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## 13 Restrained democracy and its radical alternatives after 1989

### The threefold crisis of democracy in the ‘Former West’

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By all means, the fall of the Berlin Wall was a triumph of democracy. After 1989, it was repeatedly confirmed that liberal democracy was ‘the only game in town.’ As argued in the first editorial of the *Journal of Democracy*, newly established in 1990: ‘The resurgence of democracy may be attributed in part to the failure of its rivals.’<sup>1</sup> Not only were liberal democracy’s ideological contenders—fascism and communism—defeated, but the bloodless revolution of 1989 demonstrated that ‘the people’ were able to take their fate into their own hands, and to claim popular sovereignty in the face of authoritarian leaders and repressive state power. Even more, the transitions from dictatorship to democracy in Eastern Europe witnessed the emergence (or re-emergence to some, after 1848, 1918, and 1968) of the powers of spontaneous self-organization in civil society. The experiments in democratic deliberation in the Polish Round Table Talks, the Czechoslovak Civic Forum, and other forms of direct democracy were proof that the revolution of 1989 was not just a ‘gewissermaßen rückspulende Revolution [...] die den Weg frei macht, um versäumte Entwicklungen *nachzuholen*,’ as Jürgen Habermas had argued. The wave of democratization in Eastern Europe not only caught up with the development of democracy in the West, but actually contributed to the innovation of democracy beyond the confirmation of the uncontested dominance of liberal democracy.<sup>2</sup>

By now, little of that optimism is left. In their introduction, Eleni Braat and Pepijn Corduwener reconfirm Habermas’s conservative estimate, arguing that ‘1989 seemed not only the victory of democracy,’ but that it cemented the reputation of a ‘restrained’ liberal democracy after decades in which this model of democracy had been subjected to severe criticism.<sup>3</sup> Yet they also observe that this particular type of democracy is currently challenged anew, because of its inherent limitations, and by the emergence of populism.

These observations raise two sets of questions. The first concerns issues of historical analysis: how is the perceived crisis of democracy related to the demise of communism? Did 1989 demarcate not just a high point, but also a turning point in the triumphal march of democracy? If the crisis tendencies of Western democracy are the result of more enduring tensions, what then has been the impact of 1989 on

the longer-term dissolution of ‘restrained’ democracy? Has it hastened its demise, or slowed it down? Or has it only made manifest what was already on the cards due to other factors, and unrelated to the fall of the Berlin Wall?

A second set of questions is largely evaluative: if democracy has been in decline since 1989, how bad is it now? The two contributors to this section come to very different answers to this question. According to Dan Stone (Chapter 15), the victory of democracy is about to be undone. In fact, the situation is so serious that ‘we need to start using the term “fascism” again.’ The postwar consensus in support of democracy has been abandoned, and in its place, fascism has returned: ‘What we see now is a xenophobic, protectionist ideology which combines notions of national rebirth with a desire to isolate the nation from outside forces.’<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Martin J. Bull (Chapter 14) argues that the fall of communism did not mean the end of radical left-wing politics. The final conclusion of his contribution is that ‘[t]he revolutions of 1989, in short, did not end radical politics but acted as a catalyst to its reshaping, a process that was further influenced by the economic shock of 2008 that is still reverberating today.’<sup>5</sup> Noteworthy in this respect is not only the implication that pre-1989 communism was a form of ‘radical politics,’ but also that its continuation does not evoke the kind of alarmism Stone voices about fascism. It demonstrates a remarkable irony: despite decades of Cold War anti-communism, the true enemy of democracy still appears to be fascism. Soviet communism turned out to be a dead end, but it is part of a political family some of whose other members seem to have thrived since 1989. It would be unimaginable if Stone had concluded that, although genocidal Nazism is definitely something of the past, there are felicitous signs that Italian fascism is very much alive—which it actually is, much to Stone’s and my concern. Yet Bull’s undeniable relief that radical leftist politics survived the demise of communism reflects an understanding of democracy as somehow dependent upon progressive activism. Bull’s analysis is more optimistic than Stone’s because he identifies social and political forces that might be able to counter the turn to fascism.

