⁵

For Aristotle, oligarchies that strived to include the poor were “moderate,” whereas those that did not were “extreme.” In that sense, the rise of capitalism saw the demise of (feudal) monarchies at the hands of extreme (bourgeois) oligarchies that moderated afterward, as attested by the gradual extension of the right to vote. Today, however, that pinch of democracy in modern oligarchies—that is, our contemporary bourgeois or liberal democracy—is losing appeal. With the threat of revolutions that might bring the proletariat to power having subsided since 1990, is there any reason to feel exhorted by Aristotelian prescriptions?

At the heart of contemporary politics, the *Left vacuum* very much explains the world’s elites having a disregard for preserving, let alone enriching, their democratic credentials, such as with romantic claims that prettify a situation in which “democracy” is a junior partner to oligarchic rule. To be sure, democracy is rather distinct: it is what the revolutionary Left once called the dictatorship of the proletariat—such is the political void in today’s constellation. Back to square one, radicals must decide whether to remain melancholic or face reconstruction.

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⁵ They added: “Instead of lowering themselves to the level of an applauding chorus, the workers, and above all the League, must work for the creation of an independent organization of the workers’ party” (Marx and Engels 2006).

⁴ Karatani (2003, 183) has ventured: “If universal suffrage by secret ballot, namely, parliamentary democracy, is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the introduction of a lottery should be deemed the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Here I am sympathetic with Žižek (2006, 57) in his celebration of Karatani’s “heroic risk in proposing a crazy-sounding definition.”

focuses on the contemporary contours and challenges of the radical Left, especially in the Americas.

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