I propose here to analyze in more detail the notion shared by the editors and the contributors to this section that democracy is actually in crisis. I agree it is, yet there is hardly a moment in history when democracy was not in crisis. Like Tolstoy’s depiction of the unhappy family in the opening sentence of *Anna Karenina*, every crisis of democracy is a crisis in its own way. I would argue that the current crisis is more complicated than a failure of the European demos to address the fascist challenge—as Stone suggests—yet also, that progressive radical politics is less robust than Bull’s argument seems to imply. In fact, or so I will argue, there is not just one crisis of ‘restrained’ democracy, but actually at least three modes in which Western political systems are in disarray, which do not necessarily stem from the same source and did not come about in 1989, yet definitely gained a new momentum after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In a way, 1989 did create a ‘Former West’ in which some of the disintegrative tendencies of the period before were reinforced. Even if some of these tendencies are very unsettling, it is important not to dismiss the critical social and political counterforces to these tendencies.

## **The self-inflicted debilitation of parliamentary democracy**

A first aspect of the current crisis of democracy regards parliamentary democracy. Parliaments were once the core institution of ‘restrained’ democracies. The civil (and sometimes less civil) display of political disagreement and its resolution, after due debate, in a parliamentary vote, presented an intricately formalized mode of political conflict that gave a procedural legitimacy to political decisions. Also, the power of parliamentary veto, notably the potential for a vote of no confidence, is a democratic check on executive power.<sup>6</sup> To a certain extent, parliamentary power always had to compete with other powerful institutions: sometimes in terms of a formal separation of powers, but often—in a more informal mode—representation of, deliberation about, and calibrating between interests also took place within parties and corporatist organizations, in the media and forums of public opinion, and in the back rooms of the bureaucracy. But even then, parliament remained the locus of sovereignty, not just with the final authority to turn political opinion into binding law, but also with the power to have its agenda decide the pace of political decision-making. The legitimating functions of parliamentary debate and control were based on at least the illusion of parliamentary sovereignty.

Since the 1980s, parliamentary sovereignty has proven to be an illusion and little more than that, first of all because of a growing resentment against state power as such, but also because of an increased suspicion that a parliamentary state is unable to deal effectively with the problems of a globalized society. Put in positive terms, this has been interpreted as a shift from government to governance.<sup>7</sup> More critically, it has involved a radical, and in many ways deliberate, devolution of parliamentary power, with the result that parliaments no longer set the pace of the political process, but have become subject to a politics of *fait accompli*, only able to rubber-stamp decisions forged by forces they can no longer control. This has been going on since the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s, but the fall of the Berlin Wall and the European integration it set in motion has reinforced this tendency. The end of the Cold War was a ‘momentous, unanticipated change,’ yet immediately came to be seen as utterly unavoidable.<sup>8</sup> Also, the ensuing integration of East Germany into the German Federal Republic, of former Eastern European countries into the European Community, and the latter’s further integration into the European Union and the Euro were largely experienced as self-propelling processes that received a blessing from the parliaments of each of the member states, but whose dynamic seemed to be determined elsewhere, if anywhere.

Much of this was clearly a rhetorical device of the national governments, which not only looked for excuses for their own gridlock, but actively turned the EU into the scapegoat for decisions they wanted to take anyhow. The neoliberal destruction of the welfare state and its concomitant austerity policies were hugely unpopular in the many countries that implemented such policies, and could only have been sold to a reluctant electorate by means of a self-inflicted debilitation of parliamentary control, nurturing Euroscepticism in order to avoid suspicions against domestic malfeasance.<sup>9</sup> Also, the solution of the Eurocrisis was largely left to the formally independent European Central Bank and the informal, yet

equally inscrutable, Eurogroup. Tellingly, the instances of protest against and actual obstruction of European integration were put beyond parliamentary control: whether these were the referenda in France and the Netherlands against the constitution, the Dutch referendum against a European treaty with Ukraine, or Brexit, in each of these instances, parliaments deliberately stepped aside and dodged the hard decisions.

### **The changing landscape of party democracy**

A second aspect of the crisis of democracy involves elections and parties. This narrative of crisis is often told in demographic terms as the disappearance of a clearly delineated constituency, resulting in an electorally destabilized party system. As it was authoritatively analyzed by Peter Mair, electorates in Western democracies have become less loyal, both in their allegiance to specific parties, but also to the electoral system as a whole. Party membership has declined, voter volatility has gone up, and voter turnout has gone down. As a result, parties have become increasingly dependent on the state, both in terms of their financial means and in their functionality. While parties struggle to justify their existence as interpreters of the popular will, their function is increasingly reduced to the recruitment of political personnel.<sup>10</sup> In combination with the loss of parliamentary efficacy, such parties and the political personnel they select struggle to justify their role. If party politicians neither represent the will of the people, nor are able to satisfy the needs of the people, what are they good for, other than securing their own jobs and income? Such sentiments seemed to form the basis of what the political scientists Roberto Stefan Foa and Yasha Mounk coined the ‘deconsolidation of democracy’: ‘Even as democracy has come to be the only form of government widely viewed as legitimate, it has lost the trust of many citizens who no longer believe that democracy can deliver on their most pressing needs and preferences.’<sup>11</sup>

Some of these findings have been contested, or their impact has been interpreted in a different light. Political scientists like Pippa Norris argue that such pessimistic accounts are examples of ‘fact-free hyperbole’: even if citizens are disappointed with established parties, their decision to vote for another party, or even to refrain from voting altogether, are clear indications of political interest, trust, or—if their trust does not entail current electoral options—at least political agency.<sup>12</sup> In a discussion of the alarmist articles of Foa and Mounk, Amy C. Alexander and Christian Welzel argue that a lack of trust in dysfunctional democracies actually indicates a strong commitment to democracy, while others contest the indicators, or the value Foa and Mounk assign to them, as proof of the undoing of party politics.<sup>13</sup>

Even if these comments are valid, and despite variations between countries, the trends toward declining party membership, greater voter volatility, and lower voter turnout are by and large indisputable. Maybe party and electoral politics as such are not in decline, but established parties and party systems are definitely under pressure. This is certainly the case for the two major parties of postwar

Western democracy, social and Christian democracy. In all of Western Europe, both parties have suffered serious blows.

For a long time, the dominant position of Christian democrats, or of conservative parties with a more-or-less outspoken Christian signature, seemed uncontested. After the regime changes in Spain and Portugal in the 1970s, such parties seemed almost naturally to assume a central place in the political system. Furthermore the fall of the Berlin Wall left Christian democrats untainted; in Germany, Helmut Kohl was even able to use its momentum to consolidate the power of the Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU). Yet this dominant position eroded or was fundamentally undermined by the 1990s in Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and more recently in Spain, although in some cases Christian democrats partly recovered from these blows.<sup>14</sup> In countries without a strong Christian democratic tradition, like France and the United Kingdom, the conservative parties suffered a similar decline. The French Gaullist movement became increasingly fragmented and its electoral position was challenged by the Front National and, more recently, by Emmanuel Macron's *En Marche*. The British party system also suffered from fragmentation, realignment of previously loyal constituencies, and substantial support for third parties—such as the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Nationalist Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, and the UK Independence Party. Equally troubling is the fact that the most decisive issue of the last decades, Brexit, has unsettled both the Conservatives and Labour.<sup>15</sup>

The failure of the United Kingdom's Labour Party to profit from the self-destructive tendencies among the Tories underlines a more general weakness of social democratic parties in Europe. Again, this was not self-evident and around the year 2000 social democrats ruled supreme in most Western European countries, based on a Third Way platform that included the acceptance of economic liberalization, austerity measures, and a call for self-help within civil society. Yet within a few years, this came to be seen as selling out to the neoliberal creed, and, as a result, social democratic parties in the Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany, and to a lesser extent also Spain, were electorally decimated, while in the United Kingdom, Labour was incapacitated as a result of the split between Blairites and Corbynites.<sup>16</sup>

Even more important than these electoral shifts is the fact that the major European parties lost their role as vehicles of a social compromise based on fairness, proportionality, and power sharing. Even where there was not an actual *Proporzdemokratie* (like in Austria or Belgium, where political positions and social benefits were evenly distributed among the major political parties), in most European countries, there was a kind of *trasformismo*, the late nineteenth-century Italian system in which political elites from the major parties regularly alternated in positions of power. Moreover, for a long time, these parties had been able to absorb social conflicts and new social movements, first of all in an institutional sense by crowding out or integrating more radical parties on the left and the right, and by maintaining a strong connection to organizations within civil society, such as employer organizations, trade unions, and churches. They were also able to do this ideologically: the major parties were able to suppress historically available alternatives, not only in the form of an outspoken anti-communism, but, as Dan Stone has

argued, by cementing an anti-fascist consensus.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, social and Christian democrats legitimized their position in contrast to a third alternative of laissez-faire capitalism, by forging the welfare state in a productive tension between corporatist, socialist, and liberal conceptions of social order.<sup>18</sup>

This was never a fully static order: there were moments of radicalization to the left, for example when in 1969 the new German chancellor, Willy Brandt, announced that he aimed for a radical democratization, not just of the state, but more fundamentally, of social relations.<sup>19</sup> A similar perspective was presented by the Dutch coalition government of 1973 to 1977, led by the social democrat and Dutch Labour Party leader, Joop den Uyl, who promised a redistribution of income, knowledge, and power. After the Congrès d'Épinay in 1971, the French Parti socialiste (PS), under the leadership of François Mitterrand, overcame a long period of ideological confusion and electoral marginalization in competition with the more powerful French Communist Party, and won the presidential election of 1981 on an outspoken socialist platform. Yet Mitterrand's turnabout in 1983 was equally symptomatic of the moments of moderation following the more radical phase in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> A similar *Tendenzwende* had already been made in Germany in 1974 when Brandt stepped down in favor of the more pragmatic Helmut Schmidt, while in 1975 Joop den Uyl had to acknowledge the 'the narrow margins of democratic politics,' when his government introduced its first austerity policies.<sup>21</sup> The swing of the political pendulum to the right was in the end perhaps more lasting, with the rise of conservative leaders like Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl, and Ruud Lubbers inaugurating neoliberal policies that set the tone for the coming decades. In light of these shifts, it might indeed make sense to interpret the 1970s as the 'Sattelzeit' between the Second World War and the end of the Cold War.<sup>22</sup>

In the context of this ideological landscape, the impact of 1989 can be delineated more clearly: even if it did not initiate the transformation of institutional and ideological positions, it confirmed a dramatic shift in the parameters of the political field. The first pole, anti-communism, fell away, and with it the position of social democracy as the acceptable face of the left; the second pole, anti-fascism, was relocated thus creating room for the re-emergence of xenophobic nationalism; and the third pole, laissez-faire capitalism, changed from the outpost of the ideological field into the rallying flag of neoliberalism, smack in the middle of ideological debate. If there was an impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall on the political system in the 'Former West,' it was first of all the creation of a neoliberal common ground between the mainstream political parties, and then the emergence of a new dividing line between this neoliberal consensus and a left- and right-wing populist opposition that rejected not just the neoliberal policies of the mainstream in the name of a *préférence nationale* or the radical multitude, but also the consensual political style that came with it.<sup>23</sup>

### **The radical critique of liberal democracy**

The transformation of the political landscape therefore affected not only the mainstream parties, but equally the communist and fascist alternatives. As stated

above, both Stone and Bull observe a kind of reconstruction of these tendencies. Having reviewed the crisis in parliamentary and party democracy in the previous sections, we are now perhaps better positioned to contextualize their arguments and evaluation. The post-1989 reconstruction of the left of the left and the right of the right takes place in the context of a transformation of parliamentary and party democracy, yet it affects most of all the liberal foundations of democracy by questioning the liberal distinction between private and public; between the personal and political; between economy, culture, and politics. Both leftist and right-wing radicalism also manifest themselves in new, populist modes of politics, claiming to represent 'the people' without the mediation of elections, parties, and politicians. In questioning fundamental assumptions of liberal democracy, it can be viewed as the third and final aspect of the crisis tendencies Western European democracy is subject to.

With regard to the development of the left of the left, it is questionable to what extent this is a continuation of or a reaction against communism. Already long before 1989, communism was ideologically depleted. Most communist parties in the West were therefore unable to respond to the fall of the Berlin Wall in any other way than despair and melancholy—in itself perhaps a legacy of a longer-term leftist 'culture of defeat.'<sup>24</sup> In part, the unwinding of communism was the result of its inability 'to offset the tarnishing of the Soviet socio-economic model.'<sup>25</sup> Ironically while some, notably the French and Italian Eurocommunists, shifted toward a social-democratic position, from the middle of the 1970s the social democrats themselves began to dissociate themselves from Keynesian economic planning, thus leaving the reformed communist still in the position of statist planning ideologues. Next to its lack of economic efficiency—which only became more evident in the 1970s—communism also fell into disrepute in the face of the human rights discourse emerging in the 1970s, primarily in protest against the persecution of dissidents in Eastern Europe.<sup>26</sup> Connected to that was the impact of the peace movement, rejecting not only both parties in the nuclear arms race, but also forging contacts between peace activists in both West and East.<sup>27</sup> Yet the failure was also homebred, as Western communist parties were unable to successfully incorporate most of the post-1968 activism. Initially, the surge of activism led to a rise in membership of some of the communist parties, yet the agenda of the new activists competed in organizational, strategic, and ideological terms with the traditions of the established communist parties.<sup>28</sup>

Organizationally, the new activists rejected the bureaucratic and centralist power structure of communist parties, and were more inspired by Trotskyist, Maoist, and anarchist notions of a direct connection to the spontaneous forces of the popular masses, and preferred to organize as movements, not as bureaucratized parties.<sup>29</sup> In strategic terms, these new social movements continued the communist strategy to mobilize the masses, yet the goal was no longer to conquer state power, but to transform—'decolonize'—civil society into a sphere of uninhibited communication. This strategy was vindicated by the protest against the communist regimes and the revolution that toppled them in 1989, generally perceived as an uprising of civil society; in the end, the genie of this revolution was not



Marx, but Tocqueville.<sup>30</sup>In ideological terms, the new activists were inspired by a variety of themes—feminist, gay, anti-racist, anti-nuclear, ecological—which despite their diversity were united in their rejection of work and property as central ideological categories, and material economic growth as the main measure of progress. Instead of these categories, central to the ideology of both communist and social-democratic members of the progressive political family, the main concern of the newer members of the leftist tribe was the recognition of personal and collective identities, and respect for cultural difference. Like the previous socialist and communist movements (and also civil rights movements), the new movements still fought against discrimination, but this was no longer only defined in terms of equal (economic) opportunity and the distribution of material wealth. Although these issues still played a role in the struggle for global justice, they were now reformulated as issues of repairing historical injustice and the recognition of global (ecological) interconnectedness.<sup>31</sup>

Given the organizational, strategic, and ideological differences, it is problematic to see new, radical, left-wing parties as a continuation of previous communist parties, an idea that is also questionable in terms of the formal organizations and their personnel. The focus on parties and their family relations also underestimates the shift toward movement-type organizations in civil society. The radical left manifested itself in the demonstration for nuclear disarmament in the mid-1980s, attracting millions of protesters across Europe; the anti-racism demonstrations in the early 1990s; and the series of protest movements in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, such as the Occupy movement in many parts of Europe, the Spanish *Movimiento 15-M*, the *Nuits Debouts* and the *gilets jaunes* in France, and the *Aufstehen* movement in Germany.<sup>32</sup> Although new party formations have emerged, some of which were electorally successful (like the German and Dutch Green parties, or the Spanish *Podemos*, which grew out of *Movimiento 15-M*), each of these parties have a close yet also tense relationship with social movement organizations.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, they struggle to reach out to the lower-class constituencies that were mobilized by the older members of the leftist party family. Despite calls for a ‘left populism,’ ‘the people’ appear to be mobilized more successfully by the right than the left.<sup>34</sup>

This brings us to the reconstruction of the right of the right after 1989. On closer inspection, the potential of the radical right to mobilize ‘the people,’ and therefore also the danger of right-wing populism, seems more limited than suggested by warnings against a ‘return of the repressed,’ or even a resurgence of ‘new fascism.’ In terms of the number of people mobilized, right-wing activism remains limited. The largest number of protesters the German anti-immigrant and anti-Islam movement, *Pegida*, has been able to mobilize is estimated at 25,000 people for a demonstration in Dresden on January 12, 2015. But in most other *Pegida* demonstrations, only a couple of hundred people participated., Other issues that might be characterized as right-wing attracted more protesters. In France, the largest instantiation of the anti-abortion *Marche pour la vie* attracted between 11,000 (according to the police) and 50,000 (according to the organizing committee) anti-abortion demonstrators.<sup>35</sup> Yet the number of protesters the French

conservatives were able to mobilize was much less than most of the left-wing protest. In Germany, the potential of Pegida to mobilize supporters is weak in comparison to the number of demonstrators attending protests against Pegida, and the support they receive, even from the conservative journal *Bild*, whose headline asserted ‘*Nein zu Pegida!*’<sup>36</sup>

More important than numbers is perhaps the nature of the protests: the attack on immigrants and ethnic minorities in many parts of Europe seemed unimaginable in the aftermath of Nazism. But also then, the counter-mobilization and manifestations of solidarity and indignation these attacks provoked were equally remarkable. Most striking in this respect was the massive outpouring of indignation in responses to the murder of the editors of *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015. While Pegida tried to cash in on anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiments, their expectations of a mass response did not materialize: the slogan *Je suis Charlie*, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of protesters around the world, was highly ambiguous, but not racist or directed against Islam.

Given the populist nature of the right-wing movements, it is perhaps ironic that they have made their most important impact in electoral and parliamentary politics, thus confirming the idea that party democracy as such is perhaps not in crisis.<sup>37</sup> Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, has already been a member of the Dutch parliament for over 20 years, which is his main platform of political action, not least because his freedom of movement is severely restricted due to continuous death threats. The Front National, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, and the Vlaams Belang are also primarily electoral machines, aiming to gain seats in representative bodies. This is not to say they cherish parliament for intrinsic reasons. Wilders angered his fellow MPs by calling the Dutch Second Chamber a ‘fake parliament,’ and his recent competitor for the populist vote, the MP Thierry Baudet, has explained his frequent absence from debates in parliament by declaring that its petty quibbles were beyond his dignity: ‘I refuse to participate in this fairytale world. [...] I am busy building an organization outside this Chamber.’<sup>38</sup>

However, even if right-wing populist parties attract a lot of attention with such interventions, there seems to be an insurmountable electoral threshold: so far, none of the parties have been able to attract much more than 20 percent of the vote. An exception is perhaps Italy, where Berlusconi won a series of elections on an anti-communist platform (remarkably, after 1989) that included the neo-fascist party Alleanza Nazionale, while Berlusconi himself presented a political style reminiscent of Mussolini—a comparison he did not contradict, to say the least.<sup>39</sup> An explanation for the persistent attraction of fascism in Italy might be the half-hearted departure from its fascist past, especially in comparison with the deep-seated anti-Nazi consensus in Germany (perhaps less so in former East Germany, now the main recruiting ground for Pegida and AfD). In no other European country have radical right-wing parties with identifiable links to the fascist past gained an electoral foothold. If such connections become manifest, party support withers away, as was the case with the German Republikaner. The other outcome is the party tries to distance itself from that past—and in the case of Marine le Pen and

the Front National, also from the (founding) fathers of the party. Even if parties stem from a fascist legacy, or in some cases, like the Austrian FPÖ or the Italian Lega Nord, only at a later stage embrace fascist themes, the use of the label itself is still a non-starter. This seems even to be the case in Italy, where even the most outspoken fascist movement elusively calls itself ‘CasaPound’ after the fascist modernist poet Ezra Pound.<sup>40</sup>

But perhaps it is not their potential to mobilize activists or voters, but the reappearance of the fascist ideology and style on the political scene that indicates a dramatic change in Western European politics. In that sense, Stone is right to warn against a resurgent fascism. But perhaps the more nefarious issue here is that this is only in part to be explained as the result of the rise of new, populist, extreme right-wing, ultranationalist, or even neo-fascist parties. As the expert on right-wing radicalism, Cas Mudde, argues:

Rather than the populist radical right, it has been the mainstream right-wing that has pushed West-European politics to the right, in part in response to media and popular responses to relatively recent developments (such as multi-ethnic societies, the Maastricht Treaty and 9/11).<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism affected not only the communist parties: all players in the field had to adjust as a result of crisis tendencies in Western European democracies dating back to the 1970s. The period between 1968 and 1982 can in many ways be seen as the *Sattelzeit* between the postwar period of high-modernist politics and the postmodern condition, announced by Jean-François Lyotard in 1979.<sup>42</sup> In the high-modernist phase, mass parties with a stable constituency shared parliamentary control over a state, and in this way, by and large, were able to deliver on their electoral promises. In the postmodernist phase, parliamentary debate increasingly became a spectacle, performed in the pursuit of voters whose identity became more diverse, fragmented, and individualized, while social and political transformations no longer followed a recognizable ideological script, but turned into self-propelling, auto-poetic processes. These tendencies became manifest in 1989 and were in some ways also reinforced. The fall of the Berlin Wall itself was a revolution no one had planned or was able to control; the processes of European integration that ensued were depicted as natural events, while the attempts to control it came from outside the parliamentary system.

Although most Western communist parties were abolished or thoroughly reformed, their disintegration had already set in by the 1970s. More remarkable was the reorientation of mainstream Christian and social democratic parties after 1989. The political family of the left lost not only its disciplined communist father, but also its more inclusive social-democratic mother (if we can use such gendered clichés), and multiplied in a great variety of parties and movements. The conservative family on the right welcomed the lost son of fascism

back into its midst by adopting his nationalist program and populist style. At the same time, both social democrats and conservative Christian democrats remained in most countries dominant political forces, based on their institutional power within the state. Yet they acted on the basis of a neoliberal consensus, which was presented for a long time not as an ideological choice, but as a technocratic policy option for which ‘there is no alternative,’ as Margaret Thatcher used to emphasize. As a result, parliamentary and party democracy has acquired a zombie-like character: it still functions, yet as an ideologically and socially living dead.<sup>43</sup>

Yet this is not the end of democracy. In the wake of the crisis in parliamentary and party democracy, new forms of political engagement have emerged. It is important to acknowledge that both radical leftist and right-wing reconstructions distanced themselves from the established system of political parties and parliamentary politics—and that the left did this generally more systematically and also more successfully than the right. In ideological terms, both left and right question the liberal limitations on political choice. This is definitely unsettling, especially when cherished ideas about the rule of law and the protection of minorities are put in jeopardy. But some other things need to be unsettled, notably the wisdom of a neoliberal economic order, that, even after its meltdown of 2008, in many ways seems intractable. The hard issue here is whether it is possible to separate reform of the global neoliberal order based on the mobility of money, goods, and labor from the nationalist destruction of a society of open borders and free movement of ideas and people.

Ironically, it is right-wing and nationalist populism that has gained more traction in elections and parliamentary politics, not because of the inherent power of extreme right-wing parties or movements, but as a result of the adoption of nationalist content and a populist style of debate by much of the right—and some of the left. Adopted by the mainstream, its self-regarding anti-establishment rhetoric adds to the impression that we have entered a political zombie world. Yet in itself, a reorientation of politics toward social movements, self-organization, and civil society is not necessarily a bad thing. It is an important legacy of 1989 that regrettably has largely been lost from sight, covered by the all-pervasive fear that the only alternative to a ‘restrained democracy’ would be a completely unrestrained populism that can only end in fascism.

## Notes

- 1 Diamond and Plattner, ‘Why the “Journal of Democracy”?’
- 2 ‘... in a certain sense a rewinding revolution [...] clearing the way to catch up for a failed development.’ Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution*; Bermeo and Nord (eds.), *Civil Society before Democracy*; Blokker, ‘Democracy through the Lens of 1989: Liberal Triumph or Radical Turn?’; Elster (ed.), *The Roundtable Talks*.
- 3 Braat and Corduener, ‘1989 and Its Three Consequences for the West.’
- 4 Stone, ‘The Return of Fascism in Europe? Reflections on History and the Current Situation.’
- 5 Bull, ‘The Radical Left since 1989: Decline, Transformation and Revival.’

- 6 Patzelt (ed.), *Parlamente und ihre Funktionen*.
- 7 Pierre and Peters, *Governance, Politics and the State*. A representative collection of articles discussing this theme is: Bellamy and Palumbo (eds.), *From Government to Governance*; and the ‘Symposium on Democracy and New Modes of Governance.’
- 8 Kirkpatrick, ‘Beyond the Cold War.’
- 9 See the contributions to Meny, Muller and Quermonne (eds.), *Adjusting to Europe*; Green Cowles, Caporaso, and Risse (eds.), *Transforming Europe*; Schmidt, ‘The Politics of Economic Adjustment in France and Britain: When Does Discourse Matter?’; Will and Jacquot, ‘Using Europe: Strategic Action in Multi-Level Politics’; Featherstone, ‘Introduction: In the Name of “Europe”’; Hanf and Soetendorp (eds.), *Adapting to European Integration*; Levy, ‘Redeploying the State: Liberalization and Social Policy in France.’
- 10 Mair, *Ruling the Void*.
- 11 Foa and Mounk, ‘The Danger of Deconsolidation.’
- 12 Norris, *Democratic Deficit*, 241.
- 13 See the Online Exchange on ‘Democratic Deconsolidation,’ at [www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exchange-%E2%80%9Cdemocratic-deconsolidation%E2%80%9D](http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exchange-%E2%80%9Cdemocratic-deconsolidation%E2%80%9D) [January 25, 2019]; Amy C. Alexander and Christian Welzel, ‘The Myth of Deconsolidation: Rising Liberalism and the Populist Reaction’; Pippa Norris, ‘Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks’; Erik Voeten ‘Are People Really Turning Away from Democracy?’; and the response by Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, ‘The End of the Consolidation Paradigm: A Response to Our Critics.’
- 14 Van Hecke and Emmanuel Gerard (eds.), *Christian Democratic Parties in Europe*; Kalyvas and Van Kersbergen, ‘Christian Democracy.’
- 15 Lynch and Garner, ‘The Changing Party System.’
- 16 Mudge, *Leftism Reinvented*.
- 17 Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*
- 18 Eley, ‘Corporatism and the Social Democratic Moment’; De Haan, ‘The Western European Welfare State beyond Christian and Social Democratic Ideology.’
- 19 A comprehensive overview of the German political landscape of the 1970s is offered by Faulenbach, ‘Die Siebzigerjahre: Ein Sozialdemokratisches Jahrzehnt?’; see also Faulenbach, *Das sozialdemokratische Jahrzehnt*.
- 20 Grunberg, ‘François Mitterrand et le Parti socialiste français.’
- 21 Den Uyl, ‘De smalle marge van democratische politiek.’
- 22 Faulenbach, ‘Die Siebzigerjahre: Ein sozialdemokratisches Jahrzehnt?’ 36; see also Hellema, *The Global 1970s*.
- 23 Ther, *Europe Since 1989: A History*.
- 24 Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*.
- 25 March and Mudde. ‘What’s Left of the Radical Left?’
- 26 Moyn, *The Last Utopia*.
- 27 Hudson, *European Communism Since 1989*, 28–30.
- 28 Waller, ‘The Radical Sources of the Crisis in West European Communist Parties.’
- 29 Slobodian, ‘The Meanings of Western Maoism in the Global Sixties.’
- 30 Keane (ed.), *Power of the Powerless*; Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions*; Arato, *From Neo-Marxism to Democratic Theory*; Kaldor, ‘The Ideas of 1989’; Ekiert and Kubik, ‘The Legacies of 1989.’
- 31 The relation between older and newer progressive agendas is often formulated in oppositional terms, for example, Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*; Judt, *Ill Fares the Land*. This seems to overlook the extent to which social class plays a role in claims of recognition, and the claims to distributive justice implied in identity politics.
- 32 Theoretically, this point was made by Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*—the recent trade book reprint of the original version, published in 1985, is itself an indication of the persistence of this kind of activism; empirically, the new social movements were charted in Kriesi et al., *New Social Movements in Western Europe*.

- 33 For example, Tsakatika and Lisi, ‘Zippin’ Up My Boots, Goin’ Back to My Roots.’
- 34 Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*.
- 35 [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marche\\_pour\\_la\\_vie\\_\(Paris\)](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marche_pour_la_vie_(Paris)) (January 25, 2019).
- 36 *Bild*, January 6, 2015: Kate Connolly, ‘German Leaders Condemn Xenophobia after Pegida Protests,’ *The Guardian*, January 6, 2015.
- 37 This is also reflected in scholarship: most studies of right-wing radicalism focuses on parties; that is even the case for an otherwise informative study from a social movement perspective Klandermans and Mayer (eds.), *Extreme Right Activist in Europe*.
- 38 *Handelingen Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal*, 2018–2109, nr. 35000.3, Algemene Politieke Beschouwingen, September 21, 2018.
- 39 Orsina, ‘The Republic after Berlusconi.’
- 40 Ignazi, ‘The Extreme Right in Europe: A Survey’; Cento Bull, *Italian Neo-Fascism*; Cento Bull ‘Neo-Fascism’; Castelli Gattinara and Caterina, ‘Discourse and Practice of Violence in the Italian Extreme Right’; Jones, ‘The Fascist Movement That Has Brought Mussolini Back to the Mainstream,’ *The Guardian*, February 22, 2018.
- 41 Mudde, *On Extremism and Democracy*, 15.
- 42 Lyotard, *La Condition Postmoderne*. Similar observations, largely derived from an American context, can be found in Rogers, *The Age of Fracture*.
- 43 Crouch, *Post-Democracy*.

